21st Century: A New World Order! ... And a New Power?

Abstract:

The term "power", although apparently associated essentially with resources, with the quantitative capacities that a given actor possesses, does not strictly correspond directly to this relationship.

In the current environment, in a planet in the midst of geopolitical reconfiguration, the situation can be described as almost chaotic, which makes it very complex to define and interpret power in the face of this multiplicity of actors and interrelationships.

After a brief review of the different meanings related to the concept of power, as well as the ways of understanding and applying it, what may perhaps be the power par excellence in today's environment and with liquid societies as a backdrop, is considered.

A final reflection on this subject concludes this paper.

Keywords:

Power, chaos, coercion, attraction, interference, liquid society, social shaping.

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Resumen:

El término «poder», si bien aparentemente se encuentra asociado esencialmente con los recursos, con las capacidades cuantitativas que un actor determinado posee, no responde estrictamente a esa relación de modo directo.

En el entorno actual, en un planeta en plena reconfiguración geopolítica, la situación puede ser descrita casi como de caos, lo que hace muy complejo definir e interpretar el poder ante esa multiplicidad de actores y de interrelaciones.

Tras realizar un somero repaso sobre diferentes acepciones relacionadas con el concepto de poder, así como sobre las formas de entenderlo y aplicarlo, se plantea el que quizás pueda ser el poder por excelencia en ese entorno actual y con las sociedades líquidas como telón de fondo.

Una reflexión final al respecto cierra el presente documento.

Palabras clave:

Poder, caos, coerción, atracción, injerencia, sociedad líquida, conformación social.

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Introduction: power and its dynamics

Apparently, the term "power" may seem simple to identify and understand, especially if it is associated with one of its synonyms, capacity, related to the possibility of doing -or not- certain things, of undertaking -successfully, one supposes- certain actions; but perhaps the concept is deeper and has more edges than it might seem at first.

Thus, in the dictionary of the Spanish language, the word poder[1] , in its different meanings, includes expressions such as "to have the power to do something", "to have the facility, time or place to do something", "to have more strength than someone (...)", "to be stronger than someone, to be able to defeat them"... expressions that essentially link power with the possibility, due to a favourable balance of power, of carrying out the desired action. The link between power and resources seems to be obvious.

But, from another perspective, the concept of power can be defined as the "ability or capacity to influence the behaviour of others to achieve a desired end"[2] ; in short, to have power is to be able to get someone else to do what I want by using different means and ways, not necessarily all of them direct or "forceful". And that is the real power... from this point of view.

However, from another perspective, power is nothing more or less than a social construct[3] ; power, which essentially resides in each one of us, is ceded for different reasons and circumstances to others. And as a simple illustration of this approach, it is enough to recall the "power" held by economic rating agencies - or certain international bodies - that simply the declaration by them that a certain company or nation is in economic distress triggers an almost automatic cascade of actions and perceptions that can put that company or nation at risk of economic bankruptcy. The ability to develop credible narratives or "labels" - are you solvent or not, in the above example" constitutes "power".

[1] ROYAL SPANISH ACADEMY. "Poder", *Diccionario de la lengua española*. Tercentenary Edition. March 2023. Available at: https://dle.rae.es/poder?m=form
NOTE: All internet links in this document are active as of the closing date of this document, 18 April 2024.
[2] MINISTRY OF DEFENCE. *Doctrine for the employment of the Armed Forces*, PDC-01 (A). 2018, p. 21. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Nacional/2018/PDC-01_A_Doctrina_empleo_FAS_27feb2018.pdf
[3] GUZZINI, Stefano. "The concept of power: a constructivist analysis", in Berenskoetter, Felix and Williams, M. J. *Power in world politics*. Routledge, New York, 2007, pp. 23-42.

Therefore - and, obviously, there are many more aspects to the understanding of the concept of "power" - and beyond its definition, its means and modes, its forms and elements, power is necessarily configured in terms of others, of the rest of the actors with whom the necessary and inevitable interactions take place when sharing a world, especially if it is a global and powerfully interconnected world like the current one. Faced with this dynamic approach to power... is there a paradigm that can be used to understand it, and which can help in the event that these interactions become, or could become, a dispute?

