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Brazil – Morocco: A Roadmap Ahead

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Abstract

Thinking creatively the bilateral relationship of Brazil and Morocco is quintessential for enhancing its reach and possibilities. The world is currently facing enormous changes whose outcomes are unpredictable. From a revival in the cold war realist dispute of power between the United States and Russia, the collapse of International Law in relation to Ukraine, Crimea and the South China Sea, BREXIT and the imponderable results that may impact the European Union and to the possible disengagement of the United States during President Donald Trump's term, the global chessboard faces issues and challenges that are unprecedented. Such challenges should lead to a realignment of hearts, minds, strategies and partnerships. Such challenges require innovation and creativity.

Morocco and Brazil have concentrated their partnerships with Europe and the United States. Diversification in political and economic alliances with influential countries at the regional and global level is the new game.

This paper focuses on the improvement of the political and economic relationship between Brazil and Morocco. Brazil is an emerging investor in the Africa and should intensify trade with the region. Morocco should serve as Brazil entry door not only to Africa but also into the Arab world. With more than 100 years of continuous relationship, Brazil and Morocco should forge new points in their partnership to secure greater growth and development, particularly in sectors not yet exploited by European, American or Chinese companies.

Great partnerships only happen after many successful negotiations take place. It is time to negotiate, find synergies and secure greater cooperation between those two global powers.

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The world is currently facing enormous changes whose outcomes are unpredictable. From a revival in the Cold War realist dispute of power between the United States and Russia, the collapse of International Law in relation to Ukraine, Crimea and the South China Sea, BREXIT and the imponderable results that may impact the European Union and to the possible disengagement of the United States during President Donald Trump's term, the global chessboard faces issues and challenges that are unprecedented. Such challenges should lead to a realignment of hearts, minds, strategies and partnerships.

For the longest time, Morocco and Brazil have concentrated their partnerships with Europe and the United States. As these partners face enormous and daunting challenges currently and in the years ahead, diversification in political and economic alliances with influential countries at the regional and global level becomes the new game.

Political affinity, economic interest and a desire to cooperate in building effective partnerships should prompt Brazil and Morocco to increase mutual interests and cooperation. There are open-wide areas - health care, food, agriculture, defence and services - that can be more intensively explored by both countries, since they share common commitments and values like multilateralism, free trade and human rights. Both are stable politically and seek to play a greater role in the international scene.

The future of the relationship is promising. Greater synergies should be developed beyond the realm of international trade since there is a fertile soil for greater cooperation in several issues, particularly considering that Brazil - which is closer to Morocco by distance than to some other South American countries - could serve as Morocco's point of entry into South America and Morocco could serve as Brazil's point of entry into the Arab world and Africa.

A little history of the Brazil-Morocco relationship

Historical ties between Brazil and Africa go back to the 16th century, when Brazil was still part of Portugal. Most of the initial relationship derived from slave trade, when millions of Africans were moved to Brazil to work in labour-intensive sugarcane and other commodity products.

Many African-Brazilians were also moved back from Brazil to Africa during this period and were responsible for some of the emancipation movements that took place in some African nations. This relationship, however, was greatly reduced after slave-traffic was terminated and Brazil took a distance from Africa.

Most of the relationships Brazil cultivated with Africa were somehow connected with Portugal, and the Brazilian diplomacy concentrated efforts on strengthening the relationship with colonies sharing the same language and cultural heritage. This changed for a few years, particularly under the administration of President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, who expanded the bilateral relationship of Brazil with many African countries.

Until the 18th century, many Moroccans were moved to Brazil by the Portuguese, including Jewish Moroccans, with a deep impact on the Brazilian society, its gastronomy and customs. Morocco was one

of the first countries to recognise Brazil's Independence and the first country in Africa with which Brazil established diplomatic relations, represented by the Brazilian representation on Moroccan territory installed in 1884 in Tangier. This consulate was operational until 1961.

Not much went on in the intervening years bilaterally. Things, however, started picking up again in the 1960s. Between 1961 and 1963, Rubem Braga, one of Brazil's most distinguished and prolific writers served as the first Ambassador in Rabat. This led Morocco to reciprocate the act with the opening of a diplomatic representation in Brazil in 1967. By 1999, Brazil received the most privileged partner status with Morocco and both countries have set up political consultation mechanisms, with high profile members of both governments visiting each other frequently.

