



The New Security Dynamics of the Atlantic Basin and the Way Forward for a Pan-Atlantic Approach¹

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In terms of military conflict, the Atlantic Basin can be considered relatively peaceful, especially in its northern part. However, the region has faced unprecedented challenges in terms of policy planning and strategizing, with the global pandemic, stagnating economic growth, and growing popular discontent with public institutions. The conjunction of sanitary, economic, and political crises has raised questions about the historical stability of western countries and has given traction to pre-existing populist and far-right movements in many parts of the northern Atlantic Basin. The situation is so critical for the western population from a security standpoint that they have experienced massive counts of deaths¹ due to far-right violent extremism, the inability of health institutions to cope with the pandemic, and the growing economic precariousness among middle and lower social classes. These catastrophic events have been exacerbated by the resurgence of war in Europe, another phenomenon no one expected to happen in the north.

The southern part of the Atlantic Basin meanwhile has been plagued historically by political instability and economic hardship. Military conflict, especially in Africa, has been common with, in particular, a resurgence of military coups in the Sahel, where the governance apparatus has been challenged by growing dissent among populations. The challenge to democracy isn't seen exclusively in the northern part of the Atlantic Basin, it is emerging everywhere, with the crisis of confidence in relation to elites and public institutions felt particularly in Venezuela, Mali, and South Africa. Other examples are Angola and Zimbabwe, where there has been tension and violence during their political transitions.

Political instability in fragile states is the most pressing threat triggering humanitarian crises and the multiplication of illicit trafficking (drugs, weapons, and human). In any case, the constant need for populations to migrate, especially those fleeing conflict or misery, puts growing pressure on the global community to find common responses and come together in addressing the economics gaps between north and south. In light of these events and the paradigm shifts in the west regarding the profound threats facing the global system, it is time as an academic community to propose alternative narratives to understand the Atlantic Basin. This should not be done in Manichean terms, where we perceive the north as a stable and wealthy zone, and the south as an unstable and poverty-plagued zone, but in a way in which we can grasp the common security challenges and interests involving the western and southern parts of the Atlantic Basin.

This new context of deteriorating security in both the north and south calls for increased collaboration. Although different, these challenges and security threats are common in their gravity. Creating a new paradigm for north-south and south-north cooperation requires putting humanity at the center, regardless of nationality, religion, or gender. Building new foundations for a renewed global system is of paramount importance to protect democracies and the tremendous development of human rights and prosperity in the north, but also to support the economic emergence of the global south and to give these countries a chance for stability and economic growth. Changing the mental maps while addressing leaders should be a mission for academics and think tankers, who must stress the importance of the security-development nexus and the implications of old ways of thinking in terms of the inefficiency of aid and the stalemates encountered in establishing viable streams of dialogue between north and south.

In line with this vision, the European Union has developed specific policies to support democracy and peace in the world. It also aims to integrate the pursuit of peace and democracy into all its other external actions in areas such as trade, development, enlargement, and neighborhood policies, its common foreign and security policy, and political and diplomatic relations with other countries and multilateral institutions. The EU has established a reputation as a soft power organization guided by a normative vision, and as an effective actor for peace and democracy². Nevertheless, in implementing this normative vision, the EU faces internal and external challenges.

The European Union has also developed a new vision for action revolving around the concept of 'resilient societies' based on the mutually reinforcing pillars of peace and democracy, and a special emphasis on fragile states. Against this background, recent surveys have shown that citizens expect the EU to be even more active in promoting peace and democracy externally—something that should surely strengthen its resolve to make further progress in this crucial area.

¹ Far-Right Attacks in the West Surge 320% Over Last 5 Years. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/far-right-attacks-in-the-west-surge-by-320-per-cent/>

² [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628271/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)628271_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628271/EPRS_BRI(2018)628271_EN.pdf)

Changing Security Trends in the Atlantic Space and Fostering Economic Opportunities for the South Atlantic.

