



ATLANTIC
FUTURE

**SCIENTIFIC
PAPER**

31

An emerging and globalised Atlantic Space?

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ABSTRACT

While the Atlantic has lost the pre-eminence of times past, it is still an essential part of today's globalised world. This article gives an overview of the defining features of globalisation and looks at the shortcomings of global governance in the ongoing shift of power. The article analyses some of the challenges for the emergence of a wider Atlantic space. Failure to unite all regions bordering the Atlantic into a common view, the scepticism in South Atlantic countries about the very idea of the Atlantic space, the lack of efficient management of common and scarce resources, the food imbalances found in the Atlantic and the issues that come with state fragility are analysed here as some of the main obstacles to the emergence of a true Atlantic space based on cooperation and opportunities for all the regions. Finally, the paper concludes with a reflection on the potential for cooperation in the Atlantic in certain specific areas. .

*The first draft of this Scientific Paper was presented
at the ATLANTIC FUTURE seminar in Rabat, October 2013.*

ATLANTIC FUTURE – Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas, is a project financed by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme, European Commission Project Number: 320091.



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1. Introduction

Why is global governance faltering at the time it is most important? The list of issues that cannot be governed solely at national level is longer every year. As the promise of regional governance as a mid-range solution has shown its limits with the dismal record of the European Union in governing its own economic crisis, the need for global solutions seems even more urgent. From the imperative to stop man-made climate change to the governance of global financial flows, new maritime routes and arms control agreements, there are crucial issues that can only be effectively tackled on a global scale. The effects of globalisation are felt in every corner of the planet and the urge to find governance structures and practices that can more effectively provide or defend common goods is more acute than ever before. And yet international cooperation is approaching a state of gridlock (Hale, Held and Young, 2013) as international negotiations, many of which have been in place for years, either achieve very limited successes or simply fail to deliver solutions.

There are many reasons for this, from inadequate institutions to a new structural distribution of power and from the appearance of ever more complex and intractable challenges to the impossibility of effectively extricating domestic from international issues. Equally, there may be very different solutions: from institutional reform at international level to stronger and more direct implication of citizens in global affairs, from the creation of new, exclusive groups of states that better reflect the new distribution of power (for example, the G20) to a re-examination of the role that geographical groupings can play in providing at least part of the solution. These groupings can be defined by actual institutions, such as the African Union or Mercosur, or comprise a number of countries grouped together in a conventional way, without necessarily having any formal institutions, such as the Asia-Pacific region or the Middle East. On an ever larger scale, the Pacific Basin and the Arctic are also often seen as this kind of intermediate space – loosely institutionalised but still with sharper contours than the Indian Ocean Basin or the Atlantic.

The Atlantic is, in many senses, where globalisation as we know it started. Although links connecting distant corners of the world through a flow of products, technological innovation and ideas, such as the Silk Road, had existed for centuries, the rise of maritime empires from Portugal and Spain opened up a new era of intercontinental exchanges of unprecedented scale linking the five continents. In the late 19th Century's "Age of Empire" (Hobsbawm, 1987) the last corners of the planet were connected to that impressive global network which had its centre of gravity firmly in the Atlantic. The 'Atlantic model' of the world under American leadership strongly supported by western European partners emerged triumphant from the Cold War to claim a preeminent role in the unstoppable globalisation, only to see its pre-eminence quickly erode in the ensuing two decades.

With the focus now on the Pacific, some argue that Atlantic's "momentum" is gone. The Atlantic has certainly lost the supremacy of past times. And yet, the world cannot be explained by the Pacific only. The Atlantic continues to be an essential part of the global picture, which cannot be fully understood without it. The Atlantic Future project rests on the assumption that the Atlantic still is relevant enough to pay attention to.

This article gives an overview of the defining features of globalisation and looks at the shortcomings of global governance in the ongoing shift of power. The article goes over some of the challenges for the emergence of a wider Atlantic space. The failure to unite all regions bordering the Atlantic into a common view, scepticism in South Atlantic countries about the very idea of the Atlantic space, inefficient management of common and scarce resources, food imbalances in the Atlantic and the issues that come with

state fragility, are analysed here as some of the main obstacles to the emergence of a true Atlantic space based on cooperation and opportunities for all littoral regions. Finally, the paper concludes with a reflection on the potential for cooperation in the Atlantic in certain specific areas.

The main premise of this article is that the Atlantic space can be a useful unit of analysis to map and understand broader global issues. Other authors have already suggested that the Atlantic could be used to analyse the transformations taking place in the world, both regionally and globally. In the words of Alison Games: “The Atlantic [...] is a geographic space that has a limited chronology as a logical unit of historical analysis: it is not a timeless unit; nor can this space fully explain all changes within it. Nonetheless, like other maritime regions, the Atlantic can offer a useful laboratory within which to examine regional and global transformations” (Games 2006).

2. Geography, globalisation and global governance

2.1. Geography still matters

One of the main characteristics of globalisation is that, in general terms, it renders geography less relevant in a large number of areas of economy and society. The world is interconnected in ever more ways, most of which are not directly affected by physical proximity, a flat world (Friedman, 2006) where knowledge is no longer confined to a few intellectual centres, innovation can emerge from unexpected corners and mobility (of goods, services, capital, people) can quickly transform advantages into weaknesses and liabilities into assets. Geography has also become of limited relevance when analysing the impact of current threats to global security. The list of issues that cannot be reduced to national boundaries keeps growing, including man-made disasters such as climate change, the instability of financial flows, illegal trafficking and terrorism, to name but a few. Geography has also lost relevance as a defining feature of international security, limiting the capacity of traditional actors to respond to new security threats.

