



01/2024

31/01/2024

Federico Aznar Fernández-Montesinos

What is the West? The West facing its identity: contemporary challenges

What is the West? The West facing its identity: contemporary challenges

Abstract:

Globalisation has made the world a highly complex place. The war in Ukraine, an expression of Russian revisionism, has unhinged a multipolar world and the logics that govern it, which will increase peripheral conflict. Its success would mean the reversal of globalisation, which is why it would have to confront its inertias. Russia is involved in two simultaneous political conflicts. One with Ukraine, of high intensity and with hybrid components. And the other directly with the West, trying to provoke a supply shock, that is, dissuading the West from getting involved in the conflict by penalising it economically, socially and in terms of energy. Peace from the extreme consequences of any eventual solution should be the result of a compromise that addresses Russia's position and its relationship with a Europe to which it belongs.

Keywords:

War, Ukraine, Russia, Geopolitics, European Union, Global South, energy, grey zone, economic warfare, technology

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the *Briefing Papers* are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

What is the West? The West facing its identity: contemporary challenges

Resumen:

La globalización ha hecho del mundo un escenario de una gran complejidad. La guerra de Ucrania, expresión del revisionismo ruso, ha desencajado un mundo multipolar y las lógicas que lo gobiernan, lo que incrementará la conflictividad periférica. Su éxito supondría la reversión de la globalización, razón por la que habría de afrontar sus inercias. Y es que Rusia sostiene dos conflictos políticos simultáneos. Uno con Ucrania, de alta intensidad y con componentes híbridos. Y otro directamente con Occidente tratando de provocar un shock de oferta, esto es, disuadiendo a Occidente de implicarse en dicho conflicto mediante su penalización económica, social y energética. La paz por las consecuencias extremas de cualquier eventual solución debiera ser el resultado de un compromiso en el que se dirima la posición rusa y su relación con una Europa a la que pertenece.

Palabras clave:

Guerra, Ucrania, Rusia, Geopolítica, Unión Europea, Sur global, energía, zona gris, guerra económica, tecnología

How to cite this document:

AZNAR FERNÁNDEZ-MONTESINOS, Federico. What is the West? The West facing its identity: contemporary challenges IEEE 01/2024.

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/2024/DIEEEINV01_2024_FEDAZN_Occidente_ENG.pdf and/or [link bie³](#) (consulted day/month/year)

Now the winter of our discontent is turned
to summer by this sun of York; and all the
clouds that hovered over our house are
buried in the deep bosom of the ocean.

Shakespeare, Richard III

THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE WEST

The West is a geographical place used to define a cultural domain. The West, disseminated by globalisation, is the axis and the keystone, if not the millstone, that breaks up other cultures as part of the process of cultural rationalisation that globalisation entails.

But while the world's population is growing, the West is losing population. Thus the EU will fall from 447 million inhabitants in 2020 to 416 million in 2100. That is, it will lose the equivalent of one of its medium-sized member states. As Luttwak said in 2000: "From a demographic point of view, the West is disappearing. Where it is not, it is because it is receiving immigration from non-Western countries. But the culture will survive. When the last Westerner is dead, we will still find Lucretius published in Korea".¹

The West exists as opposed to the East, as an expression of a differential fact. Both are simultaneously conjugated. However, its non-autonomous existence also serves to highlight the continuity or proximity of the subcultures it brings together, and thus the existence of a common heritage. It dichotomously expresses a community space differentiated from its surroundings. It does not exist without those who do not reflect it.

Moreover, before deciding what the West is, we should define what Europe is, which, after all, is the geographical space of its manor. The problem is that its eastern boundary, what separates it from Asia, is not a sea but a mountain range, the Urals (which, to make matters worse, splits Russia in two), unlike the rest of the continents. Europe could be

¹ LUTTWAK, Edward. "The global order of the 21st century." Colloquium between Francis Fukuyama, Timoty Garton Ash, Eric Hobsbawam, Pierre Hassner and Edward Luttwak for the newspaper "La Razón" supplement "El Cultural", 20-26 February 2000, p. 24.

seen as an appendix of the great Asian continent or, because of its exceptionality, as a space more of will than geography.