In this respect, one of the most widely used models is game theory - which was highly developed during the Cold War, an era of maximum confrontation - as it allows for the generation of a series of tools that enable decision-making in the face of a conflict of interests[4] , in the face of power struggles and power struggles.

A simple way of expressing what a game is is to understand it as a situation of conflict in which opposing interests prevail; it normally consists of a certain number of players, who interact with each other in a game, subject to certain rules or norms -the "rules of the game"-, which must be complied with on pain of punishment and where the benefits and gains obtained by each of the players depend not only on their own actions and decisions, but also on those of the other players, on those of the rest of the players in the game. Thus, players, rules, strategies -understood as each player's plan of action to obtain the maximum benefit- and profits -or losses- constitute the elements of any game.

The situation, the game, can become more complicated; the greater the number of actors, of players, the more numerous and clearer the rules have to be, which entails greater difficulty in "being able to play"; and if "cheating" takes place - if the rules are not respected - or are not accepted or are rewritten on the fly, the situation will be far from harmonious, becoming something similar to chaos, to disorder... although there can always be players who point out that it is simply a matter of adapting the rules, of establishing a new order. Even if it means unleashing "hell".

And that is the environment in which the world is immersed?

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[4] In this sense FERNADEZ NOVO, Yago and NÚÑEZ NIETO, Xavier. "Modelado de situaciones de conflicto bélico mediante la aplicación matemática de la teoría de juegos", *Revista General de Marina*, volume 274. March 2018, pp. 335-345.

21st century: Is this a (complex) hell?

After the end of the Cold War and the entry into an era of apparent "perpetual peace" in the 1990s, various milestones and events - from the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 to the global economic crisis of 2008, including China's rise to become the world's second economic power in 2011 (and with the declared aim of becoming the first by 2049), the re-emergence of Russia as a revisionist power, the Arab Spring, the rise of the so-called global south... - have given way to an environment commonly defined as a new global geopolitical struggle.- have given way to an environment commonly defined as a new global geopolitical struggle.

The constant and successive disputes on a planetary scale, in this ongoing global reconfiguration - with the war in Ukraine as the most apparent "starting pistol", although the dispute has been brewing for years - are apparently leading towards a "new order" that it is not known whether it will become unipolar, bipolar or multipolar, and which may, therefore, during this process, generate a third world war or a second cold war[5] ... "perpetual peace" is a long way off, as conflict is constantly growing in the world. With the logical caveats, it could be said, with a certain jocular tone - or none at all - that "this is hell".

And in this environment, the "rules" of the "old order", if they were ever accepted and assumed by all - or by most of the actors - are no longer so, and, moreover, the organisations in charge of enforcing them no longer have the capacity, or even the prestige[6] , to ensure that they are complied with. Considering that the "prize", the gain of this "game" - if it can be defined as such - is, apparently and at least for some of the most powerful actors, to achieve world hegemony or at least to ascend to the "club" of superpowers... How can the rules not be rewritten in the face of such a substantial prize (for the winners)?

On the other hand, globalisation in its different waves has contributed powerfully to increasing the number of players - for it is not only states that are the main "players" in

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[5] SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. *The new struggle of the powers: World War 3.0 or Cold War 2.0?* Analysis Paper 28/2023. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. 19 April 2023. Available at: https://www.google.com/search?q=guerra+hibirda&rlz=1C1ASUM_enES713ES713&oq=war+hibirda&aqs=chrome..6 9i57j0i10i512l9.2719j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#ip=1

[6] In the sense of the Roman "autoritas" and "potestas", other meanings and expressions of power. In this regard WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Authority in Ancient Rome: auctoritas, potestas, imperium and the paterfamilias.* 5 November 2019. Available at: https://www.worldhistory.org/trans/es/2-1472/la-autoridad-en-la-antigua-roma-auctoritas-potesta/

the global game; companies, corporations, international agencies, non-governmental organisations, media and even individuals - just think of the tycoon Elon Musk[7] - have also become nodes with the capacity to influence and interact globally and, consequently, players in this game, in this struggle for power on a planetary scale.

