

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ATLANTIC'S EVOLUTION

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Introduction

In the last two centuries, several key moments have defined the Atlantic Basin's history that help us understand its present. This chapter endeavours to present a comprehensive overview of this evolution, pointing out key events that set up the historical links that still play a role in the Atlantic. In the first section, following a chronological approach, it shows how the American and the French Revolutions were milestones in the balance of power in this area. Since then, a division between Europe, the Americas and Africa has evolved beyond the common historical, cultural and linguistic ground that composes the Atlantic. The second section attempts to show how human flows, economic exchanges and energy resources in the Atlantic remain the chief common drivers shaping the division of the Atlantic, contributing, paradoxically, to an interdependent evolution of the basin even during periods of political separation. Finally, the third section focuses on the 20th century, which is marked by several attempts at *rapprochement* between the various sides of the Atlantic. Following the rise of the United States as hegemonic power, this process led to a greater closeness between both sides of the North Atlantic, yet failed to yield results due to the gradual emergence of new powers in the South Atlantic. The Atlantic is still a heterogeneous and divided region, mostly due to geopolitical and ideological factors. However, its multilateral tradition and the development of different regional integration schemes might help to foster cooperation between the various shores.

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The role of historical links in the Atlantic

An overview of the balance of power in the Atlantic Space makes it clear that before us we have a deeply interconnected area that evolved from common historical ground. The concept of the Atlantic developed by Jacques Pirenne, identifying it as a “European sea”, controlled from the 16th to the 18th century by Portugal, Spain, England, France and the Netherlands, somehow still prevails (Pirenne 1948). However, it would be naïve to regard the Atlantic as a united, homogenous area. Within the Atlantic region, there are concrete elements of globalisation, with people, commodities, technologies of transportation and communication creating specific interdependence links between the four shores of the Atlantic Space.

Atlantic studies scholars generally acknowledge that the end of the early modern period in the late 18th century was a milestone for the space. Of course, defining end dates is a complex issue and historical processes can be protracted in time, but it appears clear that, after 1750, the colonial, cultural and economic ties between Africa, Europe and the Americas began to gradually change. In this sense, the American Revolution is seen as an “opening salvo” in the transformation of the Americas, which had repercussions in Europe and Africa during the long 19th century (Gabaccia 2004). Additionally, if the American Revolution can be considered a starting point for this transformation, the subsequent French Revolution (1789) definitely signals the decisive political rupture between America and Europe (Thornton 2012). Between 1811 and 1830, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Brazil all became independent states. As the almost immediate proclamation of republics in the former Spanish colonies of America seem to show four decades after the American and French Revolutions, these political independences would not have been possible without the revolutions (Chasteen 2008; Elliott 2006; Costa 1999).

The influence of the American and French Revolutions on Latin America was twofold. On the one hand, the majority of the newly independent republics adopted the political and institutional system of the US (division of powers, strong federalism, phrasing of the constitutional texts), albeit always “adapted to local and social conditions” (Thornton 2012). However, ideologically, the egalitarian principle of the French revolution prevailed, as reflected in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which inspired the republican leaders in South America (Klooster 2009). As Donna Gabaccia puts it, in the wake of anti-colonial and republican evolutions, ideologies of nation-building also attempted to rewrite Atlantic cultural connections. The United States initially announced its intention of building a new American civilisation independent of Europe, while Latin American nations more often promised to refine European civilisation in a new environment (Gabaccia 2004).

The independence of the United States from the British Crown and the end of the Portuguese and Spanish empires marked the division between the old and the new worlds. In 1823, the US declared the Monroe Doctrine, consolidating the Western Hemisphere’s autonomy and striving to prevent any attempt at restoring European power in America (Marcos 2014). In the following decades, the separation be-

tween the Americas and Europe was further established as part of the international status quo, assured by an informal alliance between the United States and Great Britain (Morgenthau 1962). In fact, the *Great Rapprochement* experienced in US-British relations in the final years of the 19th century enabled a convergence of interests between these two powers. The role of the US as the power responsible for American security was gradually recognised and, after the Spanish loss of Cuba in 1898, European possessions in the Americas became residual.

At the same time, in Atlantic Africa, the second half of the 19th century witnessed a new period of European imperial expansion. Triggered by the Industrial Revolution and a direct consequence of the growing competition between the European powers, the scramble for Africa changed the type of colonialism in practice until then. In search of new markets, filled with a sense of superiority granted by their control of technology and supported by the latest scientific developments, the Europeans embarked on a process of penetration and occupation of territories inside the continent. With the end of the slave trade, Africa quickly became the centre of dispute between European powers, who had not yet recovered from their colonial losses in the Americas, in a process that established many of the frontiers that currently divide the majority of African countries (Hobsbawm 1989; Simms 2013).

After the end of formal European political dominance over the Americas, in terms of economic exchanges, free and unfree migratory tendencies and the circulation of ideas, the Atlantic was, during the whole 19th century, a highly interdependent area.