This is even more so with the term West. It has been a space of variable geometry since Luther first referred to it, and even before that time, as an implicit or over-understood term.

In the Middle Ages, the West was the space that recognised the primacy of the chair of St. Peter, the Roman Pontiff; and the East, the Byzantine world. Afterwards, and after losing the southern shore of the Mediterranean, it has ended up absorbing the Eastern churches and adopting its own ages; Renaissance, Baroque, Enlightenment, Colonialism..... And even political proposals such as Capitalism and Democracy, which, disregarding ethnic considerations, and being constructs made in Western axiological terms, have become central elements of globalisation, which is why it was necessary to pronounce oneself in favour of their acceptance or rejection.

The idea of a universal empire was born in Alexander's Greece, endowed with a genealogy and oriental references and, as a factual reality, ephemeral. It would find its concrete expression in a Roman empire built on Greek foundations.

But universal empire meant neither global empire nor world empire; and not precisely as a result of the imperfect geographical knowledge of the time. The political philosophy of the Greek world included in its sphere of interest only a part of the known earth, the *Oikumene*, the regularly and orderly inhabited earth, that is, the part of the world where the earth can support the existence of cities. It is the land of cities (*civis*), the term from which the concept of civilisation is derived, as defining a culture, the way of life of cities².

As Andrés González Martín says, for the Romans the *Oikumene* is the *orbis terrarum*, the inhabited land, the area of the world that matters and in which to build the universal empire. The universal empire is not the empire of the whole world, it is not global, it is only the empire of the inhabited land, of the civilised land. Everything else is relegated to a comfortable anonymity, it was the land of the barbarians, that which did not belong to the Roman orb. Barbarian is an exonym from the Greek meaning "one who babbles" -

² GONZÁLEZ MARTÍN, Andrés. "Lecture on geopolitics. Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas, 2012.

bar...bar for *blah...blah* - signifying the impossibility of communication and a point of evolution or intermediate stage between savagery and civilisation.

Against the barbarians there was a right of conquest, not an obligation of civilisation; Kipling's heavy white man's burden had not yet come into play. Intervention outside the empire was neither a moral obligation, nor a civilising one, it was self-interest alone. The Romans conquered the known world only to defend themselves. This limited conception was broken with Christianity, the criterion for membership was not citizenship, the discriminating criterion was no longer the barbarian character, but non-membership of the church. Since the church was an open space, everyone had a place. The element of differentiation ceased to be civilising. The barbarian could not become a citizen; the Gentile, if he converted, was incorporated into the empire³.

The northern shore of the Mediterranean is shaped by the Protestantism that marks its extremes, and it is worth remembering this because in 2017 it was 500 years since Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church in Wittenberg. The European Mediterranean world is orthodox Catholic.

³ GONZÁLEZ MARTÍN, Andres. "Lecture on geopolitics. Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas, 2012.

