

Policy Paper

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The Rising Strategic Significance of the Atlantic Basin

An Emerging 'Pan-Atlanticism'

By Paul Isbell

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The Atlantic Basin has long lacked diplomatic and political initiatives embracing it as a whole. In that regard, it stands out from other oceans, as focus on the North Atlantic has largely overshadowed the "Rest". Nevertheless, a series of recent initiatives point to a possible solution to this long institutional absence. Building on decades of reflection and recent momentum, an emerging pan-Atlanticism might be on the horizon.



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POLICY PAPER

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AN EMERGING 'PAN-ATLANTICISM'

The Missing Atlantic and the Birth of a New Pan-Atlanticism

Of all the world's major ocean basins, only the Atlantic has long lacked an official pan-basin association. The Pacific, Indian, and Arctic Ocean basins are all ahead of the Atlantic in this respect, with numerous long-running official pan-basin cooperation frameworks, in addition to many transnational initiatives.¹ The Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (formerly TPP, now CPTPP), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Arctic Council are just a few emblematic cases. None of these ocean-basin diplomatic regional frameworks is completely inclusive, nor can they claim anything but a patchy track record on pan-basin cooperation. Nevertheless, in all these cases, the ocean basin has been considered the relevant unit of analysis on the map, around which to organize regional international cooperation and frame geo-strategy.

Of course, there is a long-standing transatlantic relationship across the northern Atlantic.² Often conflated with the notion of the Atlantic world, this deep relationship between North America and Europe consists of a dense web of bilateral and interregional strategic, political, economic, financial, digital and cultural linkages, which dwarf any other current vector of trans-oceanic linkages (including those of China with the United States, Europe, Africa or Latin America).³ This traditional transatlantic relationship is embodied first and foremost in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but also in the formal EU-U.S. relationship, with its summits and established institutional architecture.⁴ However, an all-Atlantic (or 'pan-Atlantic') cooperative framework, integrating the entire basin, north and south, comparable to the examples mentioned above, has never existed.

While the Atlantic basin can boast a handful of pan-Atlantic initiatives, most of these have been limited to research, analysis and exchange and all have remained transnational, as opposed to intergovernmental or multilateral (i.e., state-led). Nevertheless, a nascent pan-Atlantic epistemic community has been forged by the cumulative effect of these efforts. This nascent transnational Atlantic basin community has been nurtured by several pan-Atlantic research projects and outreach programs, including:

- The Wider Atlantic Program of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, now GMF South, along with the Atlantic Strategy Group⁵ (with the Policy Center for the New South), Brussels;
- The Atlantic Dialogues of the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) and its Atlantic

1. The term 'transnational' has different connotations, but what is referred to here and throughout this series of Policy Papers are economic, political and cultural processes that extend beyond the boundaries of nation states and are often engaged by civil society and non-state representatives (even if also engaged and supported by individual states).

2. Strictly speaking, the terms 'north' and 'south' Atlantic are geographic and oceanic terms, as they are divided, and defined, by the equator. However, the 'North-South divide,' as it is conventionally referred to, is actually located further north of the equator, running through the Mediterranean across the Sargasso Sea in the north Atlantic, through the Florida straits and then along the Rio Grande. Therefore, we refer to the 'Atlantic north' as the northern Atlantic and the 'Atlantic south' as the southern Atlantic, to distinguish their geopolitical geographies from the scientific geographies of the north and south Atlantics.

3. See Daniel S. Hamilton and Joseph Quinlan, *Transatlantic Economy 2023*, 20th Anniversary Edition, Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University SAIS/Transatlantic Leadership Network, 2023. (<https://transatlanticrelations.org/publications/transatlantic-economy-2023/>)

4. Including, for example the EU-US Trade and Technology Council. See 'EU-US Summit, Brussels, 15 June, 2021' (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2021/06/15/>).

5. See the Atlantic Strategy Group, (<https://www.gmfus.org/atlantic-strategy-group>)

Dialogues Emerging Leaders Program (ADEL)⁶, Marrakesh and Rabat;

- The European Commission's Atlantic Future research consortium,⁷ Brussels;
- The Atlantic Basin Initiative of the Center for Transatlantic Relations (CTR) at Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, now the Transatlantic Leadership Network (TLN),⁸ Washington D.C.;
- The Jean Monnet Network on Atlantic Studies and the Jean Monnet Network 2.0 (both with the support of the EU's ERASMUS+ program).⁹

There are others. One of the longest running and most dynamic pan-Atlantic associations is the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance, best known within scientific research circles but increasingly hailed as a success story in ocean science diplomacy.¹⁰

At least until recently, however, scant attention has been paid by states themselves to pan-Atlantic aspirations, with some notable exceptions. For example, in May 2009, Morocco initiated the 21st century pan-Atlantic movement with the Skhirat Plea,¹¹ followed by the Skhirat Declaration¹² in December 2012. These called for transnational cooperation across the Atlantic Basin to tackle a range of challenges and build on opportunities unique to the Atlantic Ocean and its societies, including food and energy security, the movement of people and knowledge-sharing, sustainable development, climate change action and biodiversity protection, and maritime and human security.

