

BUILDING A BROADER ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

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Executive summary

Today, the four Atlantic continents – North and South America, Africa, and Europe – are connecting as never before. With little fanfare, the Atlantic Basin is becoming a central arena of globalization and a microcosm of key global trends, including the diffusion of power, deepening interdependencies, and spreading transnational risks. It has rapidly become one of the world’s principal energy reservoirs. It is the world’s most heavily traveled ocean and has become the inland sea to the vast majority of the world’s democracies. The Atlantic data seaway, already the busiest in the world, is building out fast. Pan-Atlantic commercial flows rival, and in such areas as services, investment and digital commerce exceed, those of the Pacific. Never have so many workers and consumers entered the Atlantic economy as quickly as in the past two decades. The Atlantic Ocean plays a pivotal role with respect to changing global climate and weather patterns, and offers the most immediate opportunities for “blue growth” strategies to harvest its riches. Yet the Atlantic Hemisphere is a region of extreme wealth and poverty. Atlantic peoples are on the front lines of global climate change, greater superstorms, and

rising sea levels. Together they are threatened by a growing pan-Atlantic nexus of drugs, guns, and terror.

Despite these dynamics, pan-Atlantic governance mechanisms and diplomatic cooperation remain in their infancy. Twenty Atlantic countries recently pioneered a new initiative to explore greater pan-Atlantic cooperation in areas ranging from sustainable development and climate issues to maritime governance and human security. Potentially transformative digital and energy dynamics are also ripe for pan-Atlantic attention. It is time to consider ways to erase the invisible line dividing the South and North Atlantic, so that societies across this vast space are better able to face the new world rising before us.

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The Atlantic gets no respect. The Pacific is the flavor of our century, say pundits and politicians. That’s why little notice was paid to a potentially far-reaching agreement signed by 18 Atlantic countries on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly meetings in September. In a “Joint Statement on Atlantic Cooperation,”¹ Argentina, Brazil, Canada, the United

States, and several African and European countries, pledged – as “members of the community of Atlantic countries” – to “partner on a set of common challenges in the Atlantic Ocean region and to explore the development of a wider dialogue on strengthening cooperation in the region.” This pioneer group is looking to win others to join their new coalition. Two more countries – Cape Verde and Togo – have since come on board, bringing the current total to 20. Additional Atlantic countries have signaled interest.

This new initiative has the potential to give Atlantic countries new tools to address a turbulent world. Greater attention to the deepening interconnections among the four Atlantic continents – North and South America, Africa, and Europe, and including the changing Arctic – also promises to fill a major gap in our understanding of global trends.

If there is an “Asian Hemisphere,” then there must also be an Atlantic Hemisphere. Yet, the contemporary dynamics of the Atlantic Hemisphere have been relatively unexplored.

A good deal of public debate still tends to equate globalization with the rise of China or, to use former President of the U.N. Security Council Kishore Mahbubani’s term, the “Asian Hemisphere.”² This frame suffers from at least two shortcomings. First, globalization by definition is not about one part of the world. It is about how continents connect, and the four Atlantic continents are connecting in a number of distinctive and often counterintuitive ways. Second, if there is an “Asian Hemisphere,” then there must also be an Atlantic Hemisphere. Yet, the contemporary dynamics of the Atlantic Hemisphere have been relatively unexplored.

The international strategic community, focused largely on traditional inter-state disputes, has largely turned its gaze from the Atlantic Basin because it lacks the defining conflicts, cleavages, and existen-

tial flashpoints evident in the Indo-Pacific. Of the world’s three grand oceans, the Atlantic is the most pacific. North America and Europe are certainly focused on Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine and its assault on international order. However, as the German Marshall Fund’s Ian Lesser points out, in the wider Atlantic there is no equivalent³ to the risk of nuclear war on the Korean peninsula, the India-Pakistan conflict or U.S.-Chinese strategic competition.

This distinction is important, but perhaps in a different way than traditionally interpreted. While security challenges between states are paramount in the broad Indo-Pacific, security concerns within states are most relevant for the wider Atlantic. Trafficking in people, arms, drugs and money, piracy, political instability, and terrorist infiltration are all becoming concerns of pan-Atlantic scope.⁴ Human security – protecting societies from violence or disruption – is likely to be more of a driver than state security – protecting countries from other countries – when it comes to Atlantic cooperation. Furthermore, these security challenges tend to be common, and thus present an opportunity to unite efforts and test new modes of multistakeholder governance between developed and emerging economies.