However, it would be premature to say that geographical location no longer counts. The optimistic, EU-inspired (and partly EU-promoted and -funded) region-building that gained speed in the 1990s has most definitely lost steam not just because of the dwindling attraction exerted by the original model but because of the unwillingness or inability of states in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere to follow the European integration path. But regionalism as a whole has certainly not disappeared and has taken different shapes, showing that states still place some hopes in regional groupings to help their international standing or to solve some of their domestic challenges.

The economic and political emergence of Asia, followed by other parts of the global South, has re-defined geographical advantage. Environmental changes, such as the effects of global warming, could soon redefine world trade routes if and when navigation from East Asia to Europe through the Arctic Ocean becomes feasible. Technological advantages are also playing a role: new fracking techniques, for example, have made previously untapped reserves of oil and gas available, and transformed the global map of energy production.

The transport of goods is a key element of globalisation and is carried out mainly through maritime transport (around 90% of the world's long-haul trade is moved by sea). Maritime routes across the ocean therefore play an essential role. Among other factors, the existence of important hubs that shape transportation routes, as well as the

building of new infrastructure (ports and enlargements of the Suez and Panama canals) do have direct and massive impact on trade, production and supply chains. To understand the world's commercial geography, it is paramount to identify which port infrastructures act as the main gateways for maritime trade flows and which ports act as intermediate hubs.

Likewise, west African countries such as Guinea Bissau are transit countries for cocaine trafficking not only due to state fragility but also due to its geographical location, between the producing regions of Andean America and European consumers. The examples are endless and they point to the conclusion that geography, far from losing relevance, still plays a central role. The impact of geography may be changing, but it does not seem to be disappearing.

2.2. The global shift of power

Geography is also a key factor when analysing the new distribution of global power. The last few decades have witnessed a global power shift and the relative decline of Western powers. Some authors have named it "the rise of the rest" (Zakaria, 2009), a graphic representation of the relative decline of Western powers (and particularly of European powers) and of the rise of new states, geographically located far away from the traditional core of world politics. Despite the US remaining the only global superpower and the West still being the world's major economic aggregate, the rise of Japan, China, India, Korea and other Asian nations has created a new centre of global power in Asia in terms of demography, economy, trade, technology and ideas (Mahbubani, 2009).

The global shift of power is best shown by comparing the relative weights of world economies between 2013 and 2050, according to World Bank estimates. In 2013, the West led the list of the most powerful economies, with the US in first place, Germany in 4th, France 5th, the UK 6th and Italy 8th (World Bank, 2013). It is estimated that by 2050 China will have outpaced the US as the world's major economy, Germany, France and the UK will have fallen several positions, and the top five will be occupied by China, India, the US, Indonesia and Brazil. The "rest" will consolidate their economic power with Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in prominent positions in the list of the top 20 economies (PWC, 2015). All in all, a geographical shift of global economic weight towards the emerged (no longer emerging) economies will have been consolidated. Also, in terms of trade, the global economy is shifting towards the "rest". While in 1990 they accounted for the 3.6% of global trade share, in 2010 the figure was up to 15%. Not surprisingly, China witnessed the greatest growth, from 1.6% to 9.2% (BRICS Report, 2012). As for military power, even if the West's strength is unmatched by the rising powers, the limitations of its use in Afghanistan, Iraq and other crisis scenarios have questioned its relevance (Naím, 2014).

The shift of global power has happened in a context of unparalleled levels of interdependence between major world powers. Trade flows, technological advancement, human mobility and even ideas and narratives travel freely across borders. According to Stiglitz (2004), globalisation has multiple dimensions, but five of them are central to understanding the current levels of interdependence.

First, the globalisation of knowledge has enabled the free flow of ideas thanks to the falling costs of communication and closer integration between societies. The transfer of knowledge is considered one of the strongest forces for potential growth in emerging markets. Second, trade volumes across the globe have expanded at an extraordinary pace as a consequence of globalisation. Despite intense debate on whether trade

liberalisation leads to growth and development (see for instance: Rodrik and Rodriguez, 1999), trade exchanges have become a central element of interdependence between developed and developing nations. Third, labour flows between areas with diverging degrees of labour productivity can be considered one of the key factors behind the rise of human migration and mobility in the era of globalisation. Fourth, foreign direct investment is behind the massive movement of capital across borders, either in the form of short-term lending or long-term flows. Finally, Stiglitz considers capital market liberalisation and the free flow of short-term capital as the final defining feature of globalisation, although also the most controversial one. As the 2008 financial crisis showed, capital market liberalisation has become the most representative example of the snowball effect that a financial crisis can have on distant economies as a consequence of financial interdependence.

2.3 The missing link: global governance

The current global shifts in power and interdependence trends have not been matched by a new framework for global governance. Existing systems and institutions for governing global affairs lag behind the current depth of linkages between global powers and the new threats and challenges of a globalised world. Arguably, global governance is faltering at the time when it is most needed, the main reason for which is the failure of global powers to reach consensus on a new system of global governance that supersedes the structures of the post-World War II order.