General Joao Baptista Figueiredo, who presided over Brazil during the military dictatorship, was the first highest ranking Brazilian officer to visit Morocco. This 1984 visit came as the result of an invitation extended by His late Majesty King Hassan II.

In 2004, Brazil received the Royal Visit of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to expand economic and political relations. His Majesty, together with a high-level delegation from Morocco, engaged on a tour throughout several countries in Latin America to diversify partnerships and political ties in the region and paid a special visit to Brazil to enhance the political dialogue and improve the economic cooperation. Brazil, at the time, was under the administration of President Lula da Silva, a former Union leader who, benefiting from a positive international landscape for Brazil, managed to increment the image of the country internationally and project Brazil much more intensively than previous administrations as a part of his foreign policy strategy.

During the visit, Brazil reinforced its neutrality regarding the Moroccan Sahara dispute and reaffirmed confidence on a final settlement within the United Nations framework, a traditional position the Brazilian diplomacy has adopted on existing controversies around the world.

Nevertheless, Brazil still needs to define clear strategic interests in Africa despite its usual "Global Trader" discourse, which basically covers up a lack of strategic thinking in the long run. China, on the other hand, one of the most relevant powers operating in Africa, has developed mechanisms to promote its agenda in the continent effectively. Brazil, whose historical ties are much deeper than those of China in the continent, should promote a sustainable model of cooperation and reaffirm its commitment to a long-term presence by establishing ways to provide credit and financing for major infrastructure projects and expand the reach of its corporations, to ensure that cooperation flourishes and investment flows increase. African countries should be able to rely on Brazil as an alternative source of funding and business. Differently from Chinese competitors, Brazil is not perceived as a neo-colonialist power with some soft power advantages due to cultural ties and affinities. As the largest African nation outside of Africa, Brazil should play an aspirational role for African countries, based on the enormous transformation from its colonial past of underdevelopment into one of the largest promising economies in the world.

Building a successful cooperation with Morocco will allow cross-investments and a remarkable growth of joint enterprises. The geographical proximity of both countries should foster greater interaction. Both exert high level of influence in their regions and globally should jointly to play an effective role in the global chessboard. Morocco should view Brazil as its primary friend in South America and Brazil should deem Morocco as its priority partner in Africa and in the Arab world, with much to contribute to the international dialogue.

Economic and trade relations

Bilateral trade between Brazil and Morocco has decreased in the last few years. In 2011, trade between both countries reached US\$ 2 billion. In 2016, it went down to approximately US\$ 1.3 billion, with Morocco as a net exporter to Brazil. In 2016, Brazil exported approximately US\$ 488,509,301.00 to Morocco and imported US\$ 655,335,447.00. This is a reversal of a previous trend, in which trade, for instance, grew tenfold between 2002 and 2012. Such trade relationship has been mostly concentrated on products like sugar from Brazil and fertilizers from Morocco.

The bilateral trade is based primarily on agricultural products on the Brazilian side, with the agribusiness representing the largest chunk of exports. Sugarcane, corn flour, cotton and soybeans play a key role in Brazil's trade balance with Morocco. On the Moroccan side, exports have included phosphate, fertilizers, and sardines, among others. This agenda should be expanded and diversified.

The political instability Brazil has faced since 2016 has been greatly responsible for such reduction in bilateral trade due to currency devaluation, economic instability and negative economic growth. After facing the unprecedented economic contraction of 3.4% in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016 and negative growth in the two previous years, the Brazilian economy should return to steady, yet slow growth in 2017, with an estimated growth of 0.6% during the year. By 2018, however, such rate should increase and positive projections show an increase of up to 2.2%.

The reason for the meagre growth perspective in the Brazilian case results from the fact that the country is still facing a high unemployment rate, tight credit conditions due to the enormous political turmoil it has faced. This turbulent political scenario in Brazil has greatly impacted the economy, with the year of 2016 starting with one president and ending with another. A whole shift in the government bureaucracy took place after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and the new president has secured a Congressional majority that has provided economic and political stability in the country, despite the eruption of several corruption scandals affecting members of his staff and himself. Such feeble stability has initially provided essential support to implement some of the major reforms the country desperately needs, such as the constitutional amendment to limit governmental global spending ("a balanced budget amendment"). Several other measures have yet to be implemented to improve the Brazilian fiscal situation and put some controls on governmental spending. Retail sales have gone up and the current account deficit has decreased and exports have expanded. Nonetheless, the Temer Administration has accomplished more economic reforms in a shorter period than his predecessor. His political faults, however, may hunt him down and erase the positive results achieved thus far.