The international environment is therefore tremendously dynamic, due to the multiplicity of interactions between the different actors, resulting in a kind of "international anarchy". However, and once again taking into account the different perceptions that can be derived from any event, even for this anarchy - that absence of clear rules accepted by all and with punitive mechanisms for those who do not comply with them - various models can be defined[8] : Thus, one can cite a Hobbesian anarchy (centred on dispute and coercion), a Lockean anarchy (with the existence of rivalry and the pursuit of self-interest on the basis of cost-benefit calculations) or a Kantian anarchy (structured on friendship and the execution of actions endowed with legitimacy)[9] ... even anarchy has a surname?

It seems that, even when talking about anarchy, things are not clear. What is clear is that in the end "the game" becomes very complicated... would it be possible, therefore, to try to understand this environment in a more rational and scientific way in order to try, in turn, to understand power and the relationships arising from it?

In this case, and without wishing to be mechanistic, it is feasible to turn to system dynamics, a methodology that focuses, among other things, on analysing and attempting to model complex environments -such as the current one-. And what is pointed out from the outset is that "complex" is not the same as "complicated". Complex is even "more hellish" than complicated.

A "complicated" system is made up of several parts, but each of the parts acts in a particular way and its functioning is not influenced by the behaviour of the others, so that it is sufficient to know how each part acts in order to understand how the whole works. On the other hand, and although it may seem to be a simple synonym[10] , "complex", when it refers to a system, means that it is made up of several interconnected parts, and that

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[7] THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. "How Elon Musk came to influence the fates of nations". 27 September 2023. Available at: https://www.wsj.com/economy/how-elon-musk-came-to-influence-the-fates-of-nations-414bbb67

[8] WENDT, Alexander. "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics", *International Organization,* volume 46, number 2. Spring 1992, pp. 391-425. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858

[9] Obviously, these "surnames" of international anarchy derive from the formulations of these great thinkers: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1879), John Locke (1632-1704) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

[10] A succinct explanation can be found in IFISC. "What is a complex system? Available at: https://ifisc.uib-csic.es//en/about-ifisc/blog-complex-systems/what-complex-system/

the interaction between each and every one of these parts generates information - interrelationships- that are not always visible or evident, so that there may eventually be hidden variables that prevent us from knowing the system as a whole with total precision. An engine, however sophisticated, is a "complicated system", but the weather or a city is a "complex system".

Therefore, in a complex system, the whole is much more than the sum of its parts; and characteristics of the whole that are recurrently pointed out can be stated[11] as "non-linear", "feedback", "lack of central control", "spontaneous order" -among others- and where "connected", "interdependent", "diverse", "adaptive" parts and actors... make up such complex systems or environments without even defining clear boundaries within it. After a simple glance at the current global reality, it seems that it fits perfectly with all these characteristics.

This stage of the 21st century could even be defined as not only complex, but chaotic: the multitude of actors, interactions and forces and powers at play make it almost impossible to take any kind of well-founded decision, or even to make any kind of prediction or projection. In fact, the fact that, in order to briefly describe the environment, it is referred to with acronyms such as VUCA[12] (acronym whose letters stand for volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) or BANI[13] (fragile, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible) ... attest to this situation.

And this impacts and has effects not only on the main actors - states, corporations, organisations - but even on individuals, because for most of the planet's inhabitants the perhaps certain certainties of the past - that children could live better than parents, for example - have become powerful uncertainties[14] , This means that this fragile, uncertain and volatile world generates added anxiety, and that in the face of obvious non-linear cause-effect relationships (such as "if I study, I will have a better job") the situation can

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[11] ESTRADA, Ernesto. "What is a complex system, after all?", *Foundations of Science*. 30 May 2023. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10699-023-09917-w#:~:text=Examples%20of%20some%20some%20potential%20features,individual%20properties%20which%20are%20neither

[12] A brief description of the concept can be found in MINDTOOLS. "Managing in a VUCA World. Available at: https://www.mindtools.com/asnydwg/managing-in-a-vuca-world

[13] DIEFFENBACHER, Stefan F. "BANI world: what is and why we need it?". 3 September 2023. Available at: https://digitalleadership.com/blog/bani-world/

[14] In this sense, SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. *The COVID Era: A New Security Paradigm?* Analysis Paper 36/2020. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. 18 November 2020. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA36_2020PEDSAN_eraCovid.pdf

be absolutely overwhelming, and on a planetary scale, hopelessness[15] seems to be gaining ground.