TOP 30 PUERTOS UE POR TRÁFICO TOTAL EN 2020								
Rk	Puerto	País	2020	2019	2018	2017	%20/19	%20/17
1	Róterdam	Países Bajos	436,8	469,4	469,0	467,0	-6,9%	-6,5%
2	Amberes	Bélgica	230,8	238,2	235,3	223,6	-3,1%	+3,2%
3	Hamburgo	Alemania	126,3	136,6	135,1	136,5	-7,5%	-7,5%
4	Algeciras	España	107,3	109,4	107,4	101,6	-2,0%	+5,6%
5	Amsterdam	Países Bajos	91,0	105,0	101,8	100,8	-13,3%	-9,7%
6	Valencia	España	80,9	81,1	76,6	71,5	-0,2%	+13,2%
7	Haropa (1)	Francia	75,0	90,0	94,7	92,9	-16,7%	-19,3%
8	Marsella	Francia	68,9	78,8	81,0	80,6	-12,6%	-14,5%
9	Bremen/Bremerhaven	Alemania	66,5	69,4	74,1	74,2	-4,2%	-10,4%
10	North Sea Port (2)	Bélgica	63,5	71,4	70,3	66,6	-11,1%	-4,7%
11	Constanza	Rumanía	60,4	66,6	61,3	58,4	-9,4%	+3,4%
12	Barcelona	España	59,5	67,9	67,8	61,4	-12,4%	-3,0%
13	Duisburg	Alemania	59,0	61,1	65,3	68,3	-3,4%	-13,6%
14	Trieste	Italia	54,1	62,0	62,7	62,0	-12,7%	-12,6%
15	Gdansk	Polonia	48,5	52,2	49,0	40,6	-7,1%	+19,5%
16	Klaipeda	Lituania	47,7	46,3	46,6	43,2	+3,2%	+10,6%
17	Zeebrugge	Bélgica	47,0	45,8	40,1	37,1	+2,6%	+26,6%
18	Dunkerque	Francia	45,2	53,0	51,6	50,4	-14,7%	-10,3%
19	Génova	Italia	44,1	52,8	55,8	56,1	-16,3%	-21,3%
20	Sines	Portugal	42,2	41,8	49,7	49,9	+0,9%	-15,5%
21	Gotemburgo	Suecia	37,5	38,9	40,5	40,8	-3,6%	-8,1%
22	Dublín	Irlanda	36,9	38,1	38,0	36,4	-3,3%	+1,3%
23	Cartagena	España	33,0	34,3	33,9	34,7	-3,6%	-4,8%
24	Livorno	Italia	31,7	36,7	36,5	33,6	-13,6%	-5,8%
25	Huelva	España	29,9	33,8	33,0	32,3	-11,5%	-7,5%
26	Bilbao	España	29,6	35,6	35,7	34,3	-16,6%	-13,6%
27	Nantes Saint-Nazaire	Francia	28,0	30,7	32,5	29,6	-8,8%	-5,5%
28	Cagliari	Italia	27,4	34,7	35,9	37,9	-21,1%	-27,8%
29	Tarragona	España	26,5	32,8	32,1	33,7	-19,2%	-21,4%
30	Las Palmas	España	25,8	26,7	27,0	27,0	-3,4%	-4,5%

Datos en millones de toneladas. Fuente: Autoridades Portuarias. Elaboración: TRANSPORTE XXI
Notas: (1) Puertos de Le Havre, Rouen y París. (2) Puertos de Gante y Zeeland.

Figure: thirty most important ports in Europe.

Source: "Eight Spanish ports in the European top 30 by total traffic".

<https://www.transportexxi.com/ocho-puertos-espanoles-en-el-top-30-europeo-por-trafico-total/>

Since then, Europe's centre of gravity has shifted northwards, away from the borders of the ancient Roman Empire, even though the countries that are the engines of Europe have made the Greco-Latin heritage their own. And it is now these once barbaric countries that, in the context of the 2008 economic crisis, have allowed Greece to remain Europe, even though the name comes from an ancient Greek myth.