Human flows, economic drivers and energy resources in the Atlantic

Despite the many changes it has suffered over time, the Atlantic can still be seen as an interdependent area. The region's history was shaped by a variety of coherent and constant elements that can be traced in several dimensions. After the end of formal European political dominance over the Americas, in terms of economic exchanges, free and unfree migratory tendencies and the circulation of ideas, the Atlantic was, during the whole 19th century, a highly interdependent area. Indeed, notwithstanding its formal independence, the American republics were dependent until the early 20th century on "European capital, European commerce and European influence" (Rothschild 2013). There was, in fact, a sense of community shared by the two shores of the Atlantic, in particular between Latin America and the European powers.

As Marcos, Sanches and Farrés (2015) have pointed out, one of the constant and more influential foundations of the Atlantic as a region was the free and forced migration movement from Africa and Europe to the Americas during the 19th and 20th centuries. Technology and communications, the development of the modern capital and economic system, new migrations, cultural exchanges and the end of the slave trade and slavery itself caused the Atlantic to change drastically over the 19th century, in terms of both transcontinental and transnational connections. The transition around the 1850s from sail to steam brought about an increase in mass migrations from Europe to the Americas, which by the end of the 19th century were connected by a particularly dense and secure transatlantic network of high-speed communications. Between 1820 and 1920, the world experienced explosive population growth that led migratory waves of European citizens to Canada, the US and Latin American countries.

Figure 1. Annual number of US legal permanent residents, fiscal years (1820-2013)



Source: Migration Policy Institute 2013.

Figure 2. Immigration to the US (selected decades*)

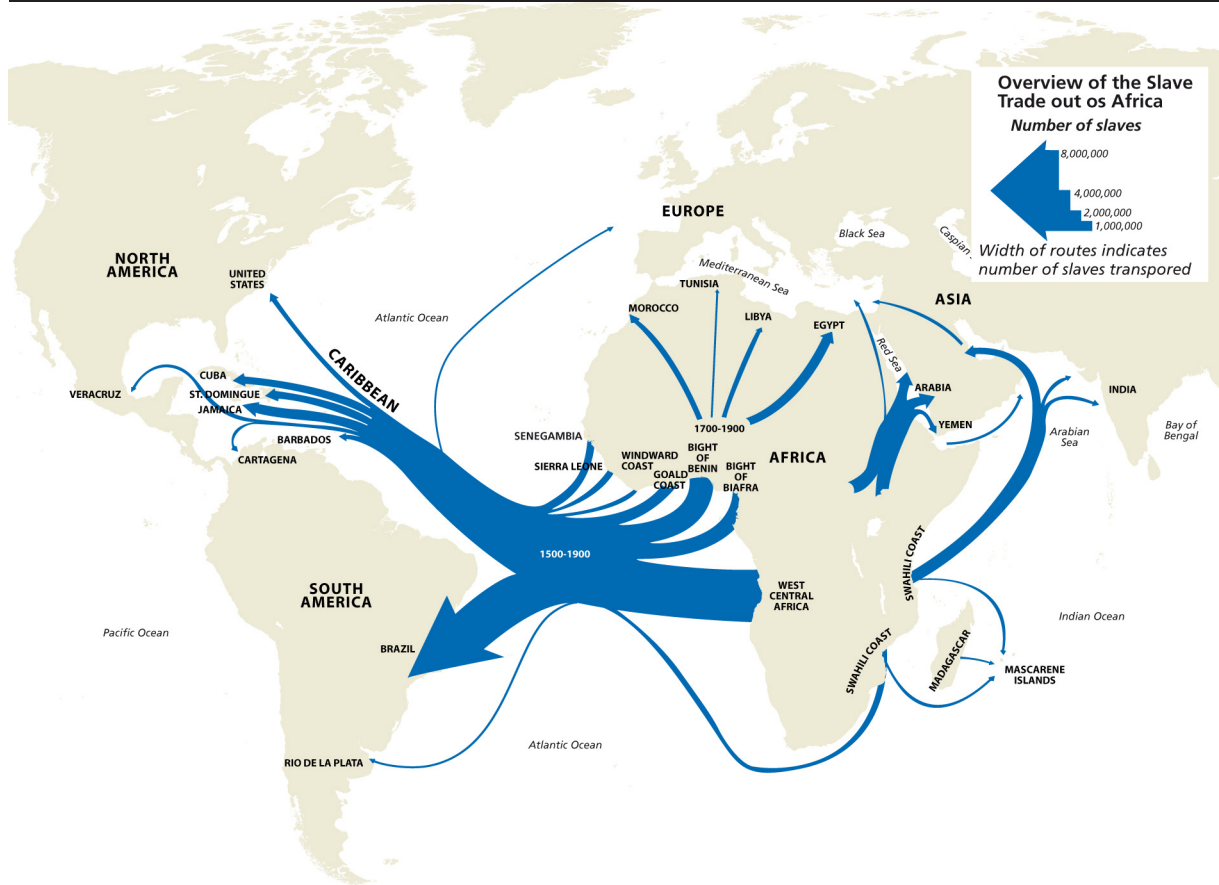


* The data cover only the specific period and do not reflect the total migration from each nationality.
Source: Created by CIDOB using data from Overy 2007.