This does not mean that state-to-state security challenges are absent in the Atlantic. States on all four Atlantic continents dispute maritime⁵ and territorial boundaries.⁶ Russian submarine and other naval activities in the northern Atlantic have prompted NATO to mind the gap once again in waters stretching between Greenland and Iceland to the United Kingdom.⁷ Evidence that the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea were sabotaged⁸ has woken governments to the realization that subsea cables crisscrossing the Atlantic are vulnerable to disruption by state and non-state actors. Various Atlantic countries have been raised concerns about China’s plans to establish a military naval base on the Atlantic coast in Equatorial Guinea.⁹ Nonetheless, the most pervasive security challenges that Atlantic nations collectively face – for which there are few, if any common response mechanisms – are those that affect the well-being of their societies.

With little fanfare, the Atlantic Hemisphere is becoming a central arena of globalization and a microcosm of key global currents, including deepening interdependencies and spreading transnational risks. Atlantic peoples are engaging and interacting in a whole host of ways that are shifting the contours of hemispheric interdependence and global power. These dynamics require more nuanced strategic attention, not neglect and indifference. The Joint Statement is the first official recognition of these realities.

What's distinctive about the Atlantic Basin? It has rapidly become one of the world's principal energy reservoirs.¹⁰ It is the world's most heavily traveled ocean and has become the inland sea to the vast majority of the world's democracies.¹¹ The Atlantic data seaway is the busiest in the world.¹² Pan-Atlantic commercial flows rival, and in such areas as services, investment and digital commerce exceed,¹³ those of the Pacific. Never have so many workers and consumers entered the Atlantic economy as quickly as in the past two decades. The Atlantic ocean plays a pivotal role with respect to changing global climate and weather patterns, and offers the most immediate opportunities for "blue growth" strategies¹⁴ to harvest its riches. Yet it is a region of extreme wealth and poverty. Atlantic peoples are on the front lines of global climate change, greater superstorms and rising sea levels. Together they are threatened by a growing pan-Atlantic nexus of drugs, guns, and terror.¹⁵

Despite these dynamics, pan-Atlantic governance mechanisms and diplomatic cooperation remain in their infancy. There are no Atlantic Basin groupings comparable to Pacific Basin initiatives¹⁶ such as the Asia-Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies, the Expanded Association of Southeast Asian Nations Maritime Forum, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, or even Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation – already over 30 years old – even though the Pacific is arguably more politically, socially, and economically diverse than the Atlantic.

Development of a truly "Atlantic" consciousness has long been stunted by historical legacies of slavery and colonialism, together with political sensitivities bound up in such evocative yet increasingly empty dichotomies as First World/Third World or Global North/Global South. Yet an Atlantic lens brings surprising new vectors into sight. The Paris Climate accord, arguably, was ultimately achieved because a broad-based coalition of Atlantic Hemisphere countries transcended old divides¹⁷ to coalesce around a set of goals that set the stage for a global agreement.

Building new Atlantic partnerships

Given the paucity of pan-Atlantic mechanisms, September's pioneer group is starting cautiously. It is focusing initially on two areas. The first is to advance shared sustainable development, economic, environmental, scientific, and climate goals across the Atlantic. The second is to explore pathways to improve maritime governance, from enabling cooperation for humanitarian response and search and rescue operations to deterring piracy, addressing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and combatting narcotics trafficking.

BASKET I: ADVANCING SHARED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CLIMATE GOALS

The Atlantic Ocean certainly shares problems with other oceans – pollution, degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems and marine biodiversity, and the looming effects of climate change. There are issues distinct to the Atlantic, however, that require pan-Atlantic attention.

First, the Atlantic serves a unique function as the locus of our planet's thermohaline system,¹⁸ a global circulation pattern of currents that distributes water and heat from the equator to the poles, reducing extremes in the planet's climate. Scientists

have found that North Atlantic surface waters are becoming warmer and less salty, and thus less dense, possibly altering¹⁹ the trajectory and force of the Gulf Stream, the North Atlantic Current, and overall global thermohaline circulation, with serious impacts²⁰ on marine ecosystems, fishing grounds, coastal water quality and nutrient cycling, sea levels and surface climate.