La banana azul europea

Concentración de población, riqueza y oportunidades

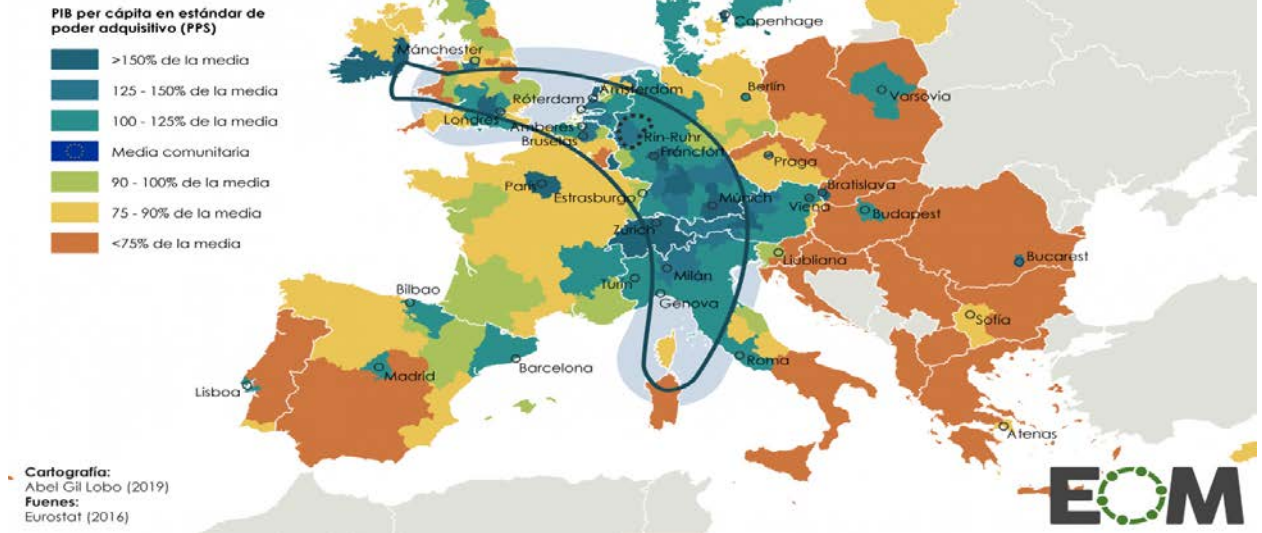


Figure: Blue Banana.

Source. "The European blue banana" The World Order.

<https://elordenmundial.com/mapas-y-graficos/la-banana-azul-europea/>

However, there is the so-called "blue banana" which takes in the richest places in Europe, starting in the rich region of Lombardy, through the former Spanish possessions surrounding old France - the ill-fated Burgundian heritage that lies at the root of almost two centuries of conflict with that country - along the so-called Spanish Way, into the Netherlands and ending in England. But there is also the so-called "golden banana" that stretches along the coast of Italy, France and Spain. The alleged superiority that Max Weber claimed for Protestant values is not verified in this way.

"Catholics also participate in smaller proportion in the enlightened layers of the working element of modern big industry. It is a well-known fact that the factory nourishes the ranks of its most highly educated workers as elements coming from the small workshop, in which they are trained professionally, and from which they depart after they have been trained; but this is to a much greater extent true of the Protestant element than of the Catholic, because the Catholics show a much stronger inclination to remain in the trade in which they usually attain the rank of masters while the Protestants throw themselves in much greater numbers into the

factory, in which they climb the higher positions of the enlightened proletariat and of the industrial bureaucracy⁴ ."