This movement was also a response to the end of the slave trade which, between the 16th and 19th centuries, nurtured the Atlantic economic system. There is no doubt that the empires and the economies of the early Atlantic were built on the slave trade that connected Africa, Europe and the Americas. By the late 18th century, around 2.5 million black slaves were working on plantation complexes that produced valuable commodities such

as sugar, tobacco, coffee, cocoa, indigo and cotton in the Americas and Africa (Benjamin 2009). Due both to ideological and political issues – religious reasons and the impact of the Enlightenment, as well as the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo after the French Revolution – this system came to an end in the second half of the 19th century, with the emancipation of slaves in the United States between 1863 and 1865, Cuba in 1886 and Brazil in 1888. Still, the abolition of slavery in the Americas did not entail the end of slavery and forced labour in Africa, which was enforced by the imperial scramble for Africa in the late 19th century. In the Americas, if the collapse of slavery meant freedom for Africans and the African-Americans, it certainly did not put an end to racial discrimination. In other words, “freedom, however, did not often bring full independence, prosperity, justice or civil rights. In their different national homes, the former slaves and their progeny were generally desperately poor and occupied the bottom rung of society’s ladder” (ibid.).

Figure 3. Overview of the slave trade out of Africa (1500-1900)

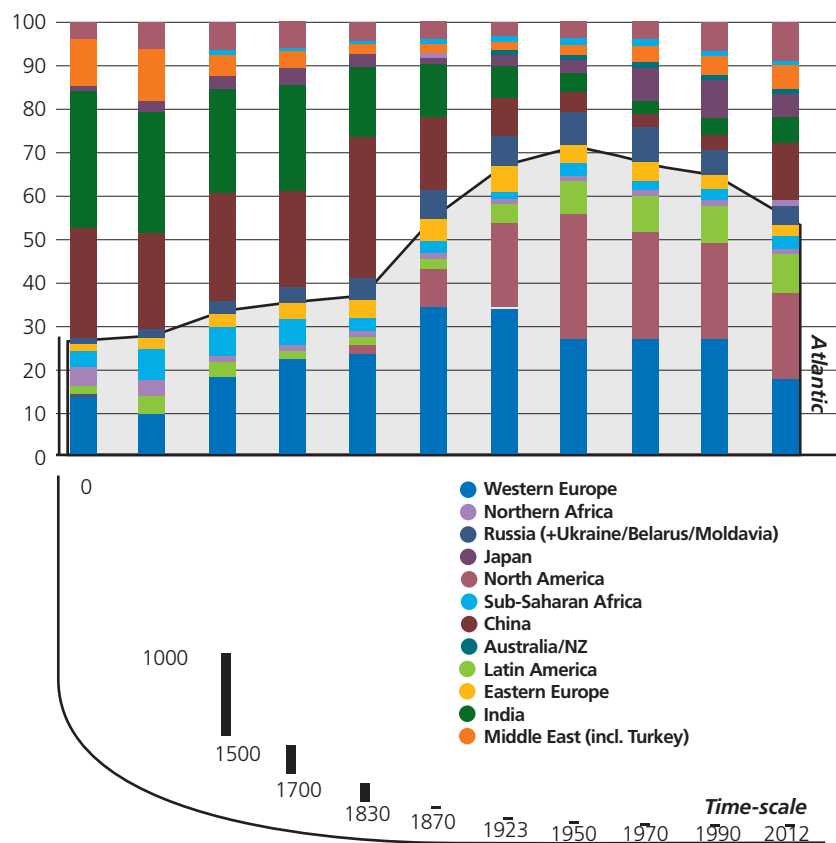


Source: Eltis and Richardson 2010.

Nevertheless, the end of slavery and the massive new flows of Europeans to the Americas was a process with a political impact, as it indirectly unleashed the rapid industrialisation and conquest of the western United States by new free farmers. In the end, it was responsible for the rise of the US as a power at the beginning of the 20th century (Valladão 2015). On the other hand, this process was responsible for the growth of an Atlantic mobility that still prevails

in this area, albeit in a different shape. The decolonisation process of the second half of the 20th century was responsible for this shift and led to the emergence of a new trend of mobility from African countries to their former European metropolis. At the same time Latin American workers looked to the US in search of better economic and social conditions. In the last twenty years, the liberalisation of trade and population flows in the North Atlantic has reinforced this South-North movement (Campos 2014). Closely connected to the human flows, the concentration of economic resources within the Atlantic Space can also be seen as a factor of unity and convergence. Generally accepted historical evidence clearly supports the idea that the Atlantic is an interdependent economic space where trade and investment have flourished to concentrate an unprecedented amount of wealth, particularly in the North Atlantic.

Figure 4. Share of world output by regions (from year 0 to 2012) (in %)



Source: Created by CIDOB using data from Piketty 2014 (original data).