The processes behind the Skhirat Plea and Declaration eventually led Morocco to identify the Atlantic space as one of its priority foreign policy vectors.¹³ The Moroccan phosphate company, OCP, subsequently established the OCP Policy Center (now the Policy Center for the New South) and partnered with the German Marshall Fund of the United States' Brussels-based Wider Atlantic Program to launch a line of research, analysis and book-length studies to explore Atlantic basin systems and their potential. This work covers three areas of special importance to the southern Atlantic, and to Morocco and Africa, in particular: the Atlantic Ocean, energy and food security.¹⁴ Out of these early efforts at cooperation was born the Policy Center's annual Atlantic Dialogues.

In another case of state participation within a transnational movement, Angola played an active role in the Atlantic Basin Initiative (ABI), and even hosted a meeting of the ABI's Eminent Persons Group (EPG) in June 2013. At this event, the EPG issued the Luanda Declaration, a rallying cry for

6. See the Policy Center for the New South (<https://www.policycenter.ma/>), the Atlantic Dialogues (<https://ad.policycenter.ma/>) and the Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders (ADEL) Program (<https://www.policycenter.ma/atlantic-dialogues-emerging-leaders-program>).

7. See European Commission, 'Final Report Summary - ATLANTIC FUTURE (Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas)', Cordis, August 18, 2016 (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/320091/reporting>).

8. See the Atlantic Basin Initiative (ABI) at <https://www.transatlantic.org/projects/the-atlantic-basin-initiative/> and <https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/topic/the-atlantic-basin/atlantic-basin-initiative/>.

9. See the Jean Monnet Network on Atlantic Studies (<http://jeanmonnetnetwork.com.br/>) and the JM Atlantic Network 2.0 (<https://www.jmatlanticnetwork2.com/>).

10. See the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance (<https://allatlanticocean.org/who-we-are/>).

11. The Skhirat Plea, High Commission for Planning of the Kingdom of Morocco, First Forum of Skhirat (Tricontinental Atlantic Initiative), May 30, 2009 (https://itca.hcp.ma/The-Skhirat-Plea_a116.html).

12. The Skhirat Declaration, High Commission for Planning of the Kingdom of Morocco, Second Forum of Skhirat (Initiative for an Atlantic Community), December 1, 2012 (https://itca.hcp.ma/Skhirat-Declaration_a305.html).

13. See Ian O. Lesser, Geoffrey Kemp, Emiliano Alessandri, and S. Enders Wimbush, *Morocco's New Geopolitics: A Wider Atlantic Perspective*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States and OCP Foundation, 2012 (<https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/morocco%E2%80%99s-new-geopolitics-wider-atlantic-perspective>); and Ian O. Lesser, 'Morocco's New Geo-Economics: Implications for U.S.-Moroccan Partnership', Wider Atlantic Program, Policy Brief, German Marshall Fund of the U.S., October 2013 (<https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/morocco%E2%80%99s-new-geo-economics-implications-us-moroccan-partnership>).

14. See John Richardson, Armando Marques Guedes, Xavier de la Gorce, Anne-François de Saint Salvy and Paul Holthus, *The Fractured Ocean: Current Challenges to Maritime Policy in the Wider Atlantic*, Wider Atlantic Series, German Marshall Fund of the US, December 2012; and Paul Isbell, *Energy and the Atlantic: The Shifting Energy Landscapes of the Atlantic Basin*, The German Marshall Fund of the US, Wider Atlantic Series, 2012.

pan-Atlantic energy cooperation through the creation of an Atlantic Energy Forum and the drafting of an Atlantic Charter for Sustainable Energy.¹⁵ Other Atlantic countries, such as Spain and Portugal, have identified the Atlantic basin as a geostrategic space of high priority for their foreign policies. From an official state point of view, however, there was little if any focus on the Atlantic basin as a whole for considering optimal geographic framing of regional cooperation and governance.

The Birth of Pan-Atlantic Cooperation

However, after a seemingly ‘anti-Atlantic’ interregnum defined by the Trump presidency in the United States, by the spring of 2021 the situation finally began to change. Portugal, long a natural proponent of an Atlantic basin focus, launched a pan-Atlantic initiative out of the Atlantic Centre,¹⁶ itself a multilateral initiative under the auspices of the Portuguese Ministry of Defense, dedicated to maritime security in the Atlantic Basin. In May 2021, 16 Atlantic states signed the Atlantic Centre Joint Declaration in the Azores.¹⁷ Since then, seven more have signed onto the initiative, bringing the total to 23 Atlantic states.