Political uncertainty has remained still but consumer and business confidence have gone up steadily, particularly due to the economic measures taken that have made inflation rates get nearer to the target range. Measures are still under negotiation to reform the pension and social security systems, eventually strengthening the political and fiscal sustainability to secure the improvement of economic growth.

Such measures, once the results start flowing, should consolidate economic sustainability, which is essential to secure political stability and clout. The Temer government has also implemented some measures to reduce the complexity of the Brazilian tax system and the easiness of doing business in Brazil and improve the business environment. Such measures have improved confidence indicators with a likely turnaround of bad expectations, with Foreign Direct Investment expected to grow more steadily in volume in 2017. Such positive environment should lead to reduced investment risks and corporate defaults and strengthen the financial sector. The Brazilian Central Bank projects inflation at 4.47% for 2017. As to the

exchange rate, the US dollar is expected at R\$ 3.36 in 2017 and at R\$ 3.49 for 2018.

With the Brazilian economic numbers improving, there should be a natural growth trend in the ties between both countries enabling greater capability for business expansion.

The Moroccan Economy

The Moroccan economy has been stable with low inflation, and strong economic growth at 4.9% in 2015. The strength of the economy derives from its exports, private investment and tourism. Structural reforms have improved the economic conditions in Morocco and strengthened its macroeconomics, with a reduction in public deficit. These positive results have allowed the country to become more engaged in the development of the Sub-Saharan region. Morocco, which has been committed to renewable energy, particularly the usage of solar power, also has relaunched its oil and gas exploration efforts.

The agricultural sector in Morocco represents 14% of the Moroccan GDP and plays a key role in the Moroccan economy, with approximately 39% of the active population working in the segment. Cereals, fruits and vegetables are essential items of the Moroccan international trade agenda. Morocco has few mineral resources, with phosphate being its main resource. The industrial sector represents 29% of the GDP and employs around 20% of the population, in areas such as textiles, leather, food, oil refining, mining and phosphate processing, etc. There is a governmental effort to reduce dependence on agricultural commodities.

All these measures have made Morocco more attractive for foreign direct investment, with a positive impact on the goal to reduce unemployment, still high around 10%, particularly for the youth.

A roadmap for Morocco and Brazil

Our purpose in this Policy Paper is to suggest a few areas where interaction should increase to strengthen the current and future ties of the bilateral relationship.

There is a clear shift taking place in the world today regarding the balance of power, with declining and ascending powers, with a clear shift to Asia as the main centre of the new global order. In this scenario, Brazil and Morocco should develop a more strategic partnership for the Wider Atlantic to build a stronger community of countries committed to sustainable development and growth. Though diverse societies, both share common values when it comes to free trade, growth, sustainable development and the reconstruction of the international system that is fairer and more inclusive

For the partnership to reach higher levels of cooperation, mental frameworks and horizon perspectives should be expanded with a different perspective on the role each could play. Morocco should not be perceived just a small market for Brazil, but a door to enter a market of 1.2 billion people in Africa, which, as projected by the United Nations, will be the only continent in the world that will continue growing in terms of population in the years to come.

Morocco, on the other hand, should understand Brazil as a large market yet to be conquered, with a population that embraces diversity and needs supporting partners in its search to become a more relevant player in the global chessboard.

Free Trade Agreement and Economic Relations

Brazil still needs to sort out what the Mercosur Agreement will be like in the coming years. Structured legally as Customs Union, the Agreement has not been able to deliver greater trade creation opportunities. Based on the 1980's European Union model, Mercosur intended to consolidate a Common Market in the Southern Cone as a replacement for all failed attempts of economic integration in Latin America. Its economic results, however, have been greatly affected by the ideological distortions deriving from a clear shift towards the left in political terms during the 1990s and 2000s. This resulted in Mercosur being treated more like a political association than an economic agreement, a clear shift from the model initially foreseen by its more liberal founding fathers.

This is due to the fact Brazil remains a closed country to international trade. Its participation is still relatively small and the country has yet to emerge as an open economy. Brazil does not belong to any major trade arrangements except for Mercosur. Additionally, the country has wrongly bet on the unlikely successful outcome of the Doha Round of trade negotiations and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as the main avenue for international trade discussions and interaction. With the diminishing role played by the WTO ever since its inception, Brazil has reduced its role in the international trade agenda. The country still relies heavily on the belief that a devalued currency will promote its exports and restore the deindustrialization process resulting from China's entry into the global stage, particularly the world labour market and industrial manufacturing. Brazil has no trade agreements with African countries, except for Egypt, and the possibility of opening trade negotiations with Morocco should widen the possibilities for Brazil in the continent and in the Arab world. Mercosur, to-date, has signed free trade agreements with Egypt (August 2010), Palestine (December 2011) and Lebanon (December 2014).