The economic transformation of the “long 19th century” was characterised by a growing process of dependence and interdependence between the various shores of the Atlantic. During this century, the old structure of the Atlantic exchanges prevailed: “European hunger for Latin American primary products was balanced by Latino craving for capital and industrial and luxury goods from Europe and, later on, from the United States” (Valladão 2015). This network of dependence

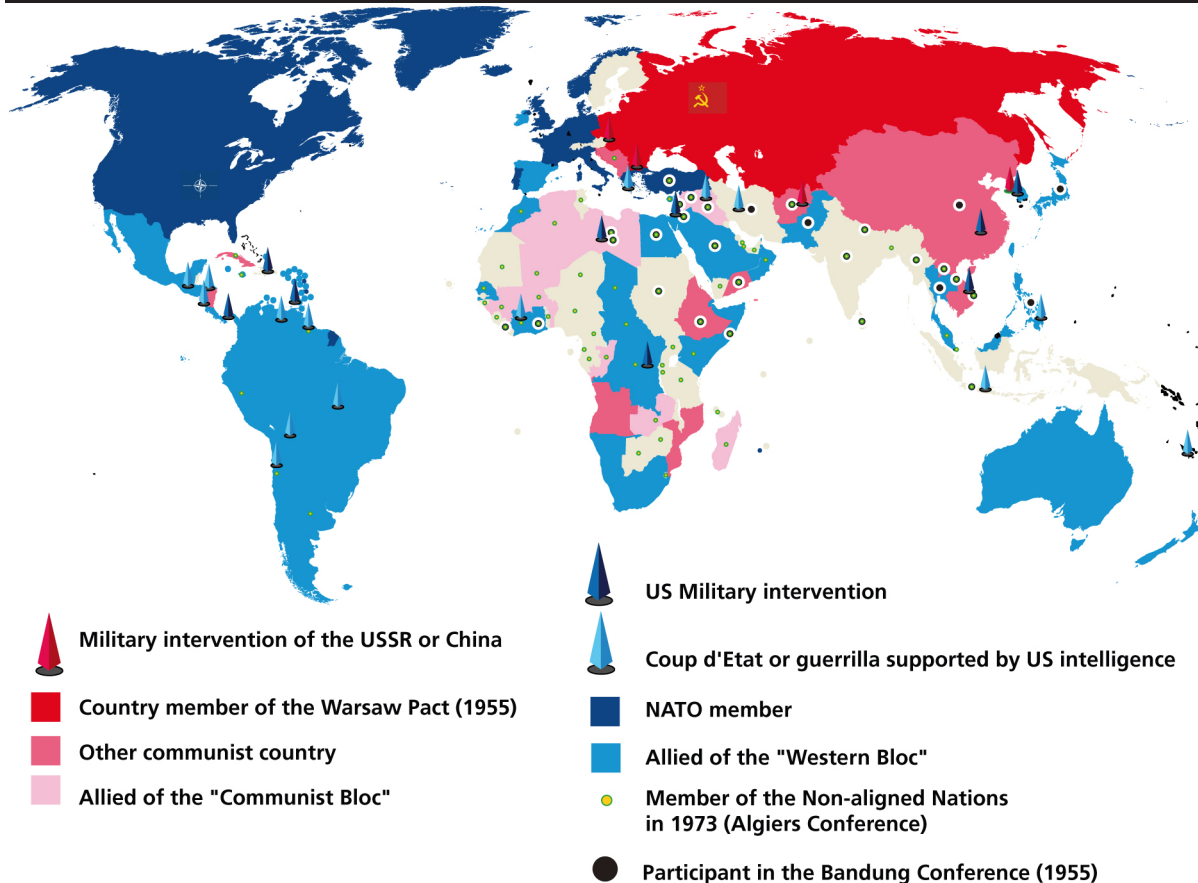
was most poignantly shown in the dramatic effects of the Great Depression. As Mary Nolan puts it, “the depression destroyed the institutions, ideas, and networks that had structured transatlantic relations” (Nolan 2012). The immediate response to the crisis was a global rush to protectionism and a focussing on what was considered to be the national interest, despite the narrowness of its definition. The Euro-American disputes around issues such as reparations and war debts, the gold standard, and protectionism eventually “reshaped the transatlantic and global flows of goods, capital, and people” (ibid.).

Post-World War II economic growth allowed the reconstruction of US-western Europe interdependence, a process that was fostered by the development of a financial and economic system of agencies and agreements, following the Bretton Woods conference in July 1944. Pinpointing the inter-war period as the main root of the European crisis that ended up in the World War II, states began to build a new monetary system in which currencies were convertible and nations could mutually benefit from the increase in trade. The goal was to create an alternative to the financial system that had prevailed in the pre-war decades, which would be less rigid than the gold standard, increasingly reliable and more mutually sustaining than a floating-rate currency regime. Following these conversations, the International Monetary Fund was set up “to facilitate the expansion and balanced growth of international trade”, and the proposal came up of an international trading organisation. Thus, in 1947, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (which in 1995 became the World Trade Organization) took shape. Its purpose was to establish an agreement on “tariffs and other concessions for contracting partners, as well as codes for trade practices and procedures for handling breaches and disputes” (Judt 2005).