With the end of the Cold War, the bipolarity of the international system gave way to unipolarity, where the United States became the only superpower in economic, political, military and even cultural terms. The major representation of the unipolar moment was embodied in Francis Fukuyama's "end of history", according to which no alternative ideology to political and economic liberalism would contest the predominance of the West (Fukuyama, 1992). The unipolar moment, with its own limitations and not without contestation, lasted a bit longer than ten years. The attack on the twin towers on 9/11 and the foreign policy failures of the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions showed the limits of US power. The global crisis of 2008, which seriously undermined the centrality of Europe and the West in the global economy, only reinforced the end of the unipolar moment and the West's pre-eminence in the political and economic structures and institutions of the international system.

When the decay of the West met the global shift of power and the increased levels of interdependence, the seeds of a multipolar world bore fruit. The "rise of the rest" began to transform the global balance of power decades ago, but the end of the bipolar and unipolar periods has not yet been reflected in a new system of multipolar governance. Some authors have analysed how the loss of a centre of gravity in an interdependent global scenario has given way to an international system that has become "no one's world" (Kupchan, 2012). Others have instead focused on the effects of multipolarity by arguing that the decline of the West and the emergence of new powers will translate into a "zero-sum world". In such a world, no power will be able to dominate the system and the lack of effective global governance schemes will force major powers to compete for their own national power (Rachman, 2010).

Multipolarity refers to a world system dominated by major powers and states, whereby relations are established on the basis of material capabilities and the balance of power. Critics of this definition have advanced other concepts to portray the current state of play on the international scene. Richard Haass has defined current times as an "age of nonpolarity", in which dozens of actors, including global companies, cities, terrorist organisations, media corporations or non-governmental organisations, to name a few,

exercise varying degrees of power (Haass, 2008). The age of nonpolarity also involves the diffusion of power and the difficulty of these actors to exercise influence – even more so during an age of globalisation. The very nature of power is changing, argues Moises Naím (2014), as it becomes easier to get, harder to use and easier to lose.

Other scholars have aimed at combining the two main trends shaping the current international order (redistribution of power and interdependence). In Giovanni Grevi's idea of an "interpolar world" (2009), major powers are able to cooperate to address the challenges of interdependence, taking into account the shifting balance of power and the geopolitical tensions that emerge from it. At the same time, the relations established among the main world powers and the influence of non-state actors are crucial to understanding the current levels of interdependence, which also need to be taken into account when devising the transformation of the global governance systems.

Globalisation has thus created incentives to cooperate, both as a consequence of the interest of major powers in finding solutions to transnational problems and in jointly facing the externalities of globalisation. The basis of current multilateral institutions can be found in the international architecture of the post-World War II order, where political and economic multilateralism was grounded on the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions. Since the 1970s, multilateralism has expanded with the proliferation of international treaties and an increase in the number of multilateral institutions. However, recent decades have also witnessed a growing mismatch between cooperation incentives at the global level and the performance of the 20th Century multilateral regimes. The crisis of multilateralism has come as a consequence of the "unilateral moment" led by the United States after 9/11 (and the emergence of the "coalitions of the willing" as the preferred form of international cooperation) and the effects of the financial crisis of 2008, which discredited the EU model of multilateral cooperation and leadership. The political and economic order based on the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions has been questioned, leading many to redefine the traditional concepts of multilateralism.

New forms of "modern multilateralism" have been put forward to adapt the existing systems of global governance to current realities. Keck and Sikkink (1998) have, for instance, argued that the role of plural networks of activists should be taken into account when analysing the policymaking of international organisations and states. Others such as Van Langenhove (2011) have advocated a more open concept of multilateralism (what he terms "multilateralism 2.0"), in which more attention should be paid to the diversification of multilateral organisations, the growing importance of non-state actors, the interlinkages between policy domains and the need for the additional involvement of citizens. Moisés Naím (2009), on the contrary, argued for "minilateralism", or the limitation of multilateralism to cooperation among like-minded countries in issue-areas of mutual concern. In a sense, a version of "minilateralism" (although not so "mini") is to be found in international frameworks for cooperation such as the G-20, the grouping of developed and developing countries that marks a step forward with respect to the G7 and G8 forums.

The broadened scope of multilateralism has not been matched by a comprehensive reform of the global governance structures. Even if there is an urgent need to produce better and more representative systems of global governance, international cooperation is approaching a state of gridlock. The reasons for the gridlock are manifold according to Hale, Held and Young (2013). Firstly, multipolarity and interdependence mean actors who used to be able to do things are now less capable. At the same time there are more spoilers and veto players and hence less room for negotiations and agreement. Secondly, there is institutional inertia – ineffective decision-making based on an outdated post-WWII order. Thirdly, global issues are more complex than before: issues that were relevant to one or two regions 25 years

ago are now relevant everywhere and have wider geographical reach. The complexity also comes from the fact that many issues are today “intermestic” (i.e. international issues having domestic consequences). And finally, there is institutional fragmentation and an inefficient division of labour at international level, which reduces the centrality of international institutions and results in interlocking and sometimes inter-blocking institutions.

