



Policy Brief

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A Wider Atlantic, Revival of a Regional Power

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Summary

This article discusses the Wider Atlantic as a re-emerging region of power. Considering the central geostrategic role of the North Euro-Atlantic and the rise of maritime priorities in the political agenda of all coastal states, we demonstrate that the Wider Atlantic is relevant to an informal partnership of trust.

The debate on the Wider Atlantic is more pertinent than ever, especially considering the relevance of its geostrategic centrality and consistency of its space. What are the advantages of this space? Is it a structured and coherent system? Is this an appropriate space for collective action? The Wider Atlantic equation combines three realities: the revival of the Euro-Atlantic's geostrategic central role (I); the major geopolitical interest of maritime space for the coastal states (II); and the relevance of the Atlantic space widened in to an informal partnership of trust (III).

I. Revival of the Euro-Atlantic's central geostrategic role

The revival of the Euro-Atlantic's central geostrategic role finds its political and military meaning in the redefinition, which is still in progress, of the Atlantic Alliance formalized by the Treaty of Washington on April 4, 1949. The end of the Cold War threw this organization into uncertainty as to its new role, before its enlargement towards the East and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 created favorable conditions for its repositioning even beyond its traditional defense area covered by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The interventions in Afghanistan and Libya, operations Ocean Shield in the Indian Ocean and Active Endeavour in Mediterranean,¹

as well as multiple NATO partnerships perfectly illustrate the new power projection in the "world-system." This strategic adjustment occurs while Russia perceives a NATO enlargement as an attempt at encirclement. This transatlantic security community, in a redefinition phase, joins an economic interest community under construction. One of the great paradoxes of the Euro-Atlantic area is the absence of a market regulated by a free trade agreement between the United States and the European Union, despite the intensity of their economic relations. This is why the prospect of establishing a transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP) represents a key turning point.²

With effort, the US and the EU will establish the largest market in the world accounting for 50% of global GDP, 40% of trade, and 60% of global innovation. This is because they see an opportunity to stimulate growth through trade, and reposition themselves in the geoeconomic sphere facing the rise of China and Asia. The US president had also described this future partnership as an economic alliance as strong as NATO, the diplomatic and military alliance."³

What lessons can be learned from the Euro-Atlantic dynamic duo?

¹ Against piracy and maritime terrorism, respectively.

² See Jim Kolbe, *Alice in Trade-Land: The Politics of TTIP*, Policy Brief, OCP Policy Center, Rabat, February 2014, <http://www.ocppc.ma>
Center, Rabat, February 2014, <http://www.ocppc.ma>

³ *Le Monde*, June 19, 2013.

First, the acceleration of contemporary history and the dynamics of its complexity move at the pace of geopolitical tectonic plates: the center of gravity of the new economic and strategic challenges certainly tilts towards Asia. However, in parallel we are witnessing the gradual rebirth of a politico-military economic power space aspiring to make the Euro-Atlantic a central axis of global governance.

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Then, focused on the Atlantic Ocean, this area of power is in contact with Latin America and African-Atlantic sub-regions. It will hold a prominent place in the organization of the Wider Atlantic, due to its strategic influence (NATO) and its role as the economic center. The United States holds this influence, for example, as part of their "multi-partnership" policy, which aims to find partners who can share their understanding of security and contribute both financially and operationally.⁴ In the Atlantic area, these partners are members of NATO along with other neighboring countries with whom political and military interoperability is developed.

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II. The major geopolitical interest of maritime space for the coastal states

Studies on the Atlantic area are generally approaches that only focus on the continental perspective or an analysis of global grids, neglecting the specificities of states and regions. However, the density of the space and the complexity of its past and immediate history invite us to

be more pragmatic than theoretical.⁵ The maritime and regional approaches offer an interesting perspective: the first is all the more necessary as the maritime factor has become a strategic issue with which states can build their power attributes; the second helps to understand the regional processes at work in the Atlantic area, considering their potential contribution to the emergence of a coherent Wider Atlantic area.

The combination of these two elements of analysis allows the consideration of the Atlantic geopolitical relevance to coastal States, through their geo-marine intentions. It is certainly possible to identify two overall functions: strategic and economic.