Bretton Woods brought about deep changes in the global financial system, with consequences for the Atlantic Space. For the first time, there were unprecedented levels of external interference in national practices, while currencies became convertible to each other in order to foster international trade. At the same time, the dollar assumed the role of leading currency in terms of trade. For these reasons, “the post-war Bretton Woods system did not come about all at once” (Judt 2005). The Soviet Union stood outside this system and even countries like the United Kingdom and France only joined during the 1950s. It collapsed in the early 1970s, with the US dollar abandonment of the international monetary system erected in Bretton Woods, and was replaced by a liberalised floating-rate system that in a few years contributed to the devaluation of national currencies and to the increase of non-fuel commodities. This situation worsened as a consequence of the two oil shocks in the 1970s which introduced another element of uncertainty to the prosperous economies of the Western World. The growing competition from the newly industrialised countries of Asia, together with currency fluctuations and rising commodity prices, added to the stagnation of the developed economies of Europe and North America and led to increased unemployment rates (ibid.). These developments contributed to a profound change in global and Atlantic wealth distribution. Competition was the new motto in commercial terms, and this was accelerated with the end of the Cold War.

Resources and energy consumption have shaped the Atlantic Basin: mineral and fossil fuels have been crucial to the process of industrialisation and have had an impact on a larger process of transformation, which is connected to urbanisation and transportation.

Figure 5. A world divided in three blocks during the Cold War (1980)*



* Military interventions between 1945 and 1990.

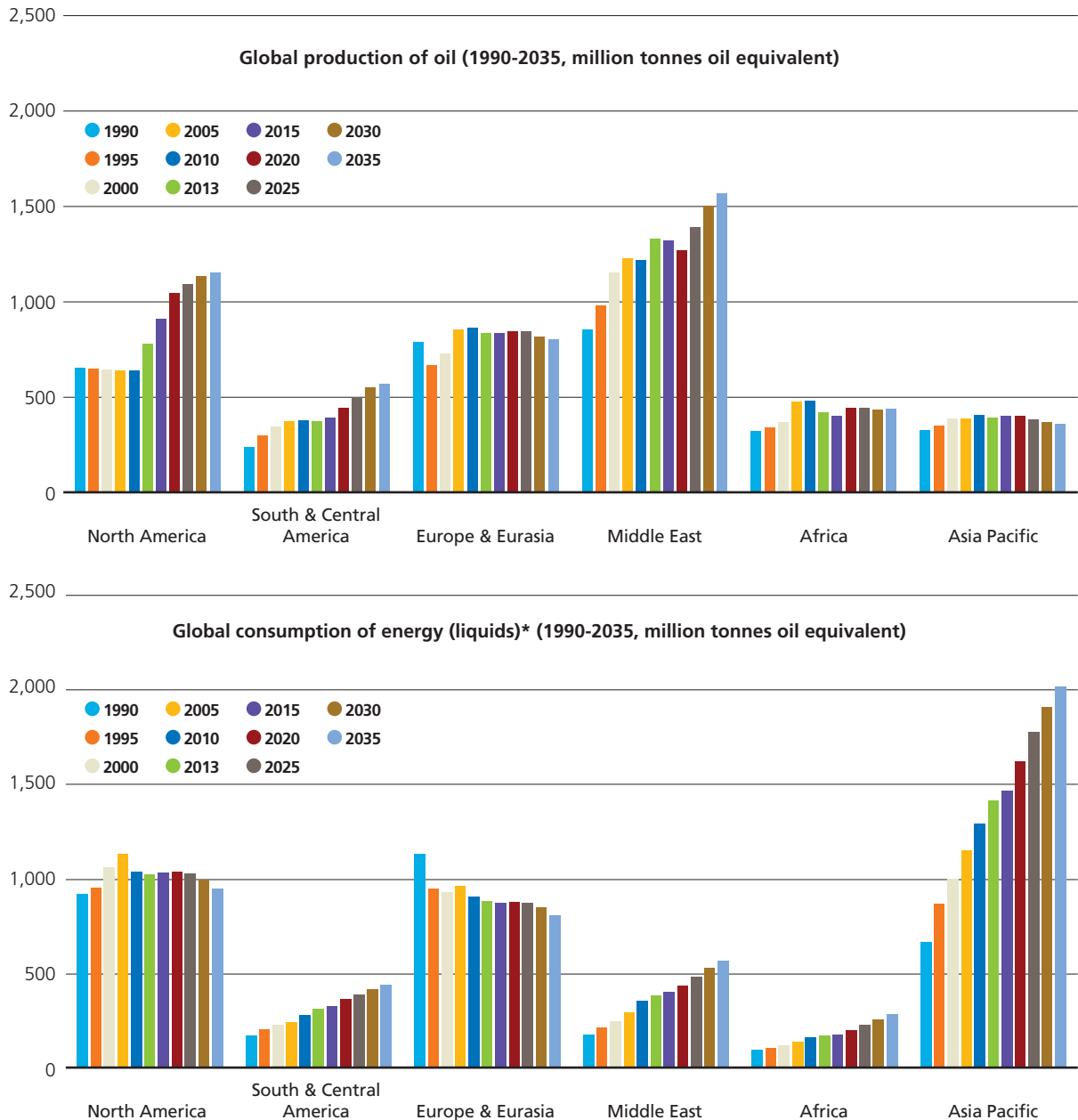
Source: Created by CIDOB adapting two existing maps published in the *Atlas du Monde Diplomatique 2013: Le tiers-monde entre deux blocs a la fin des années 1970* and *Interventions tous Azimuts*.