General de Gaulle affirmed in 1969 in Brest: *“The activity of men will turn more and more towards the search for the exploitation of the sea. And, naturally, the ambitions of the States will seek to dominate it to control its resources. ...”*. This discourse was quite prescient in view of the formidable acceleration of maritime traffic since the 1970s. Indeed, world maritime traffic increased from 2.6 billion tons in 1970 to 8.7 billion tons in 2011³. While the world economy grew by 3% in 2009, the growth of trade flows and maritime transport amounted to 5% and 7% respectively. Maritime transport cost and time reductions were at the origin of the maritimization/globalization of trade. The gigantic size of ships and the container revolution were the decisive technical tools. It is this phenomenon of increase that is called maritimization. The Atlantic Basin was not at the center of this revolution as the bulk of maritime trade has been concentrated in the east, because of the increased economic cooperation between the United States and China and the emergence of South-Asian countries as economic powerhouses. Yet, the Atlantic remains a great space for cooperation and an untapped resource, especially in the south. African ports, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Trade volumes tumbled during the early months of the pandemic, but a small number of ports managed to record some growth during the crisis. We can also notice a growing interest on the part of west African governments to invest in ports and offshore activities, with Senegal and Mauritania even investing jointly in a newly discovered offshore gas field. In 2015, Kosmos Energy announced a gas discovery said to contain around 15 trillion cubic feet of gas, potentially to produce around 10 million tons per day. Named Grand Tortue Ahmeyim, the field straddles the Mauritania/Senegal border and therefore necessitates full cooperation between the two countries to move forward with the site’s development⁴. This is a great example of south-south Atlantic cooperation and should be used as a framework to replicate investments and postures toward the Atlantic shore.

The point to be stressed here is that economic development in both the south and north Atlantic, and harnessing the power of the sea to find new pathways for growth, are prerequisites for global stability and promotion of peace in this region. Security challenges must always be addressed by tackling the sources of instability and violence. This is referred to as the security-development nexus. Before diving into this concept, we need to present briefly both the evolution of security as a concept and different approaches to international relations. In the theories of international relations, security studies began by associating security with ‘national security’, reflecting the close association with the realist school, for which the State was the main actor and referent for security—which means, ‘the protection of the state from external threats’. Despite never losing its reference to the State, the term security is also connected to the idea of guaranteeing the safety of individuals against *“violence or crimes, religious peace of mind, and financial measures to sustain a certain standard of living”*⁵. The evolution of international historical circumstances has led to economic issues influencing the definition of the concept of security; it has led governments to take economic actions and implement aid mechanisms to ensure global security. This role was mainly assumed by the United States, which has played the dual role of police and funds issuer on the international scene. Today, there is a great emphasis on security when it comes to the postures of the north towards the South in relation to controlling illegal migrations flows, fighting terrorism, and making financial aid conditional on these types of political actions. This paradigm needs to change as it addresses only the symptoms of instability. Establishing a clear connection between economic aid and improving the livelihoods of populations and the development of stable economies via infrastructures and government reforms, is the way to address and condition narratives and political actions towards the south, specially towards Africa.

The security-development nexus has firmly established its place in global policymaking. Understanding the nexus is hailed as the key to success: security and development mutually reinforce each other to create peace and prosperity. It is especially true in the west African countries; leaders from this region have also pointed out that this nexus should be a foundation of any type of foreign assistance. The security-development nexus builds on academic theories that are important to consider briefly here. These are the ‘new wars’ thesis, most famously articulated by Mary Kaldor (1999), and the greed thesis as put forward by Collier and Hoeffler

³ Géoconfluence, Maritimisation/démaritimisation <http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/maritimisation> consulted 10/12/2020

⁴ <https://energycapitalpower.com/mauritania-pushes-great-turtle-forward/>

⁵ Shinoda, Hideaki, “The Concept of Human Security: Historical and Theoretical Implications.” In Conflict and Human Security: A Search for new Approaches of Peace Building. IPSHU English Research Report Series, 2004, 6

(2004).⁶ Both theories rejected traditional explanations for the onset of civil war and emphasized war's economic dimension⁷.