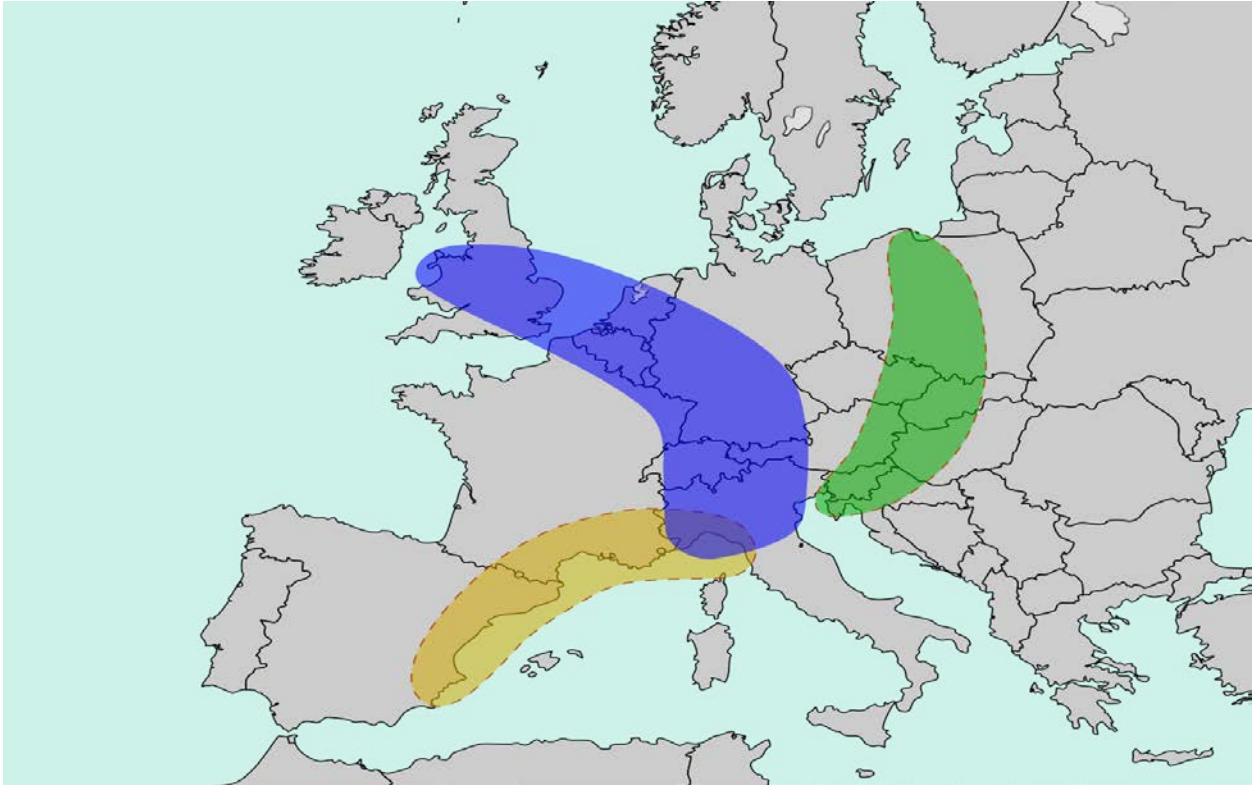


Figure: Blue Banana, Golden Banana, Green Banana

Source: wikipedia

At the same time, and presenting its values as transparent, Central Europe tries to integrate the South through the infrastructure network and in cultural terms. It is therefore not surprising that the bankruptcy of *Lehman Brothers* in the United States, which entered Europe through subprime mortgages and the Anglo-Saxon world, led to the resurgence of the term PIGS to refer to Portugal, Greece, Italy and Spain. Such a narrative helped to transform the mortgage problem, mediatically and politically, into the problem of non-protestant Southern European countries failing to honour their economic commitments.

⁴ WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1904.

European civilisation

The concept of civilisation is broad, as it implies a "set of ideas, religious beliefs, techniques, arts and customs of a particular human group" (RAE). Not surprisingly, as has been said, it derives from the Latin *civis. civitas*, which refers to the way of life in cities.⁵

For the Tofflers, the term encompasses matters as varied as technology, family life, religion, culture, politics, business, hierarchy, hegemony, values, sexual morality and epistemology.⁶ And Huntington defines it as a "cultural entity.... the broadest level of identification."⁷

He argues that "the great divisions of humankind and the predominant source of conflict will be based on the diversity of cultures.... the clash of civilisations will dominate world politics; the fault lines between civilisations will be the great battle lines of the future⁸ ." Civilisations have thus become the definition of collective identity and divide the world into large blocs, at whose fault lines friction and conflict occur.

Huntington's discourse identifies the "we" in civilisations and is based on the fact that the most relevant differences between peoples are not economic, political or ideological, but those of a cultural nature, concluding that, even if the concept of the state remains valid, international relations will be characterised by a balance of power between civilisations.

In fact, he believes that the conflict is installed in the fault lines that separate the seven civilisations into which the author divides the world. Moreover, he believes that it increasingly juxtaposes members of different cultures, prompting a reflection on their identity.

This is explained by the obvious and unbridgeable differences that exist, together with the fact that the world has become smaller, so that "interactions between peoples and peoples of different civilisations intensify individuals' awareness of civilisation and this in

⁵ RACIONERO, Luís. "El siglo XXI". ABC newspaper, 16 November 1992

⁶ TOFFLER, Alvin and Heidi. Las guerras del futuro Ediciones Plaza & Janés, Barcelona, 1994, p. 41.