Second, the Atlantic plays a particularly important role in carbon storage. The oceans are the planet's greatest carbon reservoirs, containing far more carbon than either the atmosphere or the terrestrial biosphere, and absorbing about a quarter of the carbon dioxide humans release into the atmosphere every year.²¹ While this process takes place everywhere across the ocean surface, cold salty water in the North Atlantic and in an ocean belt between 30 and 50 degrees south latitude absorbs enormous amounts of gases before it sinks, and then transports these gases to much greater ocean depths, primarily at four polar convection points, three of which are in the Atlantic.²² Unfortunately, the oceans are not absorbing carbon dioxide as fast as humans are emitting it. The high levels of carbon dioxide that are being absorbed by the Atlantic are raising the seawater's acidity levels, with potentially cascading effects throughout the marine food chain and the overall structure of marine ecosystems.

Third, warmer oceans and rising sea levels interact to enhance the destructive potential of more powerful storms. Their impact may be greatest at particular hot spot areas experiencing greater than average sea-level rise – such as the U.S. East Coast.²³ As coastal regions all along the Atlantic struggle to cope with future calamities, it is becoming more critical for littoral countries, particularly their cities and regions, to exchange best practices on integrated coastal risk management.

Fourth, there has been an explosive growth in the size and number of marine “dead zones,” areas where deep water is so low in dissolved oxygen that sea creatures can't survive. Marine dead zones have grown ten-fold globally in the past 50 years²⁴ and almost thirty-fold in the United States since 1960. All told, there are over 400 dead zones,²⁵ and another

200-plus “areas of concern” worldwide. Most are in the Atlantic.²⁶ Many occur naturally, but human-induced changes, such as agricultural runoff, have expanded such zones and changed their nature. The New Jersey-size dead zone at the Mississippi's outlet into the Gulf of Mexico has received considerable attention.²⁷ But a massive low oxygen zone off the coast of West Africa is growing,²⁸ encroaching upon habitats of tuna, billfish, and other species, forcing them into already overfished areas. This is a further phenomenon appropriate for pan-Atlantic concern.

Most of the Atlantic's marine fishing areas are being overfished at biologically unsustainable levels.²⁹ As traditional fishing grounds becoming less fruitful, fisheries move to new areas and stocks as catches diminish. This trend is being amplified by rising water temperatures in the Northeast Atlantic, which are shifting the ranges and variations of warmer water marine organisms towards the poles.³⁰ These changing patterns create new challenges for sustainable fisheries management, affect fisheries' catch probabilities, and disrupt traditional fishery areas. And as global fishing fleets increasingly focus their efforts on the southern Atlantic as traditional stocks diminish, control of IUU fishing presents a growing challenge.

A related pan-Atlantic economic development is the so-called “blue growth” agenda. This encompasses various initiatives to harness the untapped potential of oceans, seas and coasts for jobs and growth. Various aspects merit attention. The first is blue energy, or energy derived from the ocean. Offshore and deep-sea ventures to explore and extract traditional fossil fuels are advancing off all Atlantic coasts. Yet there are no international safety standards for offshore energy installations other than those defined by individual companies.

The exploitation and mining of sea minerals is also advancing and could extend into deeper water. The global marine mining market, valued at \$1.6 billion in 2021, is expected to grow rapidly, reaching \$31.5 billion by the end of 2031,³¹ and yet the Law of the Sea³² and related conventions do not fully address such developments, despite rising environmental

concerns. Finally, blue biotechnology, which could result in ground-breaking drugs developed from marine organisms, also poses challenges of standards and sustainability. In each of these areas, appropriate governance mechanisms are lacking. Atlantic nations could lead.

Cooperation among scientists from across the Atlantic countries has intensified in recent years to address these issues, and the September pioneer group has pledged to support initiatives already underway. Among the most promising is the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance, a multi-stakeholder platform promoting marine research and innovation cooperation among scientists from all four Atlantic continents.³³ In July 2022, the Alliance pledged³⁴ to address ocean-climate issues, tackle marine pollution, coordinate ocean mapping efforts, and promote sustainable ocean economies. Overall, however, pan-Atlantic cooperation is patchy. In the case of pollution from ships, for instance, the so-called Bonn Agreement³⁵ provides for cooperative arrangements in the northeastern Atlantic, but equivalent arrangements do not exist for other quadrants of the ocean. Broad cooperative mechanisms such as the EU's European Maritime Safety Agency, which aims to reduce maritime accidents and pollution from ships, do not exist in the southern Atlantic beyond national organizations. Those regional fisheries commissions that do exist have not proven particularly effective, nor do they cooperate very well.

