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The Enabling Power of the Oceans and the Atlantic Center for Defence Capacity Building¹

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Peace and security are also critical to the full enjoyment of the benefits that can be derived from the oceans and for their sustainable development. As has been remarked by the Secretary-General, “There will be no development without security and no security without development” (UN, 2018)

INTRODUCTION

The oceans are critical enablers to make the Earth home of the humankind. They cover 75 % of its surface and their physical, chemical and biological properties make the marine environment critical to life in our planet. As pointed out by the United Nations, “our rainwater, drinking water, weather, climate, coastlines, much of our food, and even the oxygen in the air we breath, are all ultimately provided and regulated by the sea.” (United Nations, 2017).

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The oceans have played an important role in the history of civilizations. Their characteristics generate the conditions of possibility to exploit or influence the political, economic, social, environmental and military domains. The importance of the oceans has evolved, mainly, thanks to the possibilities the maritime spaces offer for trade, natural resources exploitation, transport of persons, military operations and – especially in the past – the spread of ideas. According to Russel, Philosophy and Science first appeared in Miletus, because the city was an important commercial seaport, in which people of different cultures met, contributing to the diversity of ideas (Russell, 2001).

The oceans have also become an important source of biological, minerals and energy resources. This importance tends to grow as new researches and technologies demonstrate the potential of ocean resources and enable their economic exploitation. The influence of the sea extends even to the coastal areas, where the majority of the world's population lives, being subject, therefore, to the climatic changes affecting the marine environment. According to the United Nations, “over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods” (UN, 2015)

All these characteristics of the oceans can be synthetized in the concept of “the enabling power of the oceans: the ability of the oceans to contribute to the maintenance of life on Earth, to be source of wealth, to allow the flow of goods, people and information and the projection of military power at local, regional and global levels” (SILVA, 2017). The enabling power of the oceans is the main reason why nations search to increase their sea power.

Maritime Trade, Sea Power and Globalization

For Alfred T. Mahan the sea is a great path, open to all, which allows the free flow of people and goods. He points out that the history of the sea power shows the enormous influence of this transport in commerce, wealth and power of nations, but, at the same time, it reveals how

the disputes and competition often culminated in armed conflicts. So, he states, “the control of the sea is and has been a great factor in the history of the world” (Mahan, 1987, iii).

Mahan did not define precisely the concept of sea power. Sometimes he uses it as the ability of the military power in its naval expression to control the sea and many times he uses it as the set of commercial maritime activities, the access to markets and the possession of colonies contributing to a nation’s wealth and power (Crowl, 1986). To make the concepts clear, “sea power is the ability of a State to use the sea and influence the range of sea-related activities in the political, economic, social, environmental, and military domains.” (Silva, 2017). The naval power is only the military component of the sea power.

Mahan considers that trade and politics are interlinked, and nations are bonded by their interests in such a way that the whole forms an articulated system (Mahan, 1902:144). This system is what has been called today globalization. This phenomenon has dramatically increased the flow of information, financial and trade transactions, and also increased the interdependence between nations, with direct consequences on the flow of world trade, which in turn has produced an extraordinary development of shipping (Silva, 2007). Moreover, the oceans are an important source of energy. The oil offshore production has increased to one-third of the oil world production and new methods of exploration “allow the search for oil and gas to a depth of 12 kilometers below the ocean floor” (World Ocean Review, 2017:1).

Globalization and sea power are closely interlinked. Insofar, whenever the process of globalization intensifies, the maritime power develops, and vice-versa. Regarding its economic importance, the globalization has increased the flow of commercial transactions, yielding an extraordinary development of the maritime transport, which represents approximately 80% of the world total trade, measured by volume, and 70% measured by value. According to a report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in 2015 there were 89.464 commercial vessels in service at the sea. Thus “maritime transport is the backbone of international trade and global economy” (UNCTAD, 2015).

The process of globalization has contributed to the expansion of the world maritime system. As stated by Reason and Freyman, “all the economies of the world... depend for their prosperity upon uninterrupted worldwide commerce” (Reason and Freyman, 1988). Although most nations participate and benefit from this system, the nations with great sea powers are the ones that have the greatest benefits.