⁷ HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. Clash of Civilisations? Editorial TECNOS, Madrid 2002, pp. 13 and 14.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 15 and 16.

turn reinforces differences and animosities⁹ ", while the processes of modernisation strip people of their old identities.

But modernisation does not necessarily imply Westernisation: 'non-Western societies can and have in fact modernised without abandoning their own cultures and without indiscriminately adopting Western values, institutions and practices¹⁰ '. In this regard, Ignatieff, citing Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in 1776, points out that the proud Romans made the fatal mistake of confusing "the Roman monarchy with the globe.¹¹ "

Moreover, if in the West modernity is, to a certain extent, associated with the marginalisation of religious experience, in the East the opposite has been the case, since religion has been used for the benefit of politics. Consider that Jesus Christ died crucified, so Christianity arose against the ruling power and was not incorporated into the empire until the 4th century, after Constantine's conversion. The opposite is true of Islam, where the Prophet Muhammad was a political and religious leader and his successors inherited these powers.

For, since Western culture is not universal, modernisation is not the same as Westernisation, and the universalist pretensions of the West will necessarily end up producing a clash of civilisations. The export of democracy and the capitalist model, incorporating its civilisational heritage, is nothing other than Fukuyama's *End of History* proposal, as well as a polite and politically correct reformulation of the nineteenth-century *white men burden*. They thus become a kind of Trojan horse, by carrying a hidden value system and Cartesian logic, i.e. their axiological codes, which are presented in the apparent absence of cultural models.

The most significant element of civilisation, around which culture is structured, is thus religion. Ideological conflicts have been replaced by others with religious overtones, which are now the basis for solidarity relations.

⁹ Ibidem, pp. 24 and 25.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 57.

¹¹ IGNATIEFF, Michael. *El nuevo imperio americano*. Editorial Paidós, Barcelona 2003, p.13.

In this sense, it is worth mentioning that some sociologists consider that the ideas of totem and God have the same origin. Durkheim¹² affirms that "gods are the symbolically thought peoples," and that "religious interests are nothing more than the symbolic form of moral and material interests". That is, it is not gods that make peoples, but peoples that create the gods that represent them.¹³ The idea of God, thus seen, is only a form of society's worship of itself that turns religious experience into a group ecstasy with identity-forming and social cohesion-producing functions.¹⁴ From this perspective, the idea of the sacred is more relevant than the idea of God.

Thus, a civilisation such as the Western one, which presents itself as acculturated and universal, collides with the particularism of other civilisations, which thus become aware of themselves and begin to become subjects of a dynamic of which only Western nations were previously a part.

It can be inferred from Huntington's work that levels of conflict with the West will increase in the future, but also that a true clash of civilisations is unlikely. What is feasible, however, are collisions across the fault lines, which is why he postulates an international order based on civilisations.

The criticism, apart from its academically untenable conceptual rigidity, is that it leads from biological determinism to cultural determinism.¹⁵ In any case, cultural differences do not cause wars any more than similarities guarantee harmony. Many civilisations are fragmented by incorporating ethnic and linguistic plurality... And the great conflicts are not inter-civilisational, but intra-civilisational.

North America, populated mainly by European emigrants and linked to all the milestones of European history, is also part of the West. But Huntington considers that Latin America does not belong to the West and does so, among other reasons - which would also serve to exclude Spain, as it once excluded Greece - because it "incorporates indigenous

¹² ARON, Raymond. Las etapas del pensamiento sociológico. Ediciones siglo XX, Buenos Aires, pp. 54 ff.

¹³ GONZÁLEZ NORIEGA, Santiago in Introducción a Durkheim, Émile. Las formas elementales de la vida religiosa. Ediciones siglo XX, Buenos Aires, pp., p. 7.

¹⁴ JOAS, Hans. War and Modernity. Ediciones Paidós Ibérica S.A., Barcelona 2005, p. 95.