- The strategic valuation function includes a variation of situations:

Spain and Portugal occupy a peripheral position on the continent in comparison to Germany, a European center of gravity. Their equilibrium is due to their proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, which provides them with valuable strategic depth, along with the strength of their relationship with South America and through strategic support points: the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores. In the Maghreb, the complexity of inter-Maghreb relationships gives the perception that Morocco is situated on the outskirts of North Africa and that its North African quality challenges the central Maghreb countries (Algeria, Tunisia). The Atlantic coast provides vital opportunities in terms of regional positioning. Morocco has every interest to project itself as a structuring maritime power in order to revive its economy and rise to the continental geopolitical challenge.⁶

For Brazil and South Africa, the development of the maritime dimension is a cornerstone of their evolving status as an emerging power. The two countries, which have no continental rivals, direct their strategic priorities towards the Atlantic Ocean: Brazil, for example, acquired naval assets for the purpose of strategic planning and diplomacy focused on the United States, Africa and Europe;⁷ South Africa, called the "Atlantic sentry," is to date the only country along the African Atlantic coast to have a naval force including submarines, which guarantees a strike capability and unique image.

⁴Established by Defense Strategic Guidance, 2012, this trend is now supported by the new security strategy (National Security Strategy, February 2015).

⁵The British *Atlantic Studies Journal*, founded in 2004, adopts this research angle from a historical perspective.

⁶See Rachid El Houdaïgui, *Éléments de la géopolitique maritime du Maroc*, Revue des FAR, Rabat, édition 365, 2015.

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On a geostrategic level, the Atlantic Ocean is a space in which the United States deploy their naval and air forces to secure maritime routes, defend the right of free movement for their navy, protect their maritime economic interests, fight against terrorism and contribute to the regulation of crises. However, it seems that the American concern is not so much to dominate the ocean as it is to share some aspects of these missions with regional or sub regional partners in the multi-partnership policy framework.

- A rich resource area and catalyst for maritime nationalism

The maritimization of economies bordering the Atlantic has gradually strengthened as the coastline represented a considerable share in the production of national wealth, given the maritime trade, the presence of fish and hydrocarbon resources, the importance of heavy industries, and vibrant coastal towns. It reflects a dependence of the sea, as 90% of global trade is by sea. States are therefore obliged to design policies adapted to these dependencies, which actually exacerbate competition and maritime disputes. As such, energy and fisheries issues put several countries of the Atlantic area in competition (Morocco, Spain, Argentina, the UK, the Gulf of Guinea and the Northern Atlantic).⁸ It is also possible that Brazil’s maritime strategy "Blue Amazon" confronts French interests in Guyana.

Meanwhile, this maritime dynamic highlights maritime safety and security needs in order to confront asymmetric threats, including the risk areas located on the Gulf of Guinea and the West African coastline.⁹

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⁷ Livro Branco de Defesa Nacional, 2012, <http://www.defesa.gov.br/arquivos/2012/mes07/lbdn.pdf>

⁸ (Canada, USA, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden).

⁹ In 2013, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) identified 51 acts of piracy in West Africa.

III. The Atlantic Area’s relevance widened to an informal partnership of trust

Two elements, developed above, direct the analysis to the same problem: is the Atlantic area appropriate for joint actions? This question challenges the researchers as well as politicians as it is true that this space is often perceived in terms of diversity instead of a coherent system. The European Parliament is one of the first political bodies to attempt to build an overall view on the issue.¹⁰ Its commitment reflects a new reality, where the debate on a Wider Atlantic gradually becomes one of the emerging aspects in the policy agenda, except that the implementation of this project would depend on the convergence of views on the form and content of the desired cooperation. Politicians and researchers should avoid using "mundane" paradigms in speeches or slogans to structure these dynamics: integration and alliance, for example, are among the inappropriate paradigms for the Wider Atlantic’s polycentric reality. Moreover, any attempt towards overall action will be met with this space’s density and complexity of the challenges.