At the same time, in the South Atlantic, East-West confrontation forced Latin American and African countries to plead for financing and protection from western Europe, the US and USSR. This process was to some extent opposed by the emergence of economic "third-worldism", which proposed a national industrialisation process whose last aim was to "cut, as much as possible, the links between centre and periphery" (Valladão 2015). Nevertheless, in the end, North-South Atlantic economic interdependence was not hindered. If, in the North, we have industrialised countries that very much favour the establishment of free trade agreements, in the South, there are economies that are extremely dependent on the exploitation of natural resources and commodities (Marcos 2015).

Resources and energy consumption have shaped the Atlantic Basin and are deeply connected to its economic evolution. Since the Industrial Revolution, mineral and fossil fuels have been crucial to the process of industrialisation and have had an impact on a larger process of transformation, which is connected to urbanisation and transportation all over the basin. Furthermore, new demands for resources fostered colonial expansion in order to gain access to strategic raw materials. Despite the fact that, during the Cold War, much of this competition moved

eastward, making the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia the centre of gravity for energy supply, the last decades have been the stage for a revolution. Shale revolution in the North Atlantic and off-shore energy resources recently discovered in the South Atlantic have become game-changers for Atlantic trade, recovering part of its lost centrality and making it more attractive for the development of new transport connections, in particular with the Pacific (through an expanded Panama Canal and the Chinese commitment to fund a transcontinental railway from Peru to Brazil) (Isbell 2014).

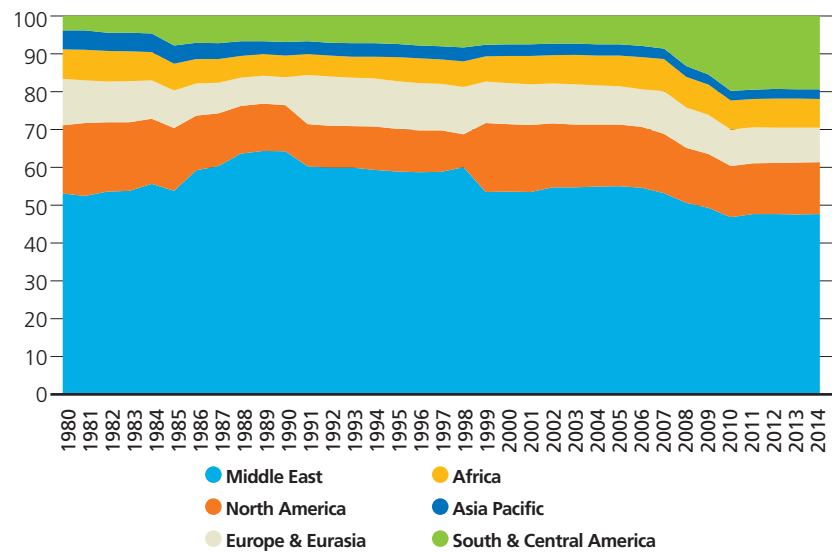
Figure 6. Global energy imbalances



* Including biofuels.

Source: Created by CIDOB using data from *Energy Outlook 2035*, British Petroleum (BP).

Figure 7. Share of global oil reserves, by region (1980-2014)



Source: Created by CIDOB using data from *Energy Outlook 2035*, British Petroleum (BP).

The political and security patterns and factors that shaped Atlantic history in the 20th century

As we have attempted to show in the previous sections, human flows, economic drivers and energy resources allowed the creation of an increasingly interdependent – though not homogenous or united – Atlantic. This is all the more evident in terms of political patterns and factors: ever since the American and French Revolutions a separation has emerged between the four shores of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the 20th century was marked by a constant search for transatlantic *rapprochement*, based on the vitality of multilateral approaches. In the end, this process is still an elusive quest, as the plurality of political behaviour in the Atlantic Space – with countries displaying varied foreign policy and normative orientations – is clearly shown (Alessandri 2015).

The period of transition in the Atlantic area begun by the World War I can be seen as an attempt to erode the dividing line created by the Monroe doctrine – responsible for the emergence of a pan-American cultural and political distinctiveness – between Europe and the Americas. French Prime Minister Georges Clémenceau aimed to establish an alliance between the United States, Great Britain and France, but US President Woodrow Wilson decided instead to promote the League of Nations. His goal was to arrange international relations in a whole new way, based on a notion of international community that mirrored the North American constitutional model. However, the Senate inhibited US participation in Wilson's project and despite Brazil's temporary membership (the country joined the North American intervention in the European war), the absence of the main American power in the League of Nations was deeply felt and contributed to the quick discrediting of the new intergovernmental organisation (Manela 2007; May, Rosecrance and Steiner 2010).