The Joint Declaration statement reads:

In this fast-evolving context the Atlantic Centre focuses on improving the security context of the whole of the Atlantic, as a part of a comprehensive approach that aims to identify and provide responses to existing and future challenges. It also comprises a key asset in bridging North-South interests, establishing an important platform for pan-Atlantic dialogue and cooperation.¹⁸

A year and a half later, and six months into the Ukraine war, the change in Atlantic Basin dynamics began to accelerate. On 20 September 2022, the U.S. Department of State released the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation.¹⁹ Joining the United States in the signing “of a joint statement for cooperation in the Atlantic” were Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Cote d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Ireland, Mauritania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Senegal, Spain and the United Kingdom. More concretely, this initial array of 18 Atlantic coastal countries, representing all the continents of the Atlantic basin, agreed to: explore opportunities to advance shared sustainable development, economic, environmental, scientific, and maritime governance goals across the Atlantic, in accordance with international law, in particular as set forth in the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).²⁰

15. See the Atlantic Basin Initiative (<https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/topic/the-atlantic-basin/atlantic-basin-initiative/>) and ‘The Luanda Declaration: Towards an Atlantic Charter for Sustainable Energy’, (https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Doc-17-Atlantic_Basin_Initiative_Luanda_energy_declaration_EPG-version-PI-edits.pdf).

16. The Atlantic Centre is a multilateral initiative, led by the Portuguese Ministry of Defence, which focuses on maritime security in the Atlantic, broadly understood. This initiative has been underway since 2018 and was officially launched on 14 May 2021 with the signing of the Atlantic Centre Joint Declaration by 16 Atlantic nations in the Azores, in the course of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Since 14 May 2021, seven more nations have joined this initiative, bringing the total to 23 Signatory States from all four continents in the Atlantic Basin: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Colombia, Denmark, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, France, Germany, Gambia, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, Netherlands, Portugal, Senegal, São Tomé and Príncipe, Togo, Spain, United Kingdom and Uruguay. See the Atlantic Centre (<https://www.defesa.gov.pt/pt/pdfesa/ac>).

17. The evaluation and decision process for building the infrastructure that will house the Atlantic Centre’s headquarters in the Azores, Terceira Island, is underway. The Atlantic Centre currently carries out its work in space provided by the Ministry of Defence in Lisbon.

18. See the Atlantic Centre’s “Joint Political Statement,” July 7, 2022 (<https://www.defesa.gov.pt/pt/pdfesa/ac/doc/Paginas/default.aspx>).

19. Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation, September 20, 2022 (<https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-atlantic-cooperation/>).

20. In the meantime, two more countries, Cabo Verde and Togo, have joined the group.

Table 1:

Signatory Countries of Joint Statements on 'Pan-Atlantic' Cooperation

Atlantic Centre Joint Declaration (Portuguese Ministry of Defense)		Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation (U.S. Dept. of State)	
Africa	Europe	Africa	Europe
Angola	Denmark	Angola	Ireland
Cameroon	France	Cote d'Ivoire	The Netherlands
Cabo Verde	Germany	Equatorial Guinea	Norway
Equatorial Guinea	The Netherlands	Ghana	Portugal
Gambia	Portugal	Guinea-Bissau	Spain
Guinea Bissau	Spain	Mauritania	United Kingdom
Morocco	United Kingdom	Senegal	
Nigeria		Cabo Verde	
São Tomé and Príncipe		Togo	
Senegal			
Ghana			
Togo			
Latin America and the Caribbean	North America	Latin America and the Caribbean	North America
Brazil	United States	Argentina	Canada
Colombia		Brazil	United States
Uruguay		Costa Rica	

Note: Countries denoted in blue have signed both statements.

Both statements recognized implicitly the value of the many research and exchange programs of the nascent transnational Atlantic basin community mentioned above. Signatories committed explicitly to engaging with, and building on, the efforts of a number of existing Atlantic or sub-Atlantic organizations and cooperation mechanisms. The Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation makes it clear that:

even though there are no pan-Atlantic mechanisms to address these issues, a latticework of existing bilateral agreements between a range of Atlantic countries, and some regional initiatives, offer potential synergies and foundations upon which to build.²¹

21. Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation, September 20, 2022, *op. cit.*

Such existing cooperation agreements and initiatives include:

- The Atlantic Centre, as a central hub for innovative, pan-Atlantic policy analysis, political dialogue, and capacity-building;²²
- The Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS or ZPCSA), as a key coordinating body for south Atlantic countries;
- The Yaoundé Architecture and the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, as a central body on African regional maritime law enforcement which, through its coordination and information-sharing mechanisms, links the Regional Maritime Security Centre for Central Africa and the Regional Maritime Security Centre for West Africa with ZOPACAS;²³
- The All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance, as a venue to advance scientific cooperation;
- Regional fisheries bodies and other organizations working on issues related to a sustainable ocean economy, and climate and environment issues concerning the Atlantic Ocean.