The negotiation of a Free Trade Agreement would prompt both countries to increment open market access and foster greater opportunities to expand bilateral trade and cross-investment, incrementing foreign direct investment.

Brazil and Morocco should therefore foment a partnership unequalled in terms of modernity in relations with the Middle East and set up a new trade paradigm for Brazilian engagement in Africa.

Possible Synergies

Closer cooperation should also take place in the field of energy, including oil and natural gas. Brazil, a self-sufficient country in energy, could work together with Morocco in the development of technology for exploration of oil and gas in the deep seabed. Investment and technology development in the field of energy is essential for both countries to secure growth and stability, and ensure energy security.

Energy, which is an essential part of growth and infrastructure, represents a key sector within the tremendous possibilities represented by infrastructure development and environmental protection that could be developed by the two countries, amplifying and incrementing the better use of human resources and the diversification of economic partnerships.

Other sectors where the relationship can be greatly incremented is agriculture, pharmaceutical and manufacturing, by pushing greater innovation and cross border interactions.

Brazil and Morocco have in agriculture an important segment of their economies. Blessed with good climate, Brazil has become a major agricultural powerhouse for several products and has been able to

improve productivity in certain levels, particularly due to the intensive role played by EMBRAPA, a Brazilian Agency created for the improvement of agriculture. Both countries should also overcome the bias there is in many developing countries against agriculture and commodities. Brazil and Morocco should develop innovative ways to add more value to the commodities they produce and sell to become more resourceful in their areas of greater competitiveness.

On the pharmaceutical side, the Brazilian generic industry is also an important area where cooperation could achieve more positive results. Most pharmaceutical companies are in the so-called Global North and lesser concern lies with the Global South, which is affected by different types of diseases and with much different medical needs. Brazil has a substantial record in the fight against some tropical diseases and AIDS.

As to manufacturing, the new normal of deindustrialisation resulting from China's entry into the world market as the "manufacturer of the world" does open avenues where Morocco and Brazil could actually cooperate in common areas with a positive result for both countries to improve their own national industries based on the complementarity of their needs and capabilities, thus developing substantial partnerships to develop better industrial output to secure greater competitiveness in the world stage.

Foreign direct investment should also be promoted and facilitated between both countries. A Bilateral Investment Agreement should be pursued to set up a competitive and transparent business framework to foster private interest in cross-investment in multiple sectors, especially the manufacturing sector, where both countries have lost ground and competitiveness to China.

Strengthening private sector cooperation is essential to ensure an increase in investments and international trade. A CEO's Forum should be set up between Brazil and Morocco to keep a steady flow of information and intelligence with governmental authorities, business and academia to develop joint projects for the improvement of economic conditions, and generate new business opportunities and reduce unemployment rates.

Because of Africa's GDP per capita increase in the coming years, millions of people will enter the consumer market, particularly anxious to enjoy the abundance of resources. A major partnership with Morocco could foster access to a much larger market and allow Brazil to tap into a network of Moroccan trade agreements that could stimulate growth in Brazil. Brazil needs to reform and modernise its infrastructure and logistics to improve distribution networks and open the African markets to its products. Maritime routes should be increased in frequency to secure on-time delivery with that continent and use Morocco as its entry door. Substantive cross-investments should push greater growth and the elimination of distortions of trade and existing obstacles to foreign investment will need to be overcome.

War on Drugs and Terrorism

Besides trade, an important area for cooperation between the two countries is the war on drugs. Both Brazil and Morocco are pass-through countries for the international drug trafficking coming particularly from Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, with the purpose to reach the European markets. As more trade and travel gets incremented bilaterally, both countries will need to find ways to cooperate effectively at refraining the drug trafficking within their borders and by taking the necessary measures to avoid the possibility of transnational border-crossing. This is an effort that requires deep cooperation on both sides of the Atlantic and is essential for the War on Drugs. Drug money has been used in the most diverse areas, including the financing of international terrorism.

Since most drug trafficking has a wide basis of support operations, Morocco and Brazil should develop methods to clamp down on drug traffickers, blocking their access to financial resources and strangling their possibilities of growth and building domestic and international distribution networks.