In such a complex environment, with so many actors, with so few (or no) accepted norms and with a global perception at all levels - from individuals to powers - of chaos and disorder... How can power be understood?

Power... ways of understanding and applying it?

The tools or elements of power - and not only in international relations - are usually collected under the acronym DIME, an acronym formed by the first letters of diplomacy, intelligence, military and economy; although this term is commonplace when speaking of elements of power, it is certainly feasible to find slight variations: Some of these letters can be subdivided - that the *d* for diplomacy integrates diplomacy and politics, for example -, that others can have a double meaning - as the *I* for intelligence can also reflect the *I* for information, in the sense of public communication and/or disinformation -, and even incorporate a new letter - such as an *l*, both for legality (that it conforms to the rules) and legitimacy (that it is perceived as legal, although this is not necessarily true, by the target audience) -; there are different possibilities and combinations[16] , but, in essence, the acronym DIME for power remains perfectly valid.

But tools are no more - and no less - than that, tools; they can be used well or badly, in one way or another to achieve a particular end; and the way in which this panoply of elements is used will be crucial to achieve the core objective of the use of power, to impose one's will on the other. And, in this respect, it is necessary to remember that this is essentially what strategy consists of, not simply understood as a plan of action, but in its classic sense, in properly aligning ends, means and ways - in essence, using the right tools (means) in a certain way (way) to achieve the desired objective (end).

And depending on how these tools are combined and in what proportion - a relationship and proportion that has mutated over time and with the existing means - different

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[15] SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ Pedro. *21st century, geopolitical reconfiguration: and the geopolitics of hope?* Analysis Paper 02/2024. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. 10 January 2024. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2024/DIEEEA02_2024_PEDSAN_Esperanza.pdf

[16] In this sense, an interesting study can be found in BAQUÉS, Josep. "Dime... espejito... si soy la más guapa del reino: análisis de los instrumentos de poder en el mundo actual", *Global Strategy Report*. 29/2021. Available at: https://global-strategy.org/analisis-dime/

meanings are used - normally using the Anglo-Saxon term directly - to indicate the different ways of understanding and applying power.

Thus, we speak of *hardpower*, of hard power, of the power of coercion, which is materialised essentially by using military and economic elements and which, applied in different ways - stick and carrot in Joseph Nye's terminology[17] - make it possible to achieve the aforementioned objectives, to impose one's will on others: whether through military intervention or sanctions - or the threat of them - or, conversely, by offering the possibility of inclusion in a defensive alliance or the lowering of trade barriers... the use of military and economic tools has been a constant in history.

This power stems very directly from each nation's capabilities, which are related to the resources at its disposal. And this conception of power is closely and secularly linked to the realist theory of international relations.

It is also possible to point out the so-called *softpower*, a term coined by Joseph Nye in the 1980s: in the face of what was considered the decline of Washington's power, and after a broad and in-depth study of the essence and nature of power[18] -centred essentially in the United States-, this political scientist expresses the need to modify the bases on which it must be based so that Washington can continue to occupy a hegemonic role on the planet. He indicates that power must be approached from a different perspective, and therefore soft power is based on the capacity of attraction generated by using cultural positioning (which is attractive to others), political values (when they are shared inside and outside the national territory) and foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and with moral authority), which make the nation attractive, a reference and a model for others to follow.

Thus, power, understood as the ability to influence the behaviour of others and obtain the desired effects, is realised on the basis of attraction rather than coercion. He even goes so far as to point out[19] that only through *soft power* can true multilateralism be addressed in the face of growing global problems, or that only *soft power* can limit the recruitment

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[17] An American political scientist and professor with an extensive body of work - some of which is cited below - in the field of international relations and power, he is considered one of the most influential people in international politics in the last twenty years. A brief biography can be found at https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/p/fapb/185594.htm.