BASKET II: IMPROVING MARITIME GOVERNANCE

Governance concerns extend beyond oceans management. Human security challenges have become acute throughout the Atlantic Basin.³⁶ Networks that traffic people, arms, drugs, and money are forging their own pan-Atlantic connections. Some are intertwining with terrorists, pirates, and mercenaries to become concerns of pan-Atlantic scope. Many states lack the capacity to break up terror cells, thwart trafficking in arms, drugs, or people, address cyber threats, or provide domestic security. Left unchecked, expanding insecurity in the Atlantic Basin could undermine global trade, energy

flows, regional development and political stability in the region. Given the transnational nature of these growing threats, singular efforts are unlikely to prove effective.

Here, too, some steps have been taken. 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. They include the G7++ Friends of Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic African States initiatives, as well as Portugal's Atlantic Centre, the South Atlantic Maritime Area Coordination, the Benguela Current Convention,³⁷ the Yaoundé Architecture's coordination and information-sharing mechanisms connecting the Regional Maritime Security Centre for Central Africa and the Regional Maritime Security Centre for West Africa, and the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic.³⁸

The Atlantic pioneer group of countries has pledged to work with these existing initiatives to improve pan-Atlantic governance. They might consider convening an Atlantic human security forum to coordinate pan-Atlantic action, including interdiction capabilities against common threats such as illegal drugs, organized crime, human trafficking, piracy, terrorism, and natural disasters. This might include the formation of an Atlantic coast guard forum, similar to existing mechanisms in the North Atlantic, the Arctic, and the Northern Pacific. They would also do well to discuss the formation of a public-private Atlantic movement management initiative to align security and resilience with commercial imperatives in Atlantic movement systems, including shipping, air transport, and cyberspace.³⁹ And they might consider an Atlantic version of the Pacific's Information Fusion Center in Singapore, where 24 countries work together to establish a common operating picture in maritime Asia, to fight piracy and protect maritime trade.⁴⁰ An Atlantic version of this initiative could usefully expand the scope of such cooperation by generating better maritime domain awareness and cooperation with regard to IUU fishing.

Expanding energy cooperation

As pan-Atlantic partnerships evolve, the pioneer group might consider expanding its initial focus to include energy issues. The way energy is produced, distributed, and traded across the entire Atlantic space is fundamentally changing. Atlantic Basin countries are increasingly bound together through the production, trade, transit and consumption of energy. An incipient Atlantic energy system is quietly taking shape that offers the capacity and potential to boost both fossil-fuel and fossil-free energy production, address energy poverty by facilitating access to energy for millions, and lay the foundation for pan-Atlantic energy collaboration and governance.⁴¹ The Atlantic is setting the pace for energy innovation⁴² and redrawing global maps for oil, gas, and renewables as new players and technologies emerge, new conventional and unconventional sources come online, energy services boom, and opportunities appear all along the energy supply chain. Heightened Atlantic energy links could reduce the dependence of many Atlantic Hemisphere countries on Eurasian energy sources and take pressure off their intensifying competition with China and India over energy from some of the world's most unstable regions.

The September pioneer group might consider enlisting additional partners to create an Atlantic energy forum, which could explore ways to boost Atlantic Basin energy trade and investment via open and competitive markets for energy products, materials, equipment, and services. It could also aim to remove technical, administrative, and other barriers to energy trade; formulate transparent legal frameworks for energy resource development; eliminate illicit energy trade; improve access to energy resources; and further develop energy infrastructure connectivity within the Atlantic Basin. An Atlantic action alliance for renewables deployment and the reduction of energy poverty might be considered, either as part of the forum or as a complementary multistakeholder initiative to scale up, commercialize, and deploy renewables and clean technologies. These initiatives could have a particularly

dramatic impact in Africa, which is still characterized by deep pockets of energy poverty. Expanding energy access can reduce poverty and infant mortality, improve education, advance environmental sustainability, and accelerate economic growth and prosperity.