The European Union has clearly advocated for a linkage between security and development, and efforts in terms of policy planning and aid policies have been conceived so one aspect is not prioritized over the other. As the *EU Report on Policy Coherence for Development* in 2009 stated: “No one questions anymore the importance of security for development and the role that development plays for preventing conflicts, ensuring durable exits from conflicts and for accompanying crisis management through protective, confidence-building and crisis-alleviating measures. The security development nexus has been firmly established in the EU's political priorities”. As an academic community we should work to remind the European Union of the importance of linking security to development, and of developing surveillance and tracking methods to study and report initiatives and cooperation models that aligns with these values. We should also make sure that the overarching security approach is avoided when it comes to dealing with the south, considering new evidence and elements proving the importance of working on both security and development in conflict areas.

Asymmetric Security Challenges in the Area and Common Need for a Value-Based System

Security challenges in the west aren't of the same magnitude as those faced by southern countries, especially those in Africa. In West Africa, there is a clear need to reformulate the whole security architecture as military coups and violent terrorism are raging due partly to the inefficiency of government in addressing economic challenges, the absence of public institutions' representatives in large parts of this region, and a general distrust towards the elite because of their apparent or non-apparent corruption. The north in comparison has more political stability and public institutions, although challenges are widespread regionally. To address the security challenges in Africa, governance and political reforms are necessary. In this topic we can find a certain commonality with the challenges faced in the north in terms of maintaining democracy, transparency, and nurturing trust between rulers and ruled. At the core of this political reform, there is the question of values, the value with which all the populations of a country can identify, and that elites and rulers will embody and base their public service on. Indeed, the question of value is essential in any political work or system. The work and vision of any government is derived from a set of values and ideologies that will direct public policies and the mentality of politicians. In Africa, a certain set of values can resonate with the population, and we must make sure not to project western values onto African society. As multiple and diverse African states are, relevant values for the African continent could be:

- **Authenticity:** Authenticity comes from living and leading in integrity with one's core values; it is basically being aligned with one's promises and identity.
- **Transparency:** The sheer act of honesty and clear posture when it comes to one's interests and alliances. A political class that works for the people and demonstrates accountability.
- **Morality:** Constantly having in mind the greater good and public interest; being incorruptible⁸.

These values can also be shared and agreed within the northern sphere, stressing the fact that when it comes to governance, populations require the same behaviors and services from public institutions and the elites representing them. In Africa, attaining this value-based system requires sustained efforts and a tremendous push from the government and civil society to promote these values. The focus should be on restoring trust between the political class and the electorate; this relationship can be built back by:

⁶ KEEN, DAVID. “Greed and Grievance in Civil War.” *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), vol. 88, no. 4, 2012, pp. 757–77. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23255617>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022

⁷ <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/07/15/examining-and-critiquing-the-security-development-nexus/>

⁸ These elements are derived from the fix politics initiative that is a citizens-led movement to structurally change and innovate politics in Nigeria, Africa, and the rest of the world. <https://www.fixpolitics.org/>

- **Promoting early political education:** Early political education would allow for a rejuvenation of the political sphere and a broader, more engaged civil society. There is a need to break the depoliticization of young populations in Africa.
- **Independent judicial system:** Independent justice is the only effective way to fight corruption and discourage it, implementing strong judicial institutions that act as a check on the political sphere is an effective way of rationalizing the political debate and encouraging citizens to participate.