As a consequence of this void in global governance, some actors are reclaiming a return to the nation state as the central actor in world politics. The lack of effective results from international organisations and even from groupings of states such as the G20 has led some authors to speak of the emergence of a G-Zero world, “a world order in which no single country or durable alliance of countries can meet the challenges of global leadership” (Bremmer, 2012). The incapability of world powers and leaders to reach consensus on fighting climate change, avoiding tax evasion and fraud and regulating financial flows on a global scale are representative of this tendency. In addition, the financial and economic crisis of 2008 has also shown the limits of regional governance as a mid-range solution. The loss of appetite by other world regions to emulate the European Union’s model of regional cooperation has inflicted a serious blow on the defenders of interregionalism, mostly as a consequence of the eurozone crisis and the dangers of disintegration in the most advanced examples of regional cooperation. The reinforcement of centrifugal dynamics in Europe (Kupchan, 2012b) has been paralleled by other world powers with respect to international institutions, inasmuch as they pursue a path of national self-assertion and render that towards global governance more difficult.

3. Oceans and globalisation: the Atlantic as a unit of analysis

The main focus of global attention for much of the last quarter of a century has been the Pacific Ocean Basin and how it has come to play a central role in globalisation. This is justified by the fact that it has indeed been the locus of the most extraordinary transformation in this period, led in particular, but by no means exclusively, by the formidable economic growth of China. However, though less visible, perhaps, in the eyes of the media and common citizens, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic are emerging as relevant sub-systems. Globalisation, by its nature, will not be restricted to a macro-region alone (Hamilton, 2013) and its full story can only be told by looking well beyond the Pacific. As a way to illustrate this, and in spite of the economic crisis, the Atlantic remains the area that concentrates the largest share of global trade and investment flows in the world.

It is often said that oceans separate regional ensembles more than they unite them. But, contrary to that view, oceans could also be seen as facilitators of integration. Quoting Dorval Brunelle, “a two-fold phenomenon is taking place: a ‘territorialisation of the seas’ – the fact that seas and oceans are more and more the object of conflicting claims – and a ‘maritimisation of economies’” – the fact that dependence as well as interdependence on supply by sea routes and sea transport are felt further and further inside continents“ (Brunelle, 2013).

As with many other constructs that have traditionally been used as units of analysis, such as nation states or continents, the “ocean basin” is not free of methodological problems. From a purely scientific point of view, the use of ocean basins poses problems that would not sustain close scrutiny. To start with, the number of ocean basins is so limited that no comparison would be possible.

Having said that, several historians have defended the use of seas and ocean basins as a framework for analysis. Jerry Bentley pointed to the value of ocean basins as “constructs that bring large-scale historical processes into clear focus” (Bentley, 1999). While recognising the limitations of establishing ocean basins as categories, the author advocates its use for the purpose of understanding such large-scale processes as an alternative to other units of analysis such as nation states or continents that do not take into account the importance of exchanges across maritime regions (commercial, cultural, migrations, etc.) (Bentley, 1999).

In addition to that, some of today’s challenges, which are embedded within the definition of globalisation, would also benefit from using “ocean basins” as the unit of analysis, as the ocean is the central stage where such issues unfold. Environmental challenges are the obvious example. Issues such as the existence of ocean garbage patches or the rising sea level need to be analysed with the ocean basin as the unit of analysis.

The Mediterranean Sea and the Pacific Ocean are well established units of analysis and are both studied as regions. Until now, the Pacific Basin, or Pacific Rim, has attracted most of the attention as an ocean around which the transformation of the last decades has occurred. There are genuinely “Pacific” institutions such as APEC or the Pacific trade agreement (Trans-Pacific Partnership) that are currently under negotiation, something that has contributed enormously to the acceptance of the Pacific as a unit of analysis. Other spaces, like the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, are not as institutionally or conceptually articulated as the Pacific. However, sub-systems can consolidate a combination of several factors such as their inclusion in the discourse (political, media or academic), growing triangular and polyhedral links (triangular relationships); existing institutional arrangements; foreign policy strategies; and the formation of epistemic communities, understood as groups of people that have included this dimension in the way they think.

Stemming from a combination of some or all of these, other ocean basins are nowadays consolidated as sub-systems. Besides the Pacific, the Indian and the Arctic Oceans are also seen as units of analysis, as sub-systems of the global system. In the case of the Atlantic, a few of the above-mentioned factors are in place. Its presence in the discourse is still very tentative, limited mainly to the North Atlantic link rather than a wider Atlantic vision; and, while the Atlantic is home to numerous multilateral arrangements, there are no pan-Atlantic institutions per se. Yet the combination of the remaining factors allows us to define the Atlantic as a sub-system. On the one hand, triangular relationships in the Atlantic are increasing. The number of initiatives involving more than two partners on different shores of the Atlantic has grown over the years. Examples of which are the Africa – South America Summit (ASA), the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS), the Cocaine Route Programme, funded by the European Commission to fight organised crime and drug trafficking, that involves different countries in Latin America and Africa, or the International Afro-Brazilian Lusophone University (UNILAB) created in 2010 (Brunelle, 2013).