An Emerging Sub-Basin Pan-Atlanticism: The Atlantic African States Process

In addition, one southern Atlantic sub-basin regional cooperation mechanism has been playing a role in both of these new pan-Atlantic initiatives, led by the U.S. and Portugal. The Atlantic African States Process (AASP), initiated by the Kingdom of Morocco, has great potential to serve as a key component in developing pan-Atlantic cooperation by, for example, coordinating the Atlantic African region in strengthening its ties, both with the northern Atlantic countries and across the southern Atlantic with Latin America.

The first AASP ministerial meeting, held in Rabat on 8 June 2022, produced the Rabat Declaration I, “which underlined the political commitment of Atlantic African countries to implement their partnership aimed at strengthening ties of cooperation and integration between African countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean, with a view to consolidating peace, stability and shared prosperity in the region”.²⁴ A Program of Action was initiated at the second ministerial in New York on 23 September 2022. This roadmap sets out how these 21 countries of the African Atlantic coast plan “to achieve their common objectives on three strategic priorities: political and security dialogue, blue economy, maritime connectivity and energy, and protection and conservation of the marine environment”. This agenda essentially covers the combined priorities expressed in the two other pan-Atlantic cooperation statements.

The AASP has recently been consolidated further by the release of the Rabat Declaration II, formulated at the third ministerial in Rabat on 12 July 2023. Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Bourita, reaffirmed the strategy of drawing together the previous disparate efforts, “highlighting

22. The Atlantic Centre has its own set of capacity building objectives, embodied in a series of deliverables outlined in a Road Map 2022-2024, established and approved by all 23 partners in December 2022. The first pillar (Political Dialogue) includes seven ‘point of contact’ meetings; a second pillar (Knowledge Production) includes the publication of 16 Policy Briefs and three annual Atlantic Centre Reports; the third pillar includes three Maritime Security Training Courses.

23. See Sabrina Medeiros, ‘Maritime security architectures in South Atlantic’, Interagency Institute, February 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350823997_MARITIME_SECURITY_IN_SOUTH_ATLANTIC. See also the Final Report of The 2nd Ministerial Session of the Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (G7 ++ FoGG), under the Senegalese-British co-presidency, held from 24 to 26 November 2021, in Dakar (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1057692/G7++_FOGG_2021_-_UK_Senegal_-_End_of_Co-Chair_Report.pdf.)

24. Press Release distributed by APO Group on behalf of Kingdom of Morocco – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates. (<https://african.business/2023/07/apo-newsfeed/statement-rabat-hosts-the-3rd-ministerial-meeting-of-the-atlantic-african-states-process>.)

the importance of combining efforts and establishing partnerships with other cooperation initiatives for countries in the South and North of the Atlantic Ocean, including the United States initiative to enhance cooperation in the Atlantic Ocean”.²⁵

The Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation

The coexistence of two pan-Atlantic official state-led movements with the potential to become international partnerships or even organizations, together with a new sub-basin process, the AASP, focused on the broader Atlantic, was a sign that something was brewing. Both the U.S.- and Portuguese-led pan-Atlantic efforts overlapped substantially in their objectives on human security across the basin and pan-Atlantic maritime security and coastal cooperation, although the U.S.-led Joint Statement also identified the ocean environment, blue economy, energy and climate change as key joint priorities. Moreover, the AASP included all the stated strategic objectives of the two pan-Atlantic processes combined.

A year after the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation was released, a ministerial meeting on Atlantic Cooperation was held on 18 September 2023, on the margins of the annual UN General Assembly Meeting in New York. The 32 Atlantic coastal states (including 23 ministers) in attendance, from all four Atlantic basin continents, issued the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation and announced the launch of the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation, which elaborated a Plan of Action.

“Today, the United States was among the 32 coastal Atlantic countries to adopt the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation and launch the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation,” reads a press release from the U.S. Department of State. “This new multilateral forum brings together coastal Atlantic countries across Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and the Caribbean to engage in collective problem-solving and uphold a set of shared principles for Atlantic cooperation”.²⁶

25. ‘African Atlantic countries agree to enhance partnership for prosperity’, July 13, 2023 (<https://www.bna.bh/en/AfricanAtlanticcountriesagreeo enhancepartnershipforprosperity.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwIzON1%2BDvjApWVejHvaSdcpnApTG%2BI%3D>)

26. Matthew Miller, State Department Spokesperson, ‘Secretary Blinken Launches the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation’, Press Statement, September 18, 2023 (<https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinken-launches-the-partnership-for-atlantic-cooperation/>).