¹⁵ TERNON, Yves. The Criminal State. Editorial Península, Barcelona 1995, p.106.

cultures that did not exist in Europe and were effectively annihilated in North America"¹⁶

. And he adds:

"Latin America has followed a quite different path of development from Europe and North America. Although it is an offspring of European civilisation, it also incorporates, to varying degrees, elements of indigenous American civilisations absent from North America and Europe. It has had a corporatist and authoritarian culture that Europe had to a much lesser extent and North America did not have at all. Both Europe and North America felt the effects of the Reformation and have combined Catholic and Protestant cultures. Historically, Latin America has been Catholic, although this may be changing... Latin American political evolution and economic development have clearly departed from the predominant models of the North Atlantic countries"¹⁷.

This is a problem of definition that begins with the observer and which increases when we try to make monolithic a reality that is truly a complex diversity full of nuances, even if it is united by a language and a basic culture.

Russia's European roots

Huntington's categorisation is also highly debatable and has even been accused of being politically motivated. The fact is that something similar to what is happening with Latin America is happening in the case of Russia. In fact, Huntington¹⁸ believes in the existence of an Orthodox civilisation led by Russia, whose leaders, following a Kemalist strategy, have historically tried to place it in a different civilisation, in Europe; and this, contrary to its nature, has in the end torn the country apart.

However, this approach leaves not only Russia out of the West, but also many EU member states of Slavic origin, as well as Greece itself.

Civilisations are not homogeneous blocs, nor can they be, but they are endowed with the same heritage; there are differences, but these are not so many in relation to the common and substantial elements. The term civilisation is very polysemous and vague; it refers to a very strong and powerful culture and a system of social organisation, i.e. a "set of

¹⁶ HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. El choque de civilizaciones y la reconfiguración del orden mundial, Paidós, Barcelona, 1997, p. 51.

¹⁷ Ibidem, pp. 51-52.

¹⁸ HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. Clash of Civilisations? Editorial TECNOS, Madrid: 2002.

customs, knowledge and arts of a particular human society".¹⁹ There is no one with sufficient authority to be able to give a categorical answer to this question.

It is true that Russia has problems defining its identity, but President Putin's instrumentalisation of Russia's past on an imperial basis, along with a greater emphasis on the country's Asian origins, breaks with the convergence on Europe expressed at the beginning of his presidential term in 2000,²⁰ and is due to circumstantial reasons as well as difficulties in fulfilling his own domestic agenda. Indeed, it was common in Russian political circles to quote de Gaulle in his 1959 Strasbourg speech: "Yes, it is Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, it is Europe, it is the whole of Europe that will decide the fate of the world".

But it is also true that such a debate existed before President Putin argued for the existence of a Eurasian identity. It has its roots in the intellectual movements of 1910-1920 and has been developed politically by Putin, who in 2015 created the Eurasian Economic Union.²¹ In other words, Russia is in Europe, but it does not belong to Europe. It is a continent country and therefore capable of sustaining its own civilisational project and identity on its own. There is pride in this assertion, in its uniqueness, even if it is based on the Slavic ethnic element. In the end, we all want to be special. The Eurasian identity with which Russia has sought to endow itself as a way of differentiating itself from the European project is not due to its history.

What, on the other hand, is beyond doubt is the powerful character of Russian culture and its contribution to Western civilisation. Russia has been a Christian country since 988 and was already mentioned in epics such as the Chanson de Roland and the Nibelungenlied.²² The Song of Igor's Host is the last landmark of medieval European cantares de gesta. This anonymous 12th century Russian work narrates the ill-fated military expedition of Igor Sviatoslavich, prince of Novgorod Sievsky, against the nomadic Polovtsians, a Turkic people from the steppes of Central Asia, who threatened the

¹⁹ Dictionary of the Spanish Language. <http://dle.rae.es/?id=9NsGVES>

²⁰ BARDUCCI Anna-Mahjar; RIPPA Giuseppe. "Understanding Russian ideology and political vision: A call to Eurasia, from Lisbon to Vladivostok". Middle East Media Research Institute website. Analysis and Research Series No. 1239. <https://www2.memri.org/espanol/entendiendo-la-ideologia-y-vision-politica-rusa-un-llamado-a-eurasia-de-lisboa-a-vladivostok/18102>.

²¹ Ibidem

²² https://www.altair.es/es/libro/cantar-de-las-huestes