On the other hand, no country facing the Atlantic can afford not to think about it, or to fail to have a foreign policy strategy for the space. The case of Morocco is particularly telling: as its long-standing confrontation with Algeria hinders regional integration, the country looks to the Atlantic as a space of opportunities (Lesser et al., 2012). Finally, there has been a proliferation of initiatives that share the view of a wider Atlantic Basin that includes both north and south and that are contributing to the creating of Atlantic epistemic communities. By way of example are: universities or think tanks such as the Atlantic Council, the Atlantic Community, the Transatlantic Academy, the Center for Transatlantic Relations, the German Marshall Fund, the Institut d’Études Internationales de Montréal (IEIM) and the Brazilian Centre for Strategy and

International Relations (NERINT); the organisation of conferences such as the Skhirat Forum and the Tricontinental Atlantic Initiative in Morocco; the conference “The Atlantic Geopolitical and Geo-economic Space: Common Opportunities and Challenges”, organised in 2012 by the European Commission; the Atlantic Dialogues organised by GMF and OCP Foundation in Morocco since 2011; and the organisation of the Ministerial Conference of African States of the Atlantic Basin in 2009 (Brunelle, 2013).

4. Challenges to the emergence of an Atlantic space

The emergence and subsequent consolidation of a meaningful Atlantic political space needs to be based, necessarily, on mutual trust and cooperation between the four regions bordering the ocean. While several factors indicate that such a space may be emerging, it is still threatened by multiple challenges.

4.1 Looking east

Atlantic powers (old and new) are not the only players in the region: Asia is now a big player in the Atlantic, with China foremost, but others too, like India and South Korea. Their presence is felt in very obvious ways both in Latin America and in Africa. China is investing heavily on both sides of the South Atlantic and is the largest trading partner of Brazil and of Africa as a whole.

China and, to a lesser extent, India, have provided countries in the South Atlantic with an economic alternative at a time when the demand from North Atlantic countries has notably decreased and also have the attraction of restricting the influence of the global North over the South (Alcaro and Alessandri, 2013). Countries in the South Atlantic generally see China as an opportunity rather than a threat: an opportunity to diversify their partnerships and to cease being overly dependent on North Atlantic countries or on regional powers like Brazil or South Africa. While the US and EU regard China's investments and dealings in Latin America and Africa with a degree of distrust, the Asian presence (mostly China's) in Latin America and Africa is generally welcome and regarded positively in the southern Atlantic. Therefore, while there is much talk of the Atlantic as a counterweight to Asia, it is doubtful that actors such as South Africa, Brazil or Nigeria would be inclined to counterbalance China. It is more likely, on the contrary, that they would rather counterbalance North Atlantic powers. The view of the Atlantic space as a counterweight to Asia fails to take into account the view from the South and is therefore unlikely to make a contribution to a common space.

Failure to articulate a common view of the Atlantic as an opportunity for all four continents (North America, South America, Europe and Africa) is one of the main obstacles to the emergence of a shared Atlantic political and economic project. Stronger ties between Atlantic countries may or may not diminish the relevance of China in the South Atlantic (Brimmer, 2014), but that should not be a reason to promote them. The countries in the South Atlantic will continue to regard China and other actors in Asia, the Gulf and elsewhere as “the” opportunity; trying to alter that in favour of other Atlantic powers may exacerbate, rather than bridge, the existing North-South divide. One good opportunity the North might be missing are the negotiations of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and the European Union. The exclusion of the South Atlantic – in contrast to the Trans-Pacific Partnership – may only increase the South's distrust of the North.

4.2 Common values, divergent perceptions

In European and American think tank and policymaking circles, the Atlantic is often assumed to be a relatively like-minded area, by implicit contrast with East Asia, the post-Soviet space, and the Islamic world. Democracy and the rule of law are often cited as common values across the Atlantic regions by the proponents of this idea. Of the 27 countries that sit on the governing council of the US-sponsored Community of Democracies, only India, Japan and Mongolia do not belong to one of the four Atlantic regions. This, along with the traditional “common values” rhetoric underpinning transatlantic relations between the US and Western Europe, contributes to that North Atlantic perception of commonality at a time when the West has seen its prestige and influence on precisely the issues of values decline rapidly across the globe.

And it is true that, well beyond the USA, Canada and Europe, there is a predominance of democratic governance across the wider Atlantic, with the main powers (the US, the EU, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Nigeria) defining themselves as liberal democracies and most countries aspiring to it, at least nominally (Hamilton, 2013). Such predominance, however, does not necessarily amount to value convergence in the Atlantic, let alone a sense of commonality shared in all four corners of the space. For starters, the degree of implementation of values such as the rule of law, good governance or respect for human rights varies greatly from country to country, as do the definitions and priorities of these principles. Western and Western-led interventions from Panama in 1989 to Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and a dozen African nations have left a strong feeling of disapproval, if not fear, in many countries. Disastrous attempts to link them to democratisation have further hurt the association with “Western” values and have contributed to strong accusations of Western double standards, neo-colonialism, and imperialism. Democratic governance may present more commonalities between Atlantic regions than with other regions, mainly Asia, but that will not be interpreted in the same way on both sides of the Tropic of Cancer, nor will it automatically bring Atlantic countries strategically closer. Interests will often be more decisive than values, especially if that community of values is only perceived in a North to South direction. And interests that guide the actions and decisions of countries such as Brazil will often differ from those of the US or Europe.