Table 2:

Signatory Countries of the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation

32 Atlantic Countries from all four continents signed the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation			
Africa (16)	Europe (7)	Latin America and the Caribbean (8)	North America (2)
Angola	Ireland	Argentina	Canada
Cote d'Ivoire	The Netherlands	Brazil	United States
Equatorial Guinea	Norway	Costa Rica	
Ghana	Portugal	Dominica	
Mauritania	Spain	Dominican Republic	
Senegal	United Kingdom	Guatemala	
Cabo Verde	Iceland	Guyana	
Togo		Uruguay	
Gabon			
Gambia			
Guinea			
Liberia			
Morocco			
Nigeria			
Republic of Congo			

Note: Guinea-Bissau signed the Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation, but not the Declaration. Since the signing of the Joint Statement, Cabo Verde, Togo, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Uruguay, Guyana, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Dominica, and Iceland have joined the Partnership.

The Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation²⁷ draws directly on the early Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation (Article 1). It also acknowledges Portugal's Joint Statement of the Atlantic Centre and recognizes the value of its synergistic efforts, along with those of other existing institutions, processes, and initiatives on pan-Atlantic challenges and opportunities. These include "the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic, the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security (YAMS), the Atlantic Centre, the Air Centre, the African Atlantic States Process (AASP) and the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA)" (Article 12).

27. Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation, September 18, 2023 (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/18/declaration-on-atlantic-cooperation/>).

The Declaration identifies the Atlantic Ocean as the focal point of pan-Atlantic cooperation and designates scientific and technological cooperation on climate change, marine environment and other maritime challenges as the first areas of collaboration (Articles 2, 5, 6, 8 and 13). Furthermore the Declaration makes it clear, at least at this early stage, that the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation, the platform established by the Declaration's Plan of Action for facilitating a new form of open, inclusive pan-Atlantic multilateralism, "will not deal with matters related to defense, security, and governance" (Article 13). At the same time, the Declaration recognizes that the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation is:

committed to international law, and a stronger, inclusive, representative, and effective multilateralism, with the UN Charter at its core as the foundation of our efforts. We acknowledge the importance of existing national and international legal frameworks, and we reaffirm that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea sets out the legal framework that governs all activities in the ocean and the seas (Article 4).

In addition, the Declaration states that the Partnership commits to:

promote an open Atlantic in which Atlantic States are free from interference, coercion, or aggressive action [and] uphold the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence of States, and the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means and the purpose to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights, and self-determination of peoples (Article 9).

The Partnership's overarching mission is "to promote the Atlantic as a place of peace, stability, prosperity, and cooperation."

Nevertheless, the Declaration makes explicit reference to a number of common and interrelated challenges that arise in the maritime domain: "piracy, transnational organized crime, narcotics trafficking, as well as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, climate change, natural disasters, pollution, and environmental degradation" (Article 2). Such a diagnosis of additional pan-Atlantic challenges suggests that the scope of pan-Atlantic cooperation could broaden in the future beyond ocean environment and climate change, the blue economy and sustainable development to embrace both human and maritime security, given the close interrelationship between both areas.

The U.S. Senior Coordinator for Atlantic Cooperation, Ambassador Jessye Lapenn, alluded to this broader scope when she spoke at the Africa Center/Atlantic Centre Seminar in Lisbon in July 2023, identifying the Atlantic Ocean:

as an economic driver; a highway for transit and trade, a route for digital commerce, services, and investment; a source of food and energy, and a locus of ocean-based climate solutions, from green shipping to blue carbon.²⁸

The Ambassador also noted the logic behind a broader and deeper Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation:

As we think about the challenges facing the Atlantic, we tend to think in baskets—economic, security and environment/climate, but virtually every challenge is interrelated, and solutions

28. Ambassador Jessye Lapenn, Senior Coordinator for Atlantic Cooperation, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, 'Remarks for Africa Center/Atlantic Centre Seminar', Lisbon, Portugal, July 17, 2023 (<https://www.state.gov/remarks-for-africa-center-atlantic-centre-seminar/>).

will require us to think across baskets. One way to think about that is through the lens of human security, which allows a transparent, sustainable blue economy to flourish. Stability enables local fishing industries as well as significant trans-Atlantic trade. This stability is built on good governance and legal cooperation.

Significantly, and despite Article 13's exclusion of matters related to defense, security, and governance, Lapenn added further that:

Governance mechanisms, diplomatic cooperation, and regional bodies are needed to ensure human security across the Atlantic region to address issues like IUU fishing. The good news for all of us is that many Atlantic nations are developing fora to look at the challenges and opportunities of the Atlantic community.

Finally, Ambassador Lapenn also noted the geostrategic significance of her newly created position, housed within the State Department's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, claiming that it:

demonstrates U.S. recognition that the Atlantic binds Atlantic states as neighbors just as surely as countries that share land borders are neighbors, and that there is an Atlantic geography, an Atlantic community... Our aim is to create an Atlantic consciousness that supports the sense of Atlantic community... The more we work together to achieve results that are not possible unilaterally or even bilaterally, the more we feel a sense of community. And the more we feel a sense of Atlantic identity and community, the more we will look to solve problems together. The initiative for Atlantic Cooperation can serve as our platform.