Additionally, what was probably the most remarkable consequence of Wilson's proposals was its effect on the existing colonial empires, both

in Asia and in Africa. The President's references to self-determination sparked the beginning of the decolonisation movement throughout the colonies. Though it would take until the second half of the 20th century to materialise, it sprang from the aftermath of World War I. Precisely because of this, Woodrow Wilson's project was always regarded by the European colonial powers, particularly Great Britain and France (the two most important victorious allies), with suspicion. These countries were unwilling to discuss their colonial empires and policies during the peace talks – except for those directly related to the former German and Ottoman territories outside Europe (Manela 2007). Therefore, what might have been a chance to overcome the division in the Atlantic (by means of the establishment of a community bound by the League of Nations) turned out to be a missed opportunity, either due to the United States' absence from the league or the unwillingness of the European powers to follow Wilson's principles regarding the idea of self-determination. Nonetheless, Woodrow Wilson's goal clearly shows that the United States was willing to cross the Atlantic and move closer to the European powers and to influence them, reversing the traditional flow in the Atlantic, in which the main political, economic and cultural influences usually went from Europe towards the Americas (Thompson 2010).

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World War II and the Cold War led to a second tentative *rapprochement* between the various shores of the Atlantic. The hegemonic power of the US in the Atlantic Space was finally established and lasts until the present day. The Anglo-American war coalition, defined in the Atlantic Charter in mid-August 1941, persisted after the victory over Nazism and was later enlarged with the Washington Treaty and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 (Simms 2013). The Atlantic Pact marked the stepping forward of the United States as the country responsible for the unity of the Western democracies (Lundestad 2005). At the same time, the Rio de Janeiro Treaty consolidated collective security in the Western Hemisphere. Emerging as the hegemonic power in the Atlantic, the United States became the sponsor of Western unity and Atlantic division (Kaplan 2007).

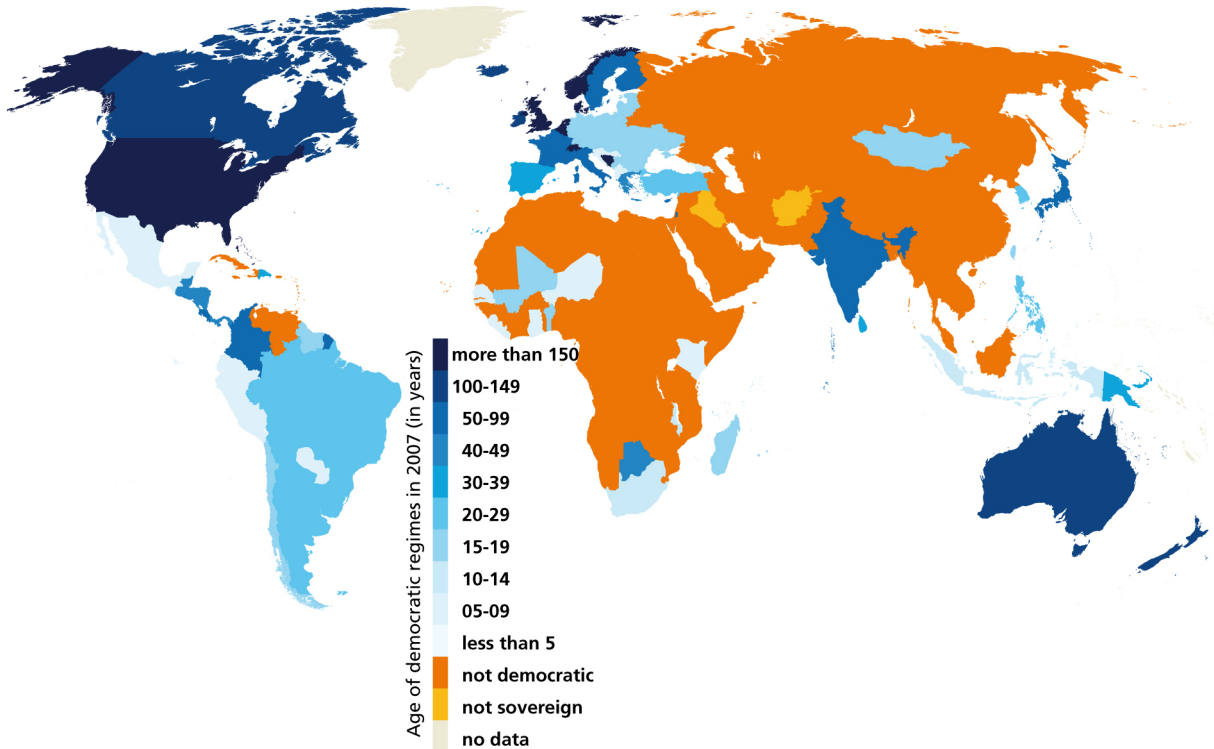
The strategic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was focussed on the East-West axis. In this dispute, the South Atlantic was of little relevance to the international balance of power during the Cold War¹. However, the post-World War II period, and especially the 1956 Suez *debacle*, confirmed the relative decline of western Europe, including France and the United Kingdom. There were two consequences of this decline. In Europe, the speeding up of the European integration process, based on the reinforced Bonn-Paris axis, strongly supported by both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations in Washington (Sou-tou 1996). In the end, this process promoted the "reaffirmation of Europe's distinctiveness", when compared to the Americas and Africa (Alessandri 2015).