In terms of perceptions, despite the Obama administration’s ‘Pivot to Asia’ and other prior Pacific-oriented initiatives by the US, it is clear that the mainstream governing elites in both the EU and the US still share similar perceptions of (North) transatlantic relations. This is partly the product of constant dialogue and examination of this relationship, with extensive public diplomacy, think tanks, donor and operational foundations, and public and private programmes devoted precisely to that. Partly, this is the result of personal links (not least those of European migrants and their descendants, still the largest group in American society) and of intensive interaction through trade, travel, institutions (NATO being the primary example) and uncountable other channels. This “old Atlanticism”, however, may in fact be more of an obstacle than a building block of a new Atlanticism if its proponents fail to acknowledge the huge negative associations linked to North Atlantic cooperation.

Some of the key powers, as well as smaller countries, in the South Atlantic show scepticism towards the idea of a wider Atlantic space. Explanations for this lack of enthusiasm can be found in the past memory of colonialism and slavery and more recent experience of post-colonial dependency on the North, exerted either directly or through West-dominated international institutions. The North-South divide can be seen in the behaviour of some of the regional powers in the South Atlantic: Brazil and South Africa, for example, tend not to support decisions that reinforce the status quo in international institutions (Brimmer, 2014), both are members of other groupings that do

not include the US or the EU (e.g. IBSA, BRICS, etc.), and embrace a view of national sovereignty that is closer to that of Russia and the Asian powers than to that of the Europeans. The South Atlantic is often reluctant to embrace the idea of a wider Atlantic, as it views such a concept as a perpetuation of the status quo, a space where the North Atlantic continues to play a leading role that often does not correspond to African or Latin American interests or even to the current configuration of forces. As a result, inclusion in a Europe and US-dominated Atlantic initiative may be perceived as an outright threat to some emerging countries who are just starting to free themselves from the old dynamics of dependence.

On the other hand, however, there are other countries, such as Morocco, that show a clear interest in exploring the Atlantic and see it as a space of opportunities. Few African and Latin American nations will willingly isolate themselves from meaningful developments of transregional cooperation if and when they do, indeed, materialise. The American and European markets remain powerful magnets for their products; historical and linguistic links still exert a key influence and other flows, from migration to foreign direct investment, are still crucial. Not the least of these is that Atlantic countries have a common interest in the need to tackle global challenges as well as transregional ones. All of this could compel countries to cooperate and act together, provided that the rhetoric of shared norms and values is not posited as a foundation for cooperation.

4.3 Resource scarcity and the need for effective management

Natural resources are abundant in the Atlantic space, but overexploitation and unbridled consumption threaten fish stocks, forests, biodiversity, water resources and all other natural resources. Only through sustainable, effective, transnational management can their depletion be avoided. All of the nations in the basin have a long-term interest in succeeding in curbing current trends but the obstacles to effective cooperation are huge. This is particularly true for those resources that are beyond the jurisdiction of a single country or in the common space of the high seas.

Examples of management of resources, and of lack thereof, abound in the Atlantic basin. Perhaps the easiest, most illustrative example is the case of fisheries. Their overexploitation has tremendous impact on the economy, food security, as well as on the environment. According to data provided by the FAO, since 1950 marine catches increased continuously until 1996 when fish production reached a peak of 86.4 million tonnes (MT) worldwide. Since then there has been a decline, with the latest figures showing 82.6 MT in 2011 and 79.7 MT in 2012. However, in spite of this decrease, the stocks of fish caught within sustainable levels have also declined. In 2011, 28.8% of the catches were overfished, meaning that they were beyond the sustainable levels of fishing compared to 10% in 1970. As a result of overfishing, future fish production is diminished, which results in negative economic and social impacts such as food insecurity and ecological damage (FAO, 2014).

These figures show how management of resources is essential to improve sustainability and avoid depletion. Four of the seven major fisheries in the Atlantic have half or more of their fish stocks exploited well above sustainability, with no effective management to control it. Although North Atlantic fisheries have now decreased their fishing catches considerably, they were exploited tremendously in the past and were overfished much earlier than other areas. As a result, fishing moved to other southern areas. The current challenge is to ensure that the same does not happen again in the South Atlantic fisheries (Holthus et al., 2012).

Regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) manage some of the fisheries with the goal of ensuring sustainable fishing in international waters. In the Atlantic, the case of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) exemplifies how its management has allowed for more sustainable fish stocks and a degree of recovery has taken place in the area.

Several aspects undermine management by RFMOs. Illegal activities (IUU, “Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated” fishing) represent one of the main challenges to resource management, reducing fish stocks dramatically, distorting the market and promoting piracy as local fishermen are not able to compete (Holthus et al., 2012). In addition, subsidies, mainly in the EU, also distort the market and contribute to overfishing, usually in other countries’ waters. The strengthening of the governance mechanisms by granting more powers to RFMOs and ensuring greater coordination among the different bodies, as well as the elimination of subsidies, are all paramount to improving the management of fisheries.

Similar management and sustainability challenges are found in the case of other resources. Forestry and water are just some of the resources that, because they are scarce, need sustainable management. Otherwise, the depletion of Atlantic resources is sure to occur, with the resulting conflicts between actors caused by competition for limited resources and other resource-related problems such as food insecurity.