The digital Atlantic

The digital Atlantic is another topic ripe for pan-Atlantic attention. The Atlantic data seaway, already the busiest in the world,⁴³ is building out fast. Submarine cables in the Atlantic already carry 55% more data than transpacific routes,⁴⁴ and the telecommunications market research company Telegeography estimates a compound annual growth rate of 38% in transatlantic capacity until 2025.⁴⁵

Sines, Portugal and Fortaleza, Brazil are emblematic of how digital infrastructure expansions on land and at sea are now wiring the pan-Atlantic. Sines, an old fishing town of around 14,000 people, is a key hub where the digital Atlantic's seascapes and landscapes meet. Already Portugal's top port for ocean-faring container ships, and host to one of the world's most modern hyperscale data centers, Sines has become Portugal's top under-the-ocean connector binding Europe to North America, South America, and Africa. Sines is but one example of how the Iberian Peninsula is turning into a strategic point of interconnection and convergence for pan-Atlantic data traffic. In 2018 the 6,600-kilometer (km) Marea cable, a project of Facebook, Microsoft and Telefonica, connected Virginia Beach, Virginia with Bilbao, Spain.

The most vivid example of Sines's importance is the new Ella Link, a subsea data cable stretching over 9,600 km from Sines to Fortaleza, a city of 2.7 million in Brazil's northeastern state of Ceará, that has become the world's leading hub city⁴⁶ for submarine and land-based data cables, connecting South America to Africa, Europe, and North America.

Countries and companies are literally branching out to connect the full Atlantic Basin.⁴⁷ The South Atlantic Cable System now links Fortaleza with Luanda, Angola. The South Atlantic Express cable is slated to link South Africa to the United States, with branches to Namibia, Saint Helena, and Brazil. A cable dubbed Firmina will run from the East Coast of the United States to Las Toninas, Argentina, with landings in Praia Grande, Brazil, and Punta del Este, Uruguay. Two Google-funded state-of-the-art subsea cables are due to come online in 2022: Grace Hopper, connecting Spain and the UK to the United States; and Equiano, linking Portugal to South Africa via Togo, Nigeria, St. Helena, and Namibia. The 8,700 km Medusa cable will link Lisbon with Port Said in Egypt, with connections in France, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Tunisia, Greece, and Cyprus. And a consortium of Meta, Nokia, Alcatel, and other telecom operators is constructing 2Africa, the world's longest subsea cable system, extending over 45,000 km with 46 landings to connect 33 countries and 36% of the world's population across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.⁴⁸

Building out the digital Atlantic holds particular promise for the two billion people in the Atlantic Hemisphere without regular access to the internet.

Building out the digital Atlantic holds particular promise for the two billion people in the Atlantic Hemisphere without regular access to the internet. Most are in Africa, which has achieved just 22% internet connectivity.⁴⁹ But a third of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean also has no internet access – an additional 244 million people.⁵⁰ Many of the digitally excluded face formidable challenges including poverty, illiteracy, limited access to electricity, and lack of digital skills and awareness. Women on both continents are particularly marginalized by this “connectivity chasm.”⁵¹ Most communities falling behind to meet the UN's Sustainable

Development Goals for 2030 are the same communities that have been digitally left behind. The Atlantic pioneer group's pledge to enhance its work on sustainable development would be immeasurably enhanced by parallel efforts to use the digital Atlantic to extend access to the digitally excluded.

Moreover, as Atlantic societies have become more digitized and connected, they have also become more vulnerable to cyberattack and disruption. Cyberattacks spiked during COVID-19, including surreptitious efforts to gain data from scientific and medical research organizations, companies, contact-tracing applications, and hospitals. Data theft, cyber-espionage, supply-chain attacks, ransomware efforts and spear-phishing scams have all risen sharply. The recent damage to the Nord Stream gas pipeline has heightened concerns about sabotage and cyberespionage risks to subsea data cables, which are inherently fragile. On average, two-to-four undersea cables break somewhere in the world every week.⁵² The Atlantic pioneer group, together with all Atlantic Hemisphere societies, has a vested interest in enhancing the digital Atlantic's resilience.

Seizing the opportunity

In each of these areas and more, it is time to set aside zero-sum formulas of the past and to consider ways to erase the invisible line dividing the South and North Atlantic, so that societies across this vast space are better able to face the new world rising before us. Past legacies and entrenched ways of thinking will make this challenging. Those not yet part of the initiative, such as Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Colombia, Mexico, France, and the European Union, will not only need to join in with nominal support, they will need to believe that building a new Atlantic community is in their national interest. Ownership must derive as much from the southern Atlantic as from the north. Much work is to be done. The Joint Statement is a start.

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