Mahan considers that the main elements that affect the sea power of a nation are the geographic position, the size of the coast and the number of areas suitable for good ports, the number of the population and its inclination for sea related activities, and the character of the government able to produce good policies (Mahan, 1987). More recently, Erik Grove has updated these elements by dividing them into those of the first order: economic strength and technological capacity and socio-political culture; and those of the second order: geographical position, dependence on maritime trade and the resources of the sea and government policy and perceptions (Grove, 1990).

The sea power of a nation includes the Blue Economy, with some established sectors, such as: extraction and commercialization of marine living resources, marine extraction of oil and gas, port activities, shipbuilding and repair; maritime transport, and coastal tourism. Moreover, there are still new sectors that are being developed, some in a more advanced stages than others, like renewable energy offshore wind, tidal and wave energy, biotechnology, coastal protection and desalination and deep-seabed mining (EU, 2018). In addition, the oceans are the repository of undersea cables that form the backbone of global communication, accounting for more than 90% of all voice and data transmitted worldwide (Chesnoy, 2016).

So, there is a circular movement that relates the nation’s economic strength and technological capacity to the improvement of its sea power and the development of this power contributing to reinforce the nation’s economic strength and technological capacity. Thus, globalization and sea power are interconnected: in the economic sphere, by the use of the sea for the production of wealth, maritime transport, and the global communications system; and in the sphere of international politics, by the military capacity (naval power) to protect this

globalized system and project power at the local, regional and global levels, in order to influence, persuade, coerce, threaten or wage war (Silva, 2017).

The expansion and the importance of the economic and financial activities of globalization have also brought consequences to the post-Cold War international security and defense system. Although the worldwide trade and the Blue Economy on one hand, contribute to the cooperation among nations, on the other hand, it fosters competition, threats and tensions, as can be seen in the next topic.

The Enabling Power of the Oceans and Military Power

The globalized maritime system is subjected to threats and tensions. Basically, they can be of three kinds: the classical tensions, the tensions increased by the process of globalization itself, and the neo-traditional threats or commonly called "new threats".³

Classic tensions may include the search for power and security of states; military interventions (which are becoming more and more frequent after the Cold War, as in the cases of Iraq, Libya and Syria); disputes over islands and maritime borders, which is the case of the Arctic, the South China Sea, the Falklands/Malvinas and the countless conflicts related to the demarcation of maritime borders established in the Law of the Sea; and the tensions generated by the contestation of the rights of countries within their jurisdictional waters, due to different interpretations about articles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As stated by Ken Booth (1989), the naval-military dimension of the Law of the Sea was a neglected issue in the Convention. Moreover, the increase in national jurisdiction over

³ The term "new threats" does not seem to clearly identify the phenomenon, because threats such as piracy, armed robbery at sea, terrorism and international crime are admittedly very old. Thus, the term "neo-traditional" seems to be best applied to describe these threats. They differ from classic threats, considered to be those related to interstate conflicts. On the other hand, the word "neo" makes it clear that these crimes are being improved by exploring the new possibilities of a globalized world, including the use of networks and new technologies.

maritime spaces, which he called "insinuating jurisdiction" or "territorialisation of the sea, may generate conflicts between states, especially with those naval powers that defend the maximum freedom of navigation.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is one item in the dispute for natural resources. International fishing fleets, often operating under flags of convenience, are fishing in the waters of developing countries, generating tensions. Illegal fishing produces an estimated loss of about \$23 billion annually and is often linked to other illegal activities such as slave labour, human and drug trafficking (FAO, 2019). Therefore, the protection of fishing stocks within Exclusive Economic Zones against predatory fishing demands a greater effort from the States, especially the navies and coast guards. This effort may be extend to the high seas adjacent to the EEZ, as a way to preserve migratory species whose overfishing may cause damage to the State, with the consequent increase in the possibility of conflicts between the countries involved (Silva, 2007).

Marine pollution is another negative aspect of globalization, affecting the safety of the seas. In addition to pollution originated in the continent and discharged into the oceans, globalization has increased the number of ships, increasing the risks of pollution caused by accidents or the discharge of polluting material. The cost reduction policy has also led several countries to adopt flags of convenience, when the owner of a vessel registers it in another country where costs are lower and control and inspection are precarious. As stated in the UNCTAD report: "... more than 50% of the world fleet sails under flags of convenience" (UNCTAD, 2018). Millions of tons of chemical and oil cargoes are transported by sea, with a high risk of accidents whenever reliable ships do not perform this transport.