[18] NYE, Joseph S. *Bound to lead: The Changing nature of American power*. Basic Books, New York, 1990.

[19] NYE, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*. Publics Affairs, New York, 2004.

capacity of terrorists; these issues, like many others, can only be achieved through persuasion and attraction, not coercion.

Although the approach is not only attractive, but even "very obvious", not everything is so simple and easy... not only must the model to be presented be sufficiently attractive - and acceptable - to those it is intended to influence, but its effects require time, a relatively long period (of years) to produce the desired results; and not all the necessary elements are directly in the hands of the state (cultural factors for example), which generates an added difficulty for the planning and application of this type of power.

On the other hand, soft power should not be identified with idealism, nor should it be seen as the negation of *hard power*; rather, it is simply one (more) form of power. In fact, Nye himself stresses[20] that power is not static, that it does not rest strictly on the same elements, and that the way it is achieved and exercised evolves in step with the changes generated by innovations, scientific discoveries, new technologies and the evolution of relationships.

These two forms of power have had two prototypical references in recent decades: the United States in relation to *hard power*, while Europe, in most cases, has been the prototype of soft power, largely in relation to the benefits of the integration process in the continent. And this has contributed to dysfunction on both sides of the Atlantic - between allies - on issues as significant as security, economic, social and cultural relations, sometimes even generating significant frictions[21] , such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 or those that the ongoing war in Ukraine has once again forcefully brought to the fore.

As the environment evolved and changed, so did the meanings and ways of understanding power; For this reason, and again with the United States as a nation - a great power - that devotes a not inconsiderable part of its intellectual capacities to reflecting on power and how to apply it to maintain global hegemony, it is suggested that the most appropriate way for Washington not to renounce its military power but, at the same time, to recover space through *softpower* as a way of trying to revitalise its capacity to attract - and thus not only be able to exercise coercion - is through what is known as *smartpower.*

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[20] NYE, Joseph S. *The future of power: And use in the twenty-first century*. Publics Affairs, New York, 2011.
[21] As noted in ILGEN, Thomas L. *Hard power, soft power and the future of the transatlantic relations*. Ashgate Publishing, Oxon, 2006.

This term refers to the appropriate use of the necessary doses of *hard* and *soft*, in that double meaning of the Anglo-Saxon term *smart* as "intelligent"... and "elegant". After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which meant a great loss of prestige for the United States on a global scale, this term began to gain ground, to such an extent that Hillary Clinton - appointed Secretary of State at the beginning of President Barack Obama's term in office in 2009 - pointed out that the United States should renew its leadership in the world and strengthen its diplomacy, as opposed to the previous Bush administration, whose foreign action was based excessively on military tools. He said: "We must use what has been called 'smart power', the full range of tools at our disposal - diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural - choosing the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation"[22] . A new era in the application, in the form of power, was underway.

At this point, it seemed difficult to find another way to apply power... or was it? In spite of the complexity of the environment, the actors continue to try to "win the game", and more recently (2017)[23] has come up with the term *sharpower*, essentially focused on the practices and uses carried out by China.

In this regard, it is pointed out[24] that what really exists is an information war waged essentially by autocratic countries - such as China and Russia - that use information maliciously to achieve political objectives; and considering that the international environment is highly decentralised, interconnected and susceptible to being influenced by the information flowing through social media and networks, it therefore enables the rapid, global dissemination and propagation of narratives that foster everything from subversion to self-censorship, including a wide range of activities aimed at contributing to achieving a political objective - in short, in "strategic language", achieving an end by employing certain means in a certain way.

Moreover, given its covert nature and its high cost-effectiveness, this form of power becomes an extraordinarily efficient way of interfering in and over the rest of the actors.