Climate Change

Both Brazil and Morocco share a clear commitment to the environment and the diversification of energy sources to reduce energy dependence and still stimulate economic growth and welfare. Thus, both countries could cooperate to find better ways to improve energy efficiency and increasing investments in renewable energy in both countries. New infrastructure projects developed mutually could promote better use of electricity and water, protecting natural resources and securing a reduced impact on the emissions of CO₂.

Morocco has a very positive history on water conservation and use. Brazil, though having one the largest water reservoirs in the world, lacks the instruments to maximize its exploration of water resources. With the United States opting out of the Paris Agreement, both countries should lead the effort to reduce pollution and CO₂ emissions, particularly in the Wider Atlantic region.

Defence Cooperation

Since Brazil is an exit door and Morocco is an entry door for drug trafficking, both countries would greatly benefit if they had intelligence exchange and even more training to protect the Wider Atlantic strengthening aviation and border security, and building the necessary measures to secure positive results.

Brazil should also support Morocco in the acquisition of military equipment, including EMBRAER airplanes to increment the bilateral defence relationship. By providing this kind of support, Brazilian companies would be benefited and jobs would be created in a very strategic sector with a trickle-down impact on the improvement of the technology and intelligence industry.

With joint efforts, both countries could enhance their capability to fight drugs and increment the bilateral relationship by applying similar policies to address the challenges imposed by drug dealers at the domestic and international levels.

Since Brazil has major oil reserves alongside its coast, the protection of such resources is quintessential for securing its economic prosperity. Thus, the protection of offshore drilling will require a much muscular navy from Brazil and a more intensive cooperation with Atlantic countries to preserve the security of such operations. Joint training and efforts should be carried out by Brazil and Morocco to consolidate the military cooperation with the specific purpose to protect essential resources. Such initiatives should foster new technologies and weaponry which could be useful for both countries. Thus, the geographical positioning of Morocco become even more strategically valuable.

Cultural Ties

There is a weak cultural connection between both countries. Despite the Brazilian TV Soap Opera, “The Clone”, which showed some Moroccan villages and customs, greater dialogue should be construed and intensified with an intensive exchange of students and professors at all levels, with the encouragement of joint degrees and programs. Students play an essential role in propagating values and culture. The greater the interaction there is in academic fora, the deeper and quicker will the cultural ties consolidate.

Brazil and Morocco should, therefore, develop programs for the exchange of students and experts to support the development of human resources in both countries, particularly solidifying the relationship ties that academic and professional exchange can proportionate.

Many Brazilians have also experienced Morocco visiting it as tourists. More than 27,000 Brazilians visited Morocco in 2015 and this number could greatly increase once the Brazilian economy stabilizes and the Brazilian Real recovers its purchasing power. By promoting Morocco in Brazil and Brazil in Morocco, both as holiday destinations, there will be a growing demand for daily flights between the main cities of both countries. The geographical proximity should help Morocco become a major hub for Africa and Southern Europe, playing a similar role like Panama, for instance, has played once it became the major hub in Central America for the entire continent. The geographical proximity could allow more flights from Latin America to Morocco and the region, and have a similar effect in the opposite direction.

Conclusion

The world is changing and a new order is being designed. The balance of power is shifting and there is uncertainty about the global chessboard. Power is shifting and so are mental mind frames.

This paper focused on the improvement of the political and economic relationship between Brazil and Morocco. Brazil is an emerging investor in the Africa and should intensify trade with the region. Morocco should serve as Brazil entry door not only to Africa but also into the Arab world. With more than 100 years of continuous relationship, Brazil and Morocco should forge new points in their partnership to secure greater growth and development, particularly in sectors not yet exploited by European or American companies.

Although Morocco's growth was smaller in 2016, resulting from negative agricultural output deriving from a several droughts in the winters 2015/2016, the country's return to the African Union will strengthen its ties with the region and open more avenues for trade and investment. Considering that African and Middle Eastern countries are expected to grow between 3% and 5% and some of them will even overtake the rate of 5%, Brazil should increment its interest in building a long-lasting partnership with Morocco.

To do this, both countries should build an ambitious bilateral agenda to increment trade and reduce logistical constraints, in addition to policies and priority areas that increment the relationship and could transform the Wider Atlantic area as an important platform for structural changes at regional level.

Morocco should be become a prime strategic partner for Brazil. Though different, more intensive business, economic, cultural and political ties should be fostered, particularly considering the synergy both could have as entry points into their regional systems.

There will be divergences of opinions throughout this process. It is important for Brazil to understand clearly Morocco's challenges, both domestically and internationally. Both countries could greatly benefit by finding ways to complement each other, particularly in agriculture, where Brazil, a major exporter, should become a strategic partner for the development of projects to increment reliability and value addition.

Great partnerships only happen after many successful negotiations take place. It is time to negotiate, find synergies and secure greater cooperation.

The future looks bright for Brazil and Morocco.

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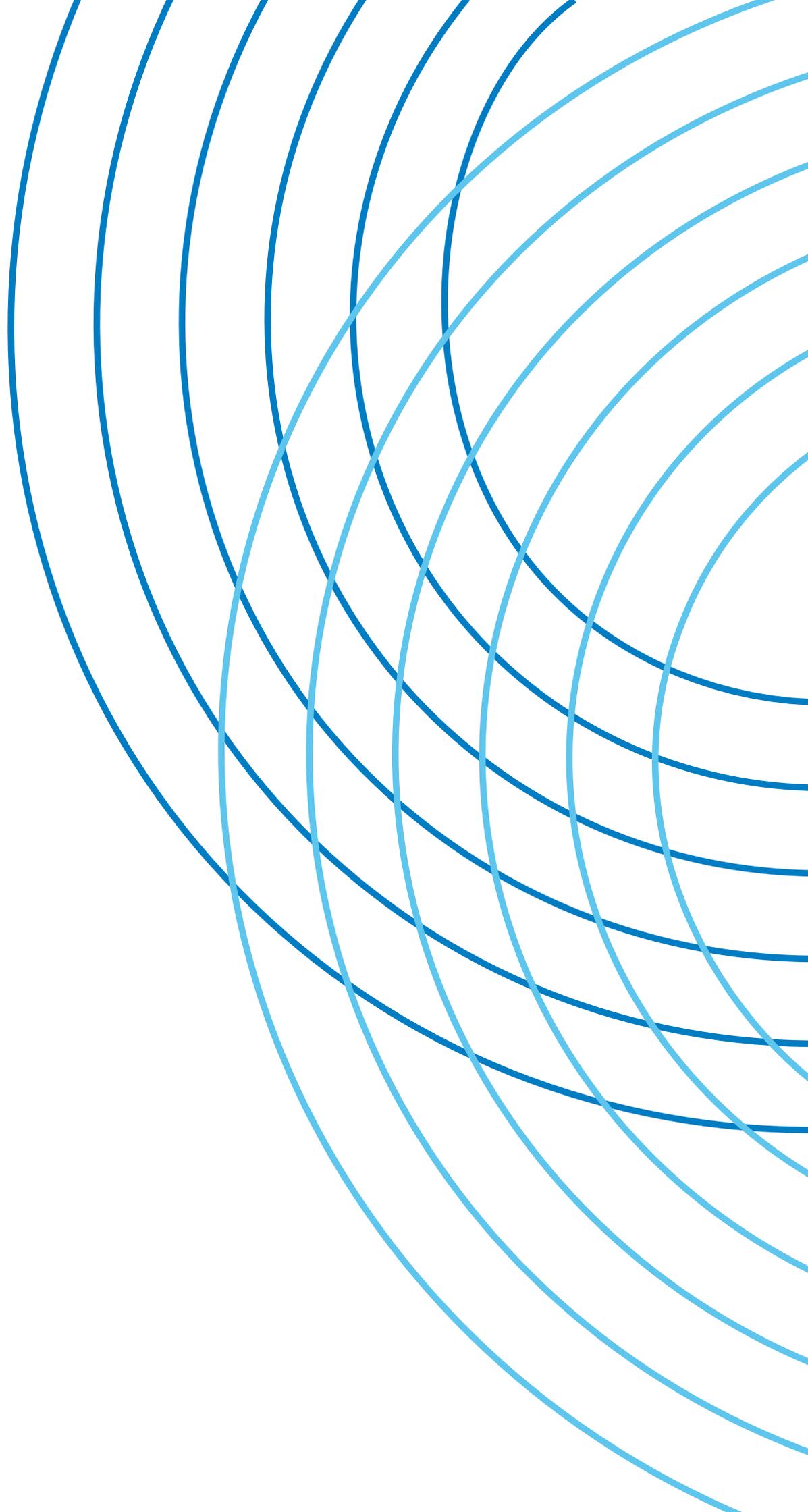
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