That initiative is now the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation. The five-point Plan of Action appended to the Declaration addresses the structure, programming focus, issue content, working modality, and future calendar of this new multilateral entity, "the first Atlantic-based grouping to include both the North and South Atlantic and address a broad range of issues on shared priorities".²⁹

Article 1 establishes that:

work will proceed at both a high level for strategic policy and at the expert level to advance specific issues, with actions taken by States individually, in smaller groups, or by the entire group.

Article 2 lays out the criteria for selecting particular cooperative activities, which should:

- "Yield concrete benefits for Atlantic States";
- "Promote the involvement and support of a maximum number of Atlantic States";
- "Be better addressed with resources and actions encompassing northern and southern Atlantic States";
- "Add value to, enhance, or broaden the scope of other initiatives, where they exist, to avoid duplication of effort".

Article 3 sets out the initial issue area for pan-Atlantic cooperation^{3/4}that of promoting "greater scientific cooperation by sharing information, building capacity, and increasing access to technology on voluntary and mutually agreed terms". Specific agreed topic areas include:

- Scientific cooperation, including shared research, environmental observations, and ocean data:

29. Matthew Miller, *op. cit.*

1. Promoting science and technology cooperation, including data sharing and sharing of best practices on coastal ecosystems, marine plastic pollution, Sargassum, estuarine invasive weeds, prevention and response to ocean-related environmental disasters, and food security, taking into account the needs of coastal communities.
 2. Expanding and broadening participation in selected All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA) activities.
 3. Strengthening forecasting and early-warning capabilities, particularly regarding severe weather events.
- Information and maritime awareness:
 1. Identifying the most critical gaps in capacity and technology.
 2. Increasing access to maritime domain awareness technology, including the transfer of know-how and technology on voluntary and mutually agreed terms.
 - Building a cadre of young Atlantic scientists:
 1. Establishing a scholarship and exchange program to foster excellence and build ties among the next generation of Atlantic Ocean scientists.

Article 4 establishes that the initiative is “voluntary” and will take into account “the different capabilities, vulnerabilities, and realities of Atlantic States”. All participating states are free to propose topics for voluntary, self-governing working groups that will develop work plans and timetables to ensure work is coordinated with existing Atlantic or sub-Atlantic initiatives. Working groups will make decisions by consensus and may invite civil society representatives to contribute as observers. They are also invited to report regularly on progress and make recommendations to ministers in order to monitor implementation, ensure coordination and mobilize the necessary resources.

Article 5 points to the next steps:

- Inviting participating Atlantic states to identify focal points to participate in topic-focused working groups;
- Convening working groups to scope the issue and determine next steps;
- Convening a Senior Officials Meeting in November 2023.

The Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation presents itself as a cutting-edge example of an open, inclusive and voluntary form of multilateralism; it could also be the beginning of a complex form of transnational ‘ocean basin’ regionalism. The Partnership’s Plan of Action limits the initial focus of cooperation to Atlantic Ocean science, technology, and data related to climate change and marine environmental protection. However, the text of the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation seen as a whole, along with statements from some of its principal proponents, point to a series of other potential pan-Atlantic areas for cooperation. These include the blue economy, human and maritime security and even hard security and economic integration. Indeed, as this Policy Report will show, there are other pressing challenges and opportunities that are uniquely pan-Atlantic and that call for widespread cooperation between states and civil societies across, and in all quadrants of, the Atlantic basin.

Box 1: Delimiting the Wider Atlantic

What is the Atlantic basin?

The term 'Atlantic basin' has varied in its definitional scope, depending on context and purpose. In the broadest version of the notion—the 'broad Atlantic basin' of the Atlantic Basin Initiative (ABI), for example—all four Atlantic continents in their entirety, including Indian and Pacific Ocean coastal states, form part of the ultimate geographic horizons of a 'pan-Atlanticism' that looks to garner wide transnational interest in an 'open regionalism' of the Atlantic.

On the other hand, the scope of the pan-Atlantic world implicit in the two recent Joint Statements and the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation is the narrowest expression of the Atlantic basin (the ABI's 'narrow Atlantic Basin'), shaped by the pragmatism of diplomacy, given that they represent the first state-driven attempts to forge pan-Atlantic cooperation, and focus on the Atlantic Ocean itself, marine science cooperation and other maritime issues in the basin as the basic pillars of common interest. As such, they engage only Atlantic coastal states, at least for now.