The third group of tensions in maritime spaces are related to neo-traditional threats such as piracy and armed robbery at sea, illegal immigration, terrorism, transnational crime including drug trafficking. Piracy, a phenomenon that survives the centuries, and armed robbery at sea continue to plague the seas. According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in 2018, 223 incidents of piracy and armed robbery were reported. The areas most affected were

West Africa, with 81 incidents; the South China Sea, with 57 incidents; the West Indian Ocean, with 36 incidents; the Caribbean and the South American Atlantic coast, with 22 incidents; and the Straits of Malacca and Singapore with 8 incidents (IMO, 2019). In addition to piracy, other "international maritime crimes are becoming increasingly sophisticated, with criminal groups exploiting jurisdictional deadlocks and law challenges on the high seas," according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (United Nations, 2019, p.1).

Terrorism is another source of tension for maritime security. This threat has led to heavy investments in maritime safety and changes in international norms, including those related to the IMO. Nevertheless, historically, there have been only few sporadic cases of terrorist attacks at the sea, such as the Italian cruise ship *Achilles Lauro*, the *USS Cole* and the attack on the tanker *MV Limburg*, in Yemen. More recently, there was a terrorist incursion from the sea but against land-based facilities in Mumbai, in 2008. Terrorists have been using the sea as a way to transport material and personnel. Thus, maritime terrorism constitutes only "a tiny percentage of terrorist acts" (Singh, 2019). This may be explained because "terrorist actions seek the psychological impact, such as that provided by the images of the 9/11 attacks. An attack at sea, far from the eyes of the media, would not have the desired impact. Second, because in order to act at sea outside the areas near the ports, greater investment would be needed whose cost-effectiveness might not be as attractive compared to the possibility of terroristic attacks on land" (Silva, 2007: 100).

This set of tensions and threats highlights the role of naval power. As Mahan states, naval power plays an important role in the economy and international politics. The enabling power of the oceans that allows the free flow of people and goods, as discussed above, is also critical to allow the projection of military power around the globe. On the one hand, naval power is fundamental for nations that aspire or is a great power, on the other hand, it is important to defend the interests of other states and the globalized maritime system.

The oceans favor the mobility of naval forces allowing them to operate on national and international waters and access the maritime areas near the coastlines, where "half the world's

population lives within 60 km of the sea, and three-quarters of all large cities are located” (UNEP, 2017:1). The International Law grants the freedom of navigation and the naval forces can legally operate in international maritime areas or approach the territorial waters of a nation using the right of “innocent passage – that it is not prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of the coastal state” (UN, 1982:41). According to Modelski and Thompson. “Naval power is an essential component of the world order...in the absence of a global conflict the naval power of the great power plays a critical role in protecting the status quo established in the last global conflict” (Modelski and Thompson, 1988, p.12).

The maritime waters are highways for those nations who are able to exploit the enabling power of the oceans for peace or war. These highways allow a maritime power to have sea borders with all the coastal states of the globe and project military power all over the world, influencing the international politics. The capacity of global reach is paramount to a great power to protect its interests, influence other countries and maintain the international order. “Sea power is the *sine qua non* of action in global politics because it is the necessary (though not the sufficient) condition of operations of global scope” (Modelski and Thompson, 1988:13). According to these authors, the History shows that world powers have been sea powers. For them, Portugal could be considered the first world power, during the period of four decades after 1500.

The Atlantic Center for Defence Capacity Building

The North Atlantic and the South Atlantic have distinct geopolitics and strategic context. Nevertheless, there are common goals that unite the countries and make possible the cooperation among Atlantic Ocean countries. Some of these goals are: the protection of the maritime globalized system, the maritime scientific research and the development of the Blue Economy.