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[22] *CBS News*. "Clinton: Use "Smart Power in Diplomacy". 13 January 2009. Available at: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/clinton-use-smart-power-in-diplomacy/
[23] WALKER, Christopher and LUDWIG, Jessica. "The meaning of sharp power, how authoritarian states project influence", *Foreign Affairs*. 15 November 2016. Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power
[24] NYE, Joseph S. "How sharp power threatens soft power, the right and wrong way to respond to authoritarian influence", *Foreign Affairs*. 24 January 2018. Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power

Therefore, the panoply is wide: coercion, attraction, intelligence (elegance), interference... But if the environment is so complex and chaotic... what is the most appropriate and effective way to apply power?

Power in times of chaos?

Measuring the "power", the capacity of an actor - individual, collective, state, international organisation - is an extremely complicated question; it is possible to measure, "weigh", calculate resources, military and economic capacities... But considering that power is related to the capacity to impose one's will on others, it follows that power cannot strictly speaking be an absolute value, since its evaluation would fall squarely into non-quantitative fields - psychology, sociology, etc.- since it is essentially a specific type of relationship between people or between human groups.

[25]As a simple confirmation of this approach, one need only think of the defeat suffered by the United States in the Vietnam War (1965-1973) or the also recent defeat of the United States - and of a large part of the international community - in Afghanistan, after two decades in the country. In fact, comparisons between the evacuation (almost flight) of Saigon (1975) and Kabul (2021) populated the media[26] and analyses, showing, once again, that more numbers are not automatically synonymous with more power.

From a purely military point of view, this is a question that has been absolutely clear since the dawn of time; a priori, the advantage in capabilities is an obvious unbalancing factor, no doubt; but it is not the only factor that ensures and guarantees victory, since it ignores the decisive factors in any struggle of wills - in any confrontation, whether more or less bloody - such as morale, the desire to fight and to achieve that victory, to "win the game". The fact that the fundamental principles of the art of war - considering that war is a complex and extreme moment in the struggle for power - set out in the Spanish Doctrine[27] - in a very similar way to the rest of the world's nations - are summed up in "will to win",

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[25] A succinct summary of the main causes can be read in *BBC.* "Vietnam War: why the United States lost the conflict despite its overwhelming military superiority". 2 April 2023. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-65059687

[26] In this regard *CNN.* "Saigon and Kabul: similarities and differences between US evacuations in Vietnam and Afghanistan". 19 August 2021. Available at: https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/08/19/similitudes-diferencias-vietnam-afganistan-orix/

[27] MINISTRY OF DEFENCE. *Doctrine for the employment of the Armed Forces,* PDC-01 (A). 2018, p. 74. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Nacional/2018/PDC-01_A_Doctrina_empleo_FAS_27feb2018.pdf

"freedom of action" and "capacity for execution" - with will playing a preponderant role - attests to this reality.

On the other hand, and in order to understand where much of the "game" is played in this environment of chaos, it is necessary to address the concept of hybrid warfare[28] -a conflict typology that, while not strictly "new", globalisation, technologies and social networks have certainly exponentially increased its capacity and possibilities-, which includes, and increasingly so, actions in this zone of non-peace and non-war (sometimes defined as the grey zone) that contribute substantially to achieving the political objectives of the ongoing confrontation. In this grey zone, the adversaries take advantage of legal loopholes and excessively protective regulations, the political, social, organisational and resilience weaknesses of states or the complexity of decision-making, among other aspects, to generate a climate of disinformation and confusion that destabilises the rival[29], the other actors in this planetary game with increasingly non-existent rules and which materialises a kind of chaos.

But, accepting that it is always necessary to know the opponent, and considering that in this "game" on a global scale this will often be made up of human groups - societies, peoples, nations, etc. -, perhaps there is the possibility of not only knowing them, but also of gradually shaping them, moulding them in order to achieve the ends envisaged... by the adversary. Or not?