Some lines of thought have already been the subject of debate at OCP Policy Center (Morocco), the German Marshall Fund (USA), and within the framework of jointly organized international conferences. As evidenced by the "Atlantic Dialogues" forum in Marrakech, the work of these two think tanks contributes to the semantic implementation of a transatlantic community interest.¹¹ In this type of forum where geopolitical representations of a Wider Atlantic are multiple and complex, the process of socialization and adaptation works toward a strategic common identity.¹²

One of the central ideas of the forum is to build trust as a guarantor of coherence for the Wider Atlantic project. Indeed, it seems appropriate to lay the foundations of a partnership of trust, preferably informal, whose purpose is to establish the terms governing the area of promoting confidence and sustainable links between the Northern Euro-Atlantic, the Latin Atlantic coastline and the African Atlantic coastline. The informal character does not in any way obscure the scope of the strategic partnership; on the contrary, through a light architecture it enables a consensual, non-binding operation.

¹⁰ Resolution of June 13, 2013 on the role of the EU in promoting a broader transatlantic partnership (2012/2287 (INI))

¹¹ Launched in 2012, this non-governmental forum is one of the largest in the Atlantic area. In October 2014, it brought together participants from 45 countries in Europe, the Americas, Africa, the Caribbean and Asia.

¹² See ATLANTIC CURRENTS: An annual report on wider Atlantic perspectives and patterns, GMF, Washington. OCP Policy Center, Rabat, October 17, 2014 <http://www.ocppc.ma/publications/atlantic-currents-annual-report-wider-atlantic-perspectives-and-patterns>.

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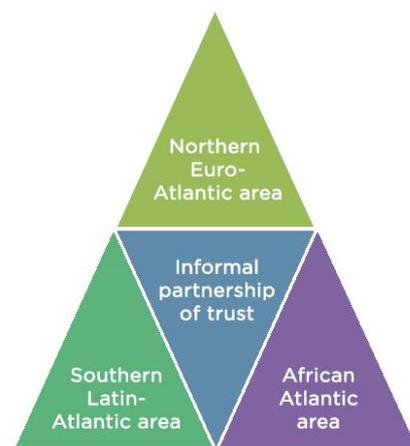
The partnership should first be based on key principles to promote collaborative working conditions:

- Objectivization: The diverse areas covered and the multiple states and postures imply the existence of well-defined objectives;
- Self-differentiation: the Atlantic Basin states are free to choose the format, content and degree of their participation;
- Specificity: respect and recognition of cultural, political and regional aspects of states;
- Complementarity: the trusted partnership should be complementary with regional and sub-regional organizations and Atlantic Basin initiatives. This is for example the case of the Conference of African States Bordering the Atlantic Ocean.¹³

Then the partnership of trust will find its strategic direction in an inclusive global political dialogue within the framework of an official but informal forum. It would cover a wide range of activities: political consultations; adoption of action plans; and evaluation of areas of cooperation. A steering committee would be responsible for organizing this dialogue on the basis of a policy statement. This dialogue would focus on political, security and economic issues.

In practical terms, the trusted partnership must include regional cooperation, considering the characteristics of each region in the priority areas: economy, security, natural resources, environment, and political governance.

The objective would be to define the target region(s) for programs and specific projects. The African Atlantic coast and in particular West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, for example, suffer from structural and cyclical barrier factors: endemic poverty, lack of resources and infrastructure to protect their sea space, piracy, territorial disputes, and poor exploitation of fisheries resources. A common vision of the issues is still taking shape, since Morocco launched the Conference of African States bordering the Atlantic. This initiative, although important because it has adopted cooperation mechanisms on maritime areas (fisheries, maritime transport, maritime security), has hardly interested international partners in the region (EU, USA).



Overall, the trusted partnership should be gradual and not binding. It is a long process and as any cooperation process it is a series of phases with their share of doubts and differences that require a prior joint reflection and discussion.

¹³ This initiative was launched in Rabat in August 2009 on the basis of a policy statement.

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OCP Policy Center is a Moroccan policy-oriented Think Tank whose mission is to contribute to knowledge sharing and to enrich reflection on key economic and international relations issues, considered as essential to the economic and social development of Morocco, and more broadly to the African continent. For this purpose, the Think Tank relies on independent research, a network of partners and leading research associates, in the spirit of an open exchange and debate platform.

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