The protection of the globalized maritime system is one important common goal to all nations. As stated above, this system is subjected to tensions provoked by neo-traditional

threats, such as, IIU fishing, marine pollution, piracy and armed robbery at sea, illegal immigration, terrorism, transnational crime including drug trafficking. These are threats that affect the Atlantic, especially, in the Gulf of Guinea. The Atlantic Center for Defense Capacity Building may have an important role to contribute to reduce these threats, in coordination with other Atlantic Ocean countries. A multinational inter-agency center can be an important platform to get and share information, offer courses and training, organize seminars and be a locus of coordination among organizations and several initiatives that has being developed in the Gulf. Moreover, the Center could contribute to think new ways to improve the cooperation with fragile African States, in order to help them to strengthen their maritime security state capacity and their Blue Economy.

The United Nation has established climate change and the conservation and sustainability use of the oceans, seas and marine resources as two of the 17 “Sustainable Development Goals to Transform Our World”. According to the UN, there is a scientific concern with the oceans level and with the environmental protection of the maritime spaces and “For open ocean and deep sea areas, sustainability can be achieved only through increased international cooperation to protect vulnerable habitats”⁴. Portugal has already been promoting a multinational Atlantic Interactions research agenda to contribute to these goals, and the Atlantic Center for Defence Capacity Building may have a role in the scientific studies related to the marine environment of the Atlantic.

According to the Portuguese Government, the Atlantic Interactions research agenda “is to be governed by an international network of research, academic and business organizations worldwide, across both south and north Atlantic countries as well as non-Atlantic countries, through an intergovernmental scientific organization: the Atlantic International Research Center. This center is to be established in the form of an inclusive international research

⁴ United Nations. Life Bellow Water. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/14.pdf>. [accessed;11 Feb.2020]

network organization with headquarters in Azores Island.”⁵ Thus, it is important to have coordination between the two Centers, in order to contribute to a Portuguese holistic Atlantic Ocean strategy.

CONCLUSION

The enabling power of the oceans is paramount to humankind, and this is the main reason why nations search to increase their sea power. Sea power and globalization are closely interlinked: in the economic sphere by the Blue Economy, the use of the sea for the production of wealth, for maritime transport, and for the global communications system using submarine cables; and in the sphere of international politics by the military capacity (naval power) to protect this globalized system and project power at the local, regional and global levels.

This globalized maritime system is subjected to threats and tensions. Basically, they can be of three kinds: the classical tensions, the tensions increased by the process of globalization itself, and the neo-traditional threats or commonly called "new threats." This set of tensions and threats highlights the role of naval power. As Mahan states, naval power plays an important role in the economy and international politics. On the one hand, naval power is fundamental for nations that are or aspire to be a great power, on the other hand, it is important for the defence of the interests of other states and the globalized maritime system.

According to Modesky and Thompson, “naval power is an essential component of the world order”, and historically, world powers have been sea powers. For the authors, Portugal was the first world power, during the first four decades of the 16th century. Portugal is nowadays an ocean country: a country that has more jurisdiction over maritime spaces than over land

⁵ United Nations. Atlantic Interactions A strategic research agenda Integrating Space, Climate-Energy, Oceans and Data Sciences through North-South / South-North Cooperation. By the Government of Portugal. Available at: <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/?id=18518>. [accessed: 11 Feb.2020]

spaces. According to Adriano Moreira, “Portugal has an inevitable relationship with the Sea, it has windows of freedom that the Sea offers...” (Moreira, 2013).

In the next two years, Portugal is going to have two windows of opportunity. It is going to co-host with Kenya, in Lisbon, the 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference as one important step to contribute to the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals, newly launched by the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.⁶ Moreover, in 2021, Portugal is going to hold the Presidency of the Council of the UE. These are two opportunities that may help to advance measures related to the Atlantic Ocean and the implementation of the Atlantic Center.

The construction of a multinational, inter-agency, Atlantic Center for Defence Capacity Building, aiming to contribute to protect the maritime globalized system and to develop ocean scientific research, in coordination with other Ocean Atlantic States, is an important contribution to “the peaceful uses of the seas and oceans, the equitable and efficient utilization of their resources, the conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection and preservation of the marine environment...”, as stated in the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea.

⁶ United Nations. 2020 UN Ocean Conference Lisbon, 2-6 Jun. 2020. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/ocean2020>. [accessed: 13 Feb.2020]

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