In relation to the previously mentioned terms describing the current environment -VUCA, BANI-, the sociologist Bauman[30] points out[31] that in contrast to the once "solid modernity", today we find ourselves in an era of "fluid modernity", in which, in contrast to the mutual commitment of that solid society, in this fluid society lack of commitment, "putting oneself in profile" and easy escape form a powerful part of people's reality. This "fluidity" implies

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[28] SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ Pedro. *The new hybrid war: a brief strategic analysis*. Analysis Paper 54/2014. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. 29 October 2014. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2014/DIEEEA54-2014_NuevaGuerraHibrida_PSH.pdf

[29] MINISTRY OF DEFENCE. *Doctrine for the employment of the Armed Forces*, PDC-01 (A). 2018, p. 91. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Nacional/2018/PDC-01_A_Doctrina_empleo_FAS_27feb2018.pdf

[30] Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) developed the concept of "liquid society"; his works include *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love: On the Fragility of Human Attachments* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (2007) and *On Education in a Liquid World* (2013).

[31] LA VANGUARDIA. "But what is liquid modernity?". 9 January 2017. Available at: https://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20170109/413213624617/modernidad-liquida-zygmunt-bauman.html

that nothing is permanent, which means that there is no commitment to anything or anyone forever, and generates a society based on individualism.

If we consider, on the other hand, that a large and growing number of stimuli impact on people every day - and technology plays an important role in this - and that these stimuli are also aimed at immediate gratification, this means that what is very relevant today - or seems to be so - will not be so tomorrow, in a rapid succession that influences life, relationships and one's own worldview, in a kind of constant change that makes it difficult not only to focus on or even discern what is important, but even to establish solid relationships with other people. And this rapidly changing lifestyle means that the answers provided are often "prefabricated"[32] , that they are "mantras provided by others" and that one's own identity is "in constant need of reassurance and confirmation"[33] .

These "prefabricated responses" become so dominant that there is no room for others, generating what is sometimes called an epidemic of self-censorship[34] and a culture of erasure -decreeing that certain ideas, facts or people should not exist and proceeding to "erase" them physically or socially-. And if we add to this the fact that the implementation of a new concept of education, where images and quick contents replace reading, reflection and the creation of critical judgement, the permeability of disinformation is intense and immediate, depriving people of the appropriate cognitive tools to deal with such negative stimuli. And this society, this human group, and surprisingly due to all the means that today's technology puts within its reach, is becoming culturally and intellectually impoverished.

And this impoverishment is increasingly reflected in many aspects of everyday life; a recent study[35] on the evolution of the complexity of pop song lyrics over the past 50 years is a somewhat surprising - or not - conclusion: lyrics are poorer in syntax and vocabulary, they deal with more and more concrete themes and fewer abstract ideas, rhymes are less varied, and choruses are simpler and repeated much more often.

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[32] RODRIGUEZ, Eugenia. "El mal de la "modernidad líquida", *Indigo*. 7 May 2012. Available at: https://www.reporteindigo.com/piensa/el-mal-de-la-modernidad-liquida/

[33] DONKIS, Leonidas. *Troubled identity and the modern world*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2009, p. 7.

[34] *BBC*. "There is an epidemic of self-censorship". 13 December 2022. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-63808204

[35] VV. AA. "Songs lyrics really are getting simpler and more repetitive over the last five decades", *Nature, Scientific Reports* 14, no. 5531. 28 March 2024. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-55742-x

Bauman himself pointed out in his work *On Education in a Liquid World* that culture in this liquid society sees memory as something absolutely useless, when it constitutes a large part of the basis of the mechanism that makes it possible for each person to move from information to knowledge, to the possibility of judgement, to the understanding of situations and to the capacity to make informed decisions.

Faced with the lack of "solid" references, with the erasure of the roots provided by history as a human group[36] -with its greatness and its miseries- as a sign of collective identity, with a growing individualism and a decreasing capacity for analysis and judgement, with a halo of certain hopelessness and with immediacy as the usual time frame, it is extremely easy to "conform" a society, to conform in the sense of the second meaning of the dictionary of the Spanish language "to give shape to something or someone"[37] .

If one actor is able to "shape" the opponent - as a person and as a society - which is a step beyond even "getting you to think the way I want you to think", if one is able to shape the other player as intended, the power tool in the DIME panoply can be applied - though probably no longer even necessary - in which the opponent is more adept or more capable.

