

Report WS1

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The first Working Session concentrated on mapping good practices and lessons learned that have emerged as a sub-product from varied crises affecting the whole of the Atlantic region. A set of operative questions was brought forward beforehand with the aim of guiding contributions and instilling a debate between speakers and participants, including:

1. How to improve the role of the military in the provision of emergency humanitarian aid in the Atlantic?
2. How to improve inter-regional coordination for the design, planning and execution of contingency measures?
3. How have Armed Forces fared in terms of military health cooperation within broader Atlantic defence cooperation initiatives?
4. How to best integrate military and civilian resources in rapid reaction mechanisms, policies and activities?

These propositions were explored with an explicit focus on the Atlantic, consensually perceived as a space vital for the maintenance of existing democratic-liberal frameworks. Its strategic value becomes further evident when attending to several security-related dimensions, such as the fight against a variety of traffics (e.g. human, drugs), piracy and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; the existence of vast energetic resources; extensive regional food security implications; or the considerable maritime strategic routs that pass through it. Multiple international and regional institutions also characterize this space and have provided occasional piece-meal solutions. However, given the difficulties in tackling all these domains in a wholesome format, decisive actions invariably require a more cooperative approach.

In this context, presentations and discussions in this Working Session focused on four issue areas: 1) the evolving nature of crises and their respective responses; 2) opportunities for more Civ-Mil cooperation whenever such situations arise; 3) the need for inter-regional cooperation in order to provide more comprehensive solutions; and 4) the potential roles the Atlantic Centre can assume in this regard.

1) The changing nature of crises

The first acknowledgement concerns the fact that, despite a recurrent call for standardization and uniformity between regional and international stakeholders, there is still not one single model of conduct and operations that can pre-emptively fit all potential crises; instead, each situation requires a different tailor-made response. This does not mean that the specificities of crises should stand in the way of laying the groundwork for how best to deal with their aftermath. But it does signal that the growing

complexity of emergencies can only be effectively counteracted through more preventive planning rather than through an emphasis on one-size-fits-all solutions.

A second element concerns the growingly diverse nature of crises themselves, particularly when considering the historical track-record thus far. Extreme weather events, for instance, have become more frequent and deadlier in recent decades. This, in turn, has a corresponding impact in terms of how to plan for rapid onset disasters. But global emergencies such as the one unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic have also shifted away the focus from national capabilities alone and brought the international community more to the forefront, as the need for a more central coordination role became glaring.

A third outtake resides in accounting for how crises may travel in contemporary settings. Whether due to the sheer magnitude of disasters or the communication links provided by globalization, crises can easily affect multiple supply chains, regions, and communities throughout the globe. This generates two immediate implications: (i) the fundamentals behind what can be considered an instance of crisis need to be reconsidered as the actual range may extend well beyond the most immediate zone of impact; and (ii) concrete regional spaces such as the Atlantic may very well be affected by the fallout of a crisis originally triggered far away from its territorial limits.

Fourth, crises often bring established cooperation frameworks under stress. The case of COVID-19 is, yet again, illustrative of the shortcomings made evident at multiple levels, for example, within the European Union (EU) (e.g. competition for the purchase of emergency, sanitary, intensive care, and protection material). Overall, the pandemic has demonstrated that global interdependence does not necessarily translate into more immediate or more effective coordination, particularly when coping with crises of this scale. When all countries dwell on a common problem and, simultaneously require assistance, more collaborative efforts become essential to overcome every possible repercussion. However, those efforts should be neither presumed nor taken for granted.

2) Opportunities for more Civ-Mil cooperation

In this context of increasingly complex crises worldwide, the issue of coordinating capabilities has understandably become of the utmost importance. Previous experiences that have taken place within the Atlantic, whether addressing the dire consequences of tropical storms or earthquakes, hold valuable lessons. Having sizeable means available for rapid deployment or pursuing active cooperation with other intervening partners, for instance, has proven instrumental in achieving quick results. At the same time, the lack of previous comprehensive planning, the vastness of the Atlantic itself, or the temptation to create ad hoc/temporary inter-regional structures, has also stood in the way of major relief efforts. Recent takeaways from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic appear to point in this very same direction: operational limitations within existing institutional frameworks; lack of prior financing and stockpiling of shared capabilities; poor early warning systems; and little attention disbursed to transport capacities, have all taken a toll on what was expected to be a far more concerted and effective response.

Amidst such lessons, coordination between civilian and military actors comprises a key dimension that might assist in tackling some pre-existing debilities in international emergency responses, but which has yet to be sufficiently explored. The topic can be best unpacked if considered in terms of both challenges and opportunities.

On the first account, lingering differences between civilian and military actors ought not to be minimized and should be instead recognized heads-on. The operational integration of military and civilian resources does not represent a simple or easy task, even when the demands of complex crises become more acute. The existence of numerous actors at the national level with similar responsibilities, the recurrent intersection of mandates, and a lack of well-defined integrative frameworks, often lead to mismatched expectations over what is possible to achieve. A modicum of resistance to institutional change is therefore to be expected when pushing for further results in this domain.