With regard to Africa, it allowed the emergence of an independent fourth shore of the Atlantic. This so-called Euro-African unity dissolved in a succession of independences that defined the end of the European overseas empires, as well as the projects for building a "third force" as an alternative to the United States and Soviet Union. In the space of ten years, independent states replaced the former colonies in Africa and, on its Atlantic front, added a set of new states in Morocco, Liberia and South Africa, which were im-

1. As Ian Lesser puts it "the Cold War strongly reinforced this North Atlantic axis. (...) The Non-Aligned Movement notwithstanding, the importance of actors in the 'global south', where they mattered at all, was largely derivative of priorities and competitions centered elsewhere" (Lesser 2010).

mediately recognised as member-states by the United Nations. The political map of the African Atlantic was completed after the independence of Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Guinea-Bissau and Angola in 1974-1975, and, after the end of the Cold War, Namibia. At the end of this process, the political map of the Atlantic was finally defined as we know it today.

Figure 8. World map of the age of democratic regimes – years before 2007 since the (last) transition to a democratic regime



Source: Created by CIDOB adapting a map by Max Roser (<http://ourworldindata.org/data/political-regimes/democratisation/>), who uses data from Boix, Miller and Rosato 2012.

As for Latin America, on the other hand, the Cold War did not change the core nature of its relations with the United States. In fact, in Latin America, “the Cold War projection of US power was based on its existing strategic and economic predominance”, which dated back to the early 20th century. Institutionally, the grounds for assuring US control of Latin America were reshaped in the late-1940s with the signature of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) in 1947 (the first move of an alliance system established by the US worldwide during the Cold War of which NATO is the one that has endured) and the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) the next year. From a geopolitical point of view, the goal was now to fight communism, and Washington officials “expected a particularly high degree of conformity to US policy preferences” (Coatsworth 2010).

In the 1950s, and particularly after the victorious Cuban Revolution of 1959, the United States’ strategy for Latin America was definitely set in a Cold War framework. The ideological element became a key factor in any intervention from Washington, overriding any other foreign policy goals the US might have concerning that region (Dominguez 1999). The

different solutions found included intense US engagement, either through direct military intervention or by encouraging the countries' armed forces to stage coups (as, for instance, in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Chile). On the other hand, there was always local resistance, as the oppositions sought to distance them from the influence of the United States (Coatsworth 2010).

The Atlantic in the face of a new international order

The end of the Cold War paved the way for new possibilities in the Atlantic Space. Together, the decolonisation of Africa, the democratisation of Latin America and of some areas of southern Africa, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of major regional powers led to a new moment in inter-Atlantic relations (Buzan and Weaver 2003; Lynch and Crawford 2011; Whitehead 2001). In this sense, the post-Cold War and, even more, the post-9/11 developments led to a redefinition of the international order, with diminishing global leadership by the United States, and the emergence of new power in the Asia-Pacific region (China, India and Japan) and of some individual economies in the South Atlantic such as Brazil and South Africa. Throughout this period, the North Atlantic continued to benefit from the existence of a stable, stronger institutionalisation of transatlantic relations, whereas in the South the emerging powers seemed to adopt a strategy of greater autonomy.

Despite the North Atlantic losing its central position in international politics and the South Atlantic's minor strategic relevance, the so-called third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991) created a new trend in the interaction between the United States, Brazil and Latin America, in the relations between the Americas and Europe, and even in the relationship between the US, the European Union, Brazil and South Africa. In 2015, the majority of the countries in the Atlantic Basin are either democracies or partially free countries, though this does not mean that issues such as democracy and human rights are not still challenged today in these regions (Gratius 2015). Additionally, the participation of Latin America and Africa in the Non-Aligned Movement caused those countries to remain "focused on traditional principles such as sovereignty, non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states, and territorial integrity", notwithstanding South Atlantic multilateral experiments mostly shaped by the European integration project. In other words, it is too early to view norms and values as the unifying factor that might bring the Atlantic Basin countries closer (Alessandri 2015).

The recognition of common interests on international and regional security issues, the increase of economic exchanges between all parties and the growing relevance of the political and cultural links in international relations should lead to a strengthening of strategic interactions in the broad Atlantic Space. In fact, even though political values and norms such as democracy and the openness of political systems are the result of increasing economic development in the South Atlantic, the wider Atlantic is still a heterogeneous political area. The emergence of new players, demanding reform of the global governance institutions, is emphasising the pluralistic nature of the Atlantic. Only interregional multilateral initiatives focused on specific and defined priorities can prompt Atlantic actors to play a critical role in regional and global efforts (ibid.).

The recognition of common interests on security issues, the increase of economic exchanges and the growing relevance of the political and cultural links in international relations should lead to a strengthening of strategic interactions in the Atlantic Space.

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