

## EDITORIAL

**Ocean politics and governance: between complexity and necessity***Oceanopolítica y gobernanza de los océanos: entre la complejidad y la necesidad*

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Around the 1970s, a new phase of globalization began, which intensified after the fall of the socialist bloc and the Berlin Wall, rapidly increasing economic, political, and cultural exchange. This led to a growing interdependence between countries, a phenomenon fueled by various sources, including technological changes driven by the third industrial revolution from the 1950s and the fourth industrial revolution, whose onset is marked by the emergence of the internet, according to historians of science. It seems that we are witnessing a moment of backtrack, or an ebb in globalization, after a long period of its flow or growth (Fazio, 2002).

During the growth phase of globalization, economic diplomacy predominated, despite all the ups and downs, invasions here, and wars there. It was a moment when geopolitics seemed to diminish in relevance compared to the momentum of economic globalization, widespread economic treaties, and the use of economic instruments to achieve strategic objectives; that is, geoeconomics and the deepening of the financialization process, characterized by the dominance of the interests of the financial sector and the imposition of its logic on other sectors.

However, the rise of phenomena of global impact, such as China's proposal for the New Silk Road, and the emergence or resurgence of wars in Ukraine, Syria, or Yemen, has marked the revival of geopolitics as a central phenomenon in contemporary international relations. This

highlights the central role played by oceans and seas in 21st-century scenarios, both as peaceful means for the transportation of people and goods (Orempüller do Nascimento, 2019) and for the transit of troops and war supplies, as well as a source of strategic resources, such as oil.

They are, therefore, a means and a potential scenario for combat operations and the struggle for control of maritime routes. In this way, the oceans are a fundamental resource and a strategic objective. These transformations suggest a transition from a predominantly geoeconomic moment to one that is eminently geopolitical.

Nevertheless, the advances made in the boom phase of globalization, as happened in the past, are never entirely lost, and there are always advances that survive moments of setback. Among them are the experiences accumulated in the management of international trade, the progressive consolidation of international law in its various manifestations, including the Law of the Sea, or strategies of consensual and participatory governance, from the highest international levels to local spaces and territories, known as multilevel governance. In other words, there are surviving lessons for dialogue.

Among these achievements, two can serve as a catalyst for the development of populations and the achievement of lasting and secure global peace. These achievements have matured in recent decades and, due to their characteristics, encompass aspects of geopolitics, geoeconomics,

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and diplomacy, presenting an exemplary opportunity to help overcome the challenging panorama of contemporary global geopolitics.

They are ocean politics and ocean governance, the former as a source of knowledge and the latter as the foundation of agreements, which both provide an opportunity for dialogue and peace. Ocean politics is based on the conception of the ocean as a complex system, in which multiple actors with heterogeneous interests interact, and a plurality of factors intervene at various levels (Martínez, 1996). Based on this perspective, ocean politics is:

“The concept that acknowledges the existence of the ocean in the geographical environment and the influence it has on political decisions. Its fundamental purpose is to ensure that political management regards the ocean as the natural space for the development and future growth of the State” (Martínez, 1993).

In this line of thought, ocean politics emerges as a science whose objective is to integrate maritime spaces into development processes through the “territorialization” of the seas (Dávalos, 2018). Due to its complexity, and global geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics, ocean politics faces challenges that can be summarized in five areas (Unesco, 2021), namely:

Climate change and its strong impact on seas and oceans, manifested in polar ice melt, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and the loss of marine biodiversity. Vital marine ecosystems for human activities are at risk as a result.

Another challenge lies in the growing marine pollution that already affects numerous species, reaching such a level that islands of floating waste composed of plastic waste and chemicals have formed in the oceans. This, along with the discharge of wastewater, forms a critical scenario that is beginning to have effects on the sustainability of island communities.

The competition for marine resources is another central component of the issue facing ocean politics, as the oceans have been a fundamental source, from time immemorial, of both food and energy resources that rely on threatened biodiversity. Demographic growth, the increasing scarcity of these resources, and the strategic

demands of various powers are exacerbating the competition for maritime resources, generating tensions and conflicts.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing characterizes one of the most pressing elements, as it is estimated to represent at least 30% of global fishing, jeopardizing species that are fundamental for the balance of nature in the sea (Unesco, 2021).

Finally, piracy and terrorism constitute a growing threat to maritime security, creating even greater tensions and risks for maritime conservation and ocean governance.

Addressing this issue requires forms of governance that allow for the recognition of the rights of all parties, within a framework of constructive dialogue and on equal terms for all actors. This is in the context of the enormous complexity of the oceans from social, political, cultural, ecological, and environmental perspectives. To this end, ocean governance has been developed as the fundamental tool that enables the search for solutions to the pressing problems facing ocean politics.

Ocean governance includes the idea that the oceans are the basis for the survival of humanity, and therefore, their prosperity is a central component for future development and the conservation of the planet. Thus, a comprehensive perspective of ocean governance has been progressively built, including norms, laws, institutions, policies and strategies, and the economic interests involved in them. It also addresses security issues aimed at managing ocean resources, including formal and informal institutions with increasingly horizontal processes of discussion, design, and solution-seeking on a consensual basis (Singh & Ort, 2020). It is a macro-process that is far from perfect but represents significant progress (Blythe, Armitage, Bennett, Silver, & Song, 2021).

Various studies have pointed out the challenges facing ocean governance. Perhaps the most significant was produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) in 2021, identifying four major challenges for ocean governance with a total of eleven components.

The first challenge is the fragmentation of governance derived from political, sectoral, stakeholder and knowledge segmentation, and territorial and institutional fracture. Capacity and awareness issues are another obstacle to ocean governance, represented by a lack of awareness of the issues concerning the seas and a lack of capacity to develop global policies due to various obstacles. Scale issues constitute another element that ocean governance faces, particularly in spatial, temporal, and representational dimensions. And finally, uncertainty and change, through emerging issues and complex problems, complete the panorama identified by Unesco as the greatest challenges for ocean governance (Unesco, 2021).

In any case, progress in ocean governance stands as a small oasis in the desert of growing global bellicosity, paving the way for the development of ocean politics that, in a process of mutual feedback, allows the creation of channels for dialogue. Its preservation, conservation, and maturation should be a central focus of states, international politics, and intergovernmental organizations.

Therefore, ocean politics is a discipline that faces the complexity of the seas and, hand in hand with ocean governance, constitutes a field for the study of the problems facing water bodies around the planet, the search for solutions, and the implementation of policies to mitigate their pressing issues.

In fact, there is a widespread consensus on the direct relationships among the main risks faced by the oceans directly related to governance, such as:

“(1) the impacts of the overexploitation of marine resources... (2) inequitable distribution of access to and benefits from marine ecosystem services... (3) inadequate or inappropriate adaptation to changing ocean conditions” (Haas *et al.*, 2022).

Colombia, with its enormous water wealth, the privilege of having coasts on two oceans, and having advanced in recent decades with the efforts of the Colombian Navy, constitutes a country that, like few others, has enormous potential to emerge as a regional power in ocean

politics and with sufficient authority to propose ocean governance schemes on the global stage. While the task has begun, there is still a long way to go.

Given its complex characteristics, delving into the understanding of ocean politics and its governance is a necessity for the country's development.

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