A society with politically conscious people aspiring for the establishment of a rule of law is a prerequisite to have accountable politicians. Indeed, an independent justice system and a strong civil society enable a constant dialogue and negotiation to reach the best political compromises and encourage the development of stable and reliable parliamentary systems. In a dominating authoritarian or one-party system culture in Africa, the development of a rules-based system sustained by an educated population can allow a shift of culture and systems, and give back a voice to populations within the power structures. Also, reforming African constitutions and protecting them from any political attempts to alter their essence is of the utmost importance in an African context, in which many African leaders have modified constitutions and staged elections to extend their stays in power. For this to change we need to:

- **Embed constitutions** and make amendments only when necessary.
- **Create new electoral laws** that are inclusive and easy to understand.

The European Union has understood the paramount importance of the rule of law and democracy in Africa, in order to ensure a stable and prosperous life for citizens. The European Union implemented a mechanism to make funding conditional on adherence to the values of democracy. The idea of making the allocation of European funds conditional on respect for European values took concrete form in December 2020 with the adoption of a mechanism for making European funds conditional on respect for the rule of law.

The principle is simple: if a country is guilty of violations of the rule of law, the European Union can decide to suspend the various financial aids intended for this State. But the implementation of this mechanism, validated by a judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union on February 16, 2022, has long been delayed by political and judicial blockages. Yet, it remains the case that the alignment in the west of values, narratives, and action is important to implement the rule of law and encourage partners that are working on creating stable and transparent public institutions. However, the ongoing threat to democracy within the EU also poses an internal challenge for European countries that seek to reinforce the legitimacy of their national institutions.

The Divergences and Convergences Within the Political Agendas of the North and South Atlantic

It is often difficult to find a conjunction in terms of narratives and postures between southern and northern Atlantic countries. The understanding of issues such as migration or violent extremism can differ, and the political agendas are a determinant factor explaining this divergence. Among populations, we notice a misunderstanding of foreign presence in their territory, and we can sense a general feeling of unfairness among African populations when it comes to interpreting foreign intervention in their countries. However, there is work to be done when it comes to African populations and their understanding of the need for foreign investment and the valuable work done by western governments and other foreign actors in assisting and helping the development of African countries. Yet, as shown by the recent backlash against the French presence in Mali, there is a growing dissent among populations and African governments when it comes to military involvement by foreign armies. The dialogue is often difficult and complex when it comes to those issues and the alignment of postures and the need to reach a compromise should be the priority for everyone involved. In relation to the French intervention in Mali, the paradox is that even if the Malian government that took power after a second coup d'état expressed its wish to see the French military leave, they were still adamant to have a gradual retrieval of French troops as they recognized their importance in fighting terrorism and securing the northern part of the country. It is fair to say that although Mali isn't an Atlantic country, we can learn lessons from the recent history of cooperation between France and Mali in terms of security issues, and the recent falling out, to work differently when it comes to the Atlantic Basin, especially given the tremendous economic opportunities that this ocean promises. This zone, both because of the economic opportunities it has, and the common challenges it faces, can be a new geopolitical space for cooperation between north and south and can be a new platform for dialogue and cooperation.

For instance, reviewing the Tri-continental Atlantic Initiative of 2009 could be a good normative step to think about the Atlantic Basin as a clear and defined geopolitical space. This international forum held in Rabat, Morocco, already stressed the systemic nature of the rupture that the world is experiencing, and how it requires mutual accountability; it called for concerted solutions from the system's main actors, from which a renewed collective governance should emerge⁹. The Kingdom of Morocco is concerned with both the EuroMed and the Atlantic. It has a free trade agreement with the United States and a special relationship with the EU. This initiative was an effort to address questions surrounding resources and shared public goods. Morocco also wants to achieve a better balance between northern and southern economies, as it seeks to share best practice and knowledge on many challenges, from climate change to human development to fighting extremism. A shared response to these challenges is required, considering differences between North and South. For example, developed states of Europe, with aging populations and low growth, need migration from the South. Other sectoral issues require attention, including energy, water, and agriculture, where there is much potential around the Atlantic, especially in the southern part of the Atlantic where a tremendous amount of work can be done around modernizing agricultural practices, water management, and the energy transition.

⁹ https://itca.hcp.ma/Introductory-note_a27.html