If the target audience is modelled on a society - a human group - weak in spirit and weak-willed, coercion provides an extraordinary result; if it works to generate dissatisfaction with one's own identity, guilt and dishonour, the attraction will be capital. And if it works to generate de-cohesion, interference will generate extraordinary returns.

While such social shaping may be masked as a part of that chaos as a consequence of chaos, it certainly seems that, even in chaos, it is still possible to plan and apply power. And it may be impossible, at least for the time being, to avoid such chaotic environments[38] , where the shaping of societies seems to be, perhaps, power par excellence. Faced with this dilemma, there are basically two options: one is to give up; and the other is to...

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[36] SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ Pedro. "Rewriting History: Social "Resetting". Academic Communication, Academy of Military Arts and Sciences, 16 November 2023. Available at: https://www.acami.es/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Reescritura-de-la-Historia-Reseteo-social-web.pdf

[37] ROYAL SPANISH ACADEMY. "Conformar", *Diccionario de la lengua española*. Tercentenary Edition, March 2023. Available at: https://dle.rae.es/conformar?m=form

[38] SALAZAR DUQUE, Óscar. "A look at modern management from chaos theory and transdiscipline", *Universidad & Empresa* 19(33). February 8, 2017, pp. 137-161. Available at: https://revistas.urosario.edu.co/index.php/empresa/article/view/5234/3703

On reflection...

In this "complex hell", this environment of chaos that is the current situation, in the face of today's fluid societies and a spectre of hybrid warfare... do we really forget what the essence of power is?

A chaotic system is dynamic, changing and sensitive to the mutual influence of the multiple iterations between all the actors or elements in it, and it is absolutely random, messy and unpredictable... or perhaps not so much.

There is a theory, the so-called chaos theory, which points out that chaos is not, apparently, absolute disorder, but perhaps simply a kind of "order" that we do not understand. And despite this extreme complexity, the system tends to create a series of patterns towards which it tends to move, patterns that are called attractors. And given that it is very difficult - perhaps impossible, given the current complex dynamics - to avoid these chaotic environments, the aim would be to induce the generation of an attractor that is capable of establishing some sort of self-organisation in the system.

But this is certainly not easy, and requires a powerful capacity to understand the environment, to assess and analyse it, and to draw the necessary conclusions. This certainly requires, in the first instance, the knowledge that such a process is necessary and, in addition, the willingness and ability to do so.

And for this we must not forget, we must be absolutely clear that power, the real power, lies in each and every one of us. Therefore, losing the ability to analyse, reason, contrast and evaluate based on facts, and not on siren songs or misinformation, really means handing over power to others, to others... even to adversaries.

What actor, whether non-state, state or supra-state, does not say that they seek peace, justice, the well-being of a people, harmonious global development, a better standard of living for all, to be able to live according to their own customs and culture, a world with fairer rules...? But behind this narrative lies the reality: the often conflicting interests of a multiplicity of actors, playing "games" that are often contested in the grey zone and that are ultimately won through the "shaping" of a society. And if it is important to be aware that one is "playing this game", it is also important to clearly identify each of the players, especially in order to prioritise responses according to the degree of danger.

And it may seem that this is not an easy task; it certainly is not, but, as the good detective novels of yesteryear pointed out, once the motive - the cause of the crime - was discovered, it was much easier to discover the criminal. Knowing who ultimately benefits from the action performed, it is most likely to be assumed that the beneficiary was the perpetrator, directly or indirectly, of the action; so much so that even in criminal law the concept of motive, the motive that induces someone to perform or omit to perform a conduct, is a valid element in clarifying the perpetration of a crime.

Considering that actors are essentially rational, even if some of their actions or omissions may appear absolutely irrational - such as a large and bloody terrorist attack - the truth is that, normally, by identifying the intended purpose, by identifying the benefit sought, it is - relatively - easy to identify the actor, the agent involved, even in spite of the convoluted iterations of chaos.

And from there, it is much easier, if necessary, to find a solution, to try to "play our way" and not "someone else's way", to use one's power to safeguard what one wants.

All we need to do is to want to do it.

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