4.4 Food imbalances in the Atlantic

Global food production should be sufficient to address the current demand for food and yet millions go hungry. At a global level, the main issue is no longer the production of food but access to it, whether because of lack of resources or location. In the next decades, demand for food is expected to rise significantly due to both population increase and growth in purchasing power. The population of one of the most food insecure areas in the world, sub-Saharan Africa, will more than double by 2050. FAO estimates show that by 2050 food production will have to increase by 70% to adjust to growth in demand (FAO, 2009).

The Atlantic space is where the world’s most food-insecure regions (the MENA region and sub-Saharan Africa), its largest food producer (Europe), and two regions with great food production potential (Latin America and Africa) meet. Intra-Atlantic food trade reflects the existence of these three different areas. Some of the major cereals and fruit exporters, as well as the largest and third largest cereals importers (MENA and sub-Saharan Africa) are in the Atlantic space (Woertz, 2014). Non-Atlantic (from China, Korea and the Gulf, mainly) and Atlantic (in particular, South African and American) producers are immersed in a race for the ownership of vast expanses of fertile land in South America and Africa as a means to ensure some food security in the future.

The Atlantic space as a region has the potential to be food secure, as there is complementarity between the different Atlantic regions, with some producing the food needed by others. Only the MENA region, of all those bordering the Atlantic, does not have the means to ensure its future food security at current trends without trade with other regions. Otherwise, the Atlantic space is seen as the future world’s breadbasket. While most of the additional food demand in the next decades is expected to come from Asia, the response to such demand will probably come from the Atlantic space (Guinan, 2012). And yet, food security and food production in the Atlantic are not ensured. Africa would be able to supply its demand for food if it were to improve yields and increase land use. But the main problem in Africa is not so much production as access to food. There is a lack of infrastructure to support the transport and storage of

food. As a result much of the food is not consumed and in many cases, is lost (Guinan, 2012). In addition, Africa agonises between exporting high value crops (fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, coffee, cocoa, etc.), improving the production of cereals and basic staples for Africans, and selling land to private corporations or foreign powers (e.g. China) that will export whatever food is produced to feed their own population (Searchinger, 2012). With food insecurity leading to humanitarian crises, tensions and conflicts, the very existence and functioning of the Atlantic space is compromised unless there is greater cooperation to ensure complementarity between the regions.

A further challenge is how to increase food production in a sustainable way to prevent unaffordable ecologic impact. With the rise of food demand and the resulting expansion of agriculture, particularly in Africa, the emission of greenhouse gases and the reduction of soil carbon pools are set to increase. The use of techniques that reduce emissions, a focus on the production of high value crops and the prevention of deforestation are some of the measures that would need to be implemented in the production of food to ensure its sustainability (Searchinger, 2012).

4.5 An unstable Atlantic

There are a number of states in the Atlantic that are defined as failed or failing, most of them in Africa, but also in places like the Caribbean. On top of humanitarian concerns in their own territory, spillover effects on neighbouring countries and the whole region are hard to ignore such as instability, displacement of people, and ungoverned areas that allow organised crime and terrorist groups to thrive. While the Atlantic is nowadays an area that is relatively free of “traditional” security threats – that is, open or latent conflicts between states – unconventional security risks abound. Illegal trafficking across the Caribbean and Africa, terrorism in the Sahel region and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea thrive in areas of state fragility.

Guinea Bissau and Haiti are obvious examples of the trafficking trap into which many fragile states fall. Guinea Bissau has often been called “Africa’s first narco-state”. The country’s weak institutions and its convenient geographical location have made it a preferred point of entry and transit for cocaine on its route from Latin America to Europe. While it cannot be said that the fragility of Guinea Bissau is caused only by the drug trade, high levels of corruption in the government, justice and the military along with the systemic failure to deliver basic state functions has made the country a prime target for drug smugglers. Similarly, Haiti is also fertile ground for drug trafficking. Endemic corruption and weak institutions, unguarded borders and a strategic location favour Haiti being one of the major transit points for drug trafficking, which further aggravates its problems in establishing functioning governance and the rule of law. These two countries are extreme cases, but other countries in Central America, the Caribbean and West Africa are fighting an uphill battle to contain the use of their territory as a launching pad for cocaine trafficking.

State fragility has also favoured piracy in the Atlantic, one of its main security threats. More than a quarter of reported piracy attacks in the world happen in the Gulf of Guinea, mainly on coastal waters or near ports (rather than on the high seas, such as the Indian Ocean). Their aim is cargo theft and in many cases crew kidnapping for ransom. Last but not least, in recent years the terrorist groups Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have taken advantage of the inability of even relatively powerful states such as Algeria and Nigeria to control their territory, of the weakness of vast states like Mauritania and Niger, and have thrived on the open crises in Mali and Libya. In a macro-region with porous borders like the Sahara-Sahel, they have been a permanent, threatening presence for over a decade. Smuggling

drugs, arms and migrants across the Saharan routes has provided additional resources to some of these groups.