This does not mean, however, that more Civ-Mil cooperation should not be actively pursued, particularly when considering that adaptation and incorporation of previous experiences comprise classic trademarks of modern military apparatuses. On the contrary, these characteristics can point to the way ahead. The extensive track-record that Armed Forces have amassed over the years (e.g. providing humanitarian emergency aid, engineering, etc.) represent promising entry-points for more intersections with civilian resources. By relying on existing planning and command structures, highly trained personnel, and multiple existing capabilities on several domains (including space and cyberspace) it is possible to entertain not only the expansion of traditional roles assigned to Armed Forces, but also to consider new venues through which to respond more rapidly and effectively to high-risk situations, in collaboration with other similarly invested actors.

Potential steps to improve coordinated and more integrated responses to crises could involve:

- mapping existing military capabilities in response to emergencies;
- encouraging an interagency line of work with civilian and military personnel working side by side;
- identifying gaps in personnel and equipment;
- providing specialized training and develop specific doctrine;
- developing joint emergency relief units and joint command structures;
- promoting inter-institutional frameworks for the sharing of Civ-Mil experiences;
- reinforcing Civ-Mil interactions within regular large-scale international exercises;
- highlighting the public assistance role of the military in transporting health supplies and helping with medical evacuations.

3) The need for more inter-regional cooperation

The existence of numerous international and regional organizations, structures, and initiatives within the Atlantic comes across as a perennial obstacle for the effective planning and execution of responses to emergency situations. Even if single nations too

often take the lead when the demand for collective leadership surfaces, improving mutual awareness and regular communication between each actor can prove decisive to foment more comprehensive solutions.

Accordingly, it is important to take stock of what is already being carried out in this regard. The EU's approach to various developments and crises in the Atlantic, for instance, needs to be fully accounted for. That includes acknowledging its multiple guidelines and strategies for both the Atlantic and the Gulf of Guinea, but also the pilot projects being put forward for the latter sub-region. On a more operational note, the role of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)/Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) as well as of DG ECHO hold particular significance for crises management and resolution. Likewise, it is worth considering how traditionally invested agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), or unavoidable partners such as the US might also participate in a more sustained manner. The capabilities associated to AFRICOM stand out in this regard, but less visible initiatives such as the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum can also potentially play a part.

However, a problem may emerge when other existing multilateral frameworks – created or established with a similar purpose of preserving and securing the interests of sets of coastal states – are not sufficiently taken into account in these discussions. In order for any holistic approach to be successful within the broader context of the Atlantic, it is required to first expand the awareness over similar counterparts throughout the region, that may be grounded in different historical track-records, interests and goals. That includes, for instance, the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS), the South Atlantic Maritime Area (AMAS), the Yaoundé Process architecture, the G7++ FoG (Friends of the Gulf of Guinea), the Macaronesia forum and several other African regional projects.

Possible remedies to mitigate such disconnects might reside in: relying more visibly on key regional countries as privileged interlocutors between different shores; building upon the role of small island states as honest brokers in shared multilateral settings; adopting a more incremental approach, by which the focus is first disbursed to different sub-regions of the Atlantic, and only afterwards to the Atlantic as a whole; or making good use of less-security driven institutions, such as the Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance (AORA) or the Atlantic International Research (AIR) Centre, as temporary bridge-builders to better involve other sub-regions.

Regardless, intra-regional coordination will continue to stand out as a recurrent priority. When considering the current institutional ecosystem in the Atlantic, more efforts should therefore be invested in:

- sharing lessons learned from past experiences between each active organization focused on the Atlantic;
- identifying gaps or lingering problems in regional cooperation and coordination that may compromise more regular exchanges;
- improving communication channels in order to coordinate more robust responses by sub-regional and regional organizations with similar capabilities.

4) Possible roles for the Atlantic Centre

In light of the topics raised, the relevance of the Atlantic Centre as an aggregating forum comes across as further heightened. The fact that it can play a singular role in promoting increased cooperation between the two sides of the Atlantic for the benefit of all surrounding countries and, specifically, bringing together north and south Atlantic countries in one platform, was particularly acknowledged. Given the different thematic and functional possibilities in its reach, the following recommendations were brought forward concerning the Atlantic Centre's course of action:

- Focus on mapping existing cooperation and coordination mechanisms, through studies or regular reports that explore relevant situational awareness as well as the evolving geopolitical context.
- Focus on sharing lessons learned between relevant regional organizations in the wider Atlantic, with an emphasis on past and present experiences in terms of civilian-military cooperation as well as similar gaps in operational coordination.
- Focus on promoting training and exercises opportunities in terms of civil-military cooperation, so has to improve the capacity to work together in responding to complex emergencies across the Atlantic.
- Focus on establishing regular channels of communication and information exchanges with existing regional organizations, through joint projects and studies of common interest.

By promoting joint development of these activities, the Atlantic Centre would be able to make a sizeable contribution to the promotion and nurturing of an effective Atlantic cooperative environment.