Furthermore, somewhere between these broad continental and narrow coastal framings, there is an 'intermediate Atlantic basin'. Research on the comparative dynamics of 'ocean basin regions' (in relation to those of the traditional land-based 'continental' and 'sub-continental' regionalisms) employs this geographic scope of the Atlantic basin. This perspective would exclude the coastal states of the Pacific and Indian Ocean basins from the Atlantic basin frame, but would incorporate the landlocked states of the southern Atlantic continents, whose geographies and transport infrastructures link them more to the Atlantic than to the Indian or Pacific. Landlocked states that are, on the other hand, more closely tied to one of the other ocean basins would, in ocean basin terms, be considered part of them.

What is pan-Atlanticism and pan-Atlantic cooperation?

The terms 'all-Atlantic' and 'pan-Atlantic' are essentially interchangeable in their meaning in that they aspire to engage Atlantic states and societies from all four Atlantic continents. The term 'wider Atlantic' is looser than the 'pan-Atlantic' category, but the meaning in most contexts largely overlaps. Pan-Atlantic cooperation, as proposed by the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation or the Atlantic African States Process, can be seen as updated versions of the previously existing notion of 'triangular cooperation', which embraces Europe, Africa and the Americas. The United Nations defines triangular cooperation as "Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country(ies)/or multilateral organization(s) to implement development cooperation programs and projects".³⁰ Pan-Atlanticism is the expression of pan-Atlantic cooperation that includes the participation of at least one state or civil society group from each of the four Atlantic continents.

30. UN Office for South-South Cooperation, "About South-South and Triangular Cooperation", retrieved 7 December 2023 (<https://unsouthsouth.org/about/about-sstc/>)

The strategic relevance of pan-Atlanticism in a shifting world

Implicit in the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation is an acknowledgement that an Atlantic basin or ‘pan-Atlantic’ focus makes strategic sense. The multiple global impacts of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have set in motion a reshuffling of the international system of power, ushering in a period of fluid and initially unstable multipolarity, ripe with possibilities for realignment. In this context, many distinct strategic interests are now converging in the Atlantic basin. They often have different strategic intents and distinct conceptualizations of interest and global governance, but they all intersect, or partially overlap, in strategically provocative ways across the broader Atlantic Basin. Some of these vectors of strategic interest and initiative represent opportunities for pan-Atlantic cooperation; others are more likely to be seen as challenges or even threats.

These vectors of interest and initiative come both from within the Atlantic Basin (‘intra-Atlantic’ initiatives)—and, increasingly, from the Southern Atlantic—and from without (‘extra-Atlantic’ interests, like those of China and Russia, and the rest of the BRICS Plus, among others in the broader ‘BRICS-sphere’). They come from such opposed geostrategic geographies as Eurasia’s heartland (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Central Asia)—the ‘geopolitical antipodes’ of the Atlantic Basin—and from many of Eurasia’s ‘rim lands’ (such as China, India, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean states). Moreover, these rising levels of interest and more dynamic vectors of diplomacy in the Atlantic also come from distinct ideological perspectives, including those seeking to reestablish the bases of global governance, either by reforming the UN Bretton Woods system so that it is more representative of, and responsive to, the BRICS Plus and the rest of the Global South, or by developing parallel institutions that take into consideration their legitimate and pressing concerns. There are also those striving for a restoration of the ‘liberal international order’ under U.S. hegemony.

Yet, at the same time, there is now a nascent Atlantic basin consciousness. Many have even called for a ‘pan-Atlantic’ New Atlantic Community.³¹ Some analysts already see an Atlantic basin region in incipient formation.³² Moreover, a new ‘pan-Atlantic’ multilateral entity, the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation, has been born. In this sense, the long-held notion that we are now in an Asian (or Pacific) century should be revisited and problematized by an analytical focus on the entire Atlantic basin.

Morocco’s Contemporary Atlanticism

One of these dynamic vectors of Atlantic interest and initiative leads us in a full circle back to the country that launched the initial impulse for contemporary Atlanticism: the Kingdom of Morocco. In the wake of the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI underlined the strategic significance of the Atlantic Basin and Morocco’s ‘Atlantic Dimension’ in his 6 November 2023 address to the nation on the occasion of the commemoration of the Green March. “Just as the Mediterranean links Morocco to Europe, the Atlantic coast is our gateway to Africa and the Americas”. The speech laid out a number of Morocco’s key geostrategic objectives:

- “to rehabilitate our national coastline, including the part in the Moroccan Sahara region bordering the Atlantic, and re-engineer this geopolitical space at the African level”;

31. See the Eminent Persons Group of the Atlantic Basin Initiative, ‘A New Atlantic Community: Generating Growth, Human Development and Security in the Atlantic Hemisphere – A Declaration and Call to Action’, ABI White Paper (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, Center for Transatlantic Relations and Brookings Institution Press, 2014) <https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Doc-25-Atlantic-Basin-Initiative-White-Paper.pdf>.

32. See, for example, Andréas Litsegård and Frank Mattheis, ‘The Atlantic Space – A Region in the Making’, Chapter 1 in Frank Mattheis and Adreas Litseard, eds., *Interregionalism across the Atlantic Space*, Springer International Publishing, 2018. <https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Interregionalism-across-the-Atlantic-Space.pdf>.

- “to transform the Atlantic region into a space for human interaction and economic integration, and to make sure it plays a key role at continental and international levels”;
- “to facilitate connectivity between the different countries bordering the Atlantic, provide for means of transportation, build logistics platforms and consider the development of a strong, competitive national commercial marine fleet”;
- “to develop a maritime economy that contributes to prosperity in the region and serves its inhabitants...an integrated economy based on the development of exploration for offshore natural resources and the promotion of investment in marine fishing, in addition to seawater desalination to encourage agricultural activities, promote the blue economy and support the renewable energy agenda”.

His Majesty King Mohammed VI continued:

A stable and credible country, Morocco is keenly aware of the stakes and challenges for African countries in general, and those bordering the Atlantic in particular. The region along the Atlantic coast suffers from a significant deficit in infrastructure and investment, despite skilled human capital and abundant natural resources.

It is this recognition, the King pointed out, that prompted Morocco to launch the Atlantic African States Process (AASP, see above), “an initiative for the creation of an institutional framework that brings together the twenty-three African countries bordering the Atlantic.” Among the concrete projects belonging to this initiative is the Morocco-Nigeria gas pipeline, “a strategic project [...] designed to promote regional integration, boost joint economic growth and serve development objectives in the countries bordering the Atlantic [...] and guarantee energy supplies for European countries”. Finally, His Majesty proposed the Sahel as a new area for Atlantic cooperation:

The problems and difficulties facing African sister countries in the Sahel region will not be solved by security and military measures alone, but rather by an approach based on cooperation and shared development. I therefore suggest that we launch an international initiative to enable the Sahel countries to have access to the Atlantic Ocean.³³

Conclusion and Approach to the Policy Papers of the Series

As more and more interests coincide or clash in this increasingly identifiable geostrategic space, the strategic significance of the Atlantic Basin continues to grow. More specifically, the strategic importance of the southern Atlantic is growing even more rapidly, given that all the vectors of interest pass through it. In this Policy Report, we will illustrate these twin theses by examining the significance of different players, vectors of interest, and schools of thought and practice within the Atlantic basin, through the analytical lenses of three major perspectives on international relations: realism, liberalism and environmentalism.³⁴

This comparative analysis will identify what the Atlantic basin represents in strategic and policy terms for realists, liberals, and environmentalists at this historical juncture, and where their interests and objectives overlap, coincide, or clash. Realists, liberals, and environmentalists in the Atlantic have their own motives and interests in promoting and participating in pan-Atlantic cooperation,

33. “HM the King Delivers Speech to Nation on Occasion of 48th Anniversary of Green March”, Monday 6 November 2023 (<https://www.maroc.ma/en/royal-activities/hm-king-delivers-speech-nation-occasion-48th-anniversary-green-march-full-text>)

34. There are many other theoretical perspectives and schools of thought in international relations (and related disciplines), including Marxism, Constructivism and Feminism. We have not included these in the analysis, in part due to limitations of time and space but also because to do so (with the possible exception of Marxism) would only complement (not contradict) the validity of the argument and conclusions.

and even in pursuing an Atlantic basin regionalism. Although these various motives and perceived interests in the Atlantic might be focused and articulated differently, they overlap in ways that are not incompatible. Likewise, state, private and civil society actors beyond the Atlantic, guided by one or another of these perspectives, are also witnessing rising strategic interest in the Atlantic basin, regardless of whether they view pan-Atlantic cooperation and Atlantic basin regionalism as beneficial or detrimental to their own interests.

By identifying the major barriers to and drivers of pan-Atlantic cooperation, when the Atlantic Basin is taken as the relevant unit of analysis and a potential space for regional cooperation or geostrategic competition, the comparison of these perspectives allows for an initial mapping of potential cooperation and conflict across the Atlantic basin, while shedding light on potential directions for the current restructuring of the international system. The report will conclude by identifying the multiple practical implications involved, both for Atlantic basin states and societies beyond the basin, and offering policy recommendations. The conclusion may also include suggestions for professors, research analysts, theoreticians, and practitioners of geopolitics.

About Policy Center for the New South

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

As such, the PCNS brings together researchers, publishes their work and capitalizes on a network of renowned partners, representative of different regions of the world. The PCNS hosts a series of gatherings of different formats and scales throughout the year, the most important being the annual international conferences "The Atlantic Dialogues" and "African Peace and Security Annual Conference" (APSACO).

Finally, the think tank is developing a community of young leaders through the Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders program(ADEL) a space for cooperation and networking between a new generation of decision-makers from the government, business and civil society sectors. Through this initiative, which already counts more than 300 members, the Policy Center for the New South contributes to intergenerational dialogue and the emergence of tomorrow's leaders.

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