It is clear that unconventional security challenges that thrive in environments of state fragility are a threat to even the most powerful Atlantic players. Therefore, a common interest in slowly reigning over these grey security zones could be a primary target for cooperation in the wider Atlantic. The fight against these threats cannot be expected to happen at a national level only. It is in the interest of all countries in the Atlantic to provide joint responses. Some initiatives supporting a regional or global approach to security challenges in the Atlantic already exist, such as several programmes implemented by UNODC that cooperate in the fight against illegal trafficking (Faria, 2014), or initiatives to counter piracy activities in the Gulf of Guinea. However, the fight against illegal trafficking, piracy or terrorism has to tackle the roots of the problem, which can often be closely interlinked with extreme poverty, territorial isolation and sociopolitical violence.

In this regard, it is to be noted that most of the Millennium Development Goals will not be met by the end of this year 2015 in a large number of African countries (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2015). Unless this is addressed, the South Atlantic will lack the capabilities and resources to fight against some of the threats in the region such as illegal trafficking. New approaches must be found to fight poverty and address the development gap in the Atlantic. Otherwise, with the foreseen population growth over the next decades in Africa, conditions in some countries will only worsen and will increase the likelihood of fragility in the Atlantic.

5. Governing global issues in the Atlantic

The Atlantic offers a good illustration both of the need for transnational approaches to macro-regional and global issues and the complexity of creating the governance structure that would be needed to effectively address them across the North-South divide. The four regions that overlook the Atlantic jointly face most of the challenges brought on or accentuated by globalisation: from the scarcity of resources to illegal trade; from maritime security to environmental degradation. The four regions are part of the global shift of power and the increasing impotence of world governance institutions. Despite the absence of apparent geopolitical fault lines and strong divergence in models of governance, however, the Atlantic sees less basin-wide cooperation than the Pacific and Arctic Oceans.

An analysis of the dynamics reshaping world politics and the global distribution of power reveals a transformation that is altering the old links and the correlation of forces in the Atlantic basin. This is happening in a context where, in contrast to its strong history of contact and exchanges since the 15th century, the Atlantic as a space lags behind other regions such as the Pacific or the Mediterranean in both institutionalisation and political discourse. The Atlantic, in fact, undergoes the transformations and challenges of globalisation as much as others regions do. Transnational economic and trade linkages have transformed the dynamics of the Atlantic space in the last few decades, as have emerging political initiatives to counter Western dominance, such as the BRICS or IBSA. Political and diplomatic relations between Atlantic powers are also changing, giving birth to a multipolar region where all actors, big and small, increasingly aim to have multi-vector foreign policies.

Other less desirable trends of globalisation have impacted the Atlantic, such as an increase of inequality and development gap among sub-regions and within them, environmental degradation and competition over energy resources. Partly as a

consequence of these dynamics, the Atlantic faces several challenges limiting the existence of a true Atlantic space, including strong rivalry between Atlantic powers, different values and perceptions, resource competition, food insecurity and the burden of failed states, to name just a few. But to address them, the Atlantic has a few precious shared instruments that other regions lack. The Atlantic can build on historical, cultural, linguistic and ideological links that cannot be compared to those in any other Ocean basin. It is true as we have seen that the weight of its past is an obstacle, but it could also be a launching pad for future cooperation.

At this point, a few challenges remain. First, new global governance dynamics would need to overcome the Western hegemony over the current international institutions. Western-centred institutions are most present in the Atlantic, where the foundations of the post-World War II political and economic international institutions were laid. If the Atlantic space manages to provide a framework for the “de-Westernisation” of the current governance structures, or create, together with southern Atlantic partners, a new set of more balanced arrangements, a contribution towards a more equal system of global governance may follow. Particular attention should be given to avoid reproducing the old patterns of domination by regional powers also in the South.

A more equal system should also involve a larger degree of representation of southern voices in the current governance structures. In light of the global shift of economic weight and political power, the Atlantic should not remain the last space to give the global South a global voice and a fair share of decision-making power in international affairs.

The idea of commons (Ostrom, 1990) seems to offer good ground on which to build an Atlantic governance that can progressively overcome the almost total lack of integration that exists today. Joint cooperation of Atlantic powers on some of the common goods explored in this paper (such as preserving fishing stocks or depolluting the Atlantic) may enable the introduction of joint governance schemes which respect the sovereignty of Atlantic countries and advance effective governance systems, potentially to be replicated on the global stage.

Security, food production and environmental governance are three areas with potential for cooperation. In the area of security, the Atlantic space has a number of grey spaces – whether it is fragile states like Haiti and Guinea Bissau, weak states like Mauritania and Honduras that struggle to control violent groups, or even black holes of insecurity inside relatively large and powerful countries such as Mexico and Nigeria – where different kinds of mostly unconventional security risks (terrorism, drug traffic, violent crime and piracy) flourish. In food production, the Atlantic regions combined (the Americas, Africa and Europe) hold the key to addressing food security at global scale, but they have to find the ways to do it without intolerable ecologic impact. Finally, environmental governance is an urgent issue that cannot be delayed. From the preservation of fisheries to climate change, from biodiversity to chemical pollution of the oceans, the Atlantic could pioneer the solutions to a range of environmental issues.

In a way, the Atlantic perfectly illustrates the absence, but also the promise, of common approaches to global issues. If common ground is found in any of these challenges, the Atlantic may become not only a somewhat imperfect microcosm of globalisation, but also a pioneer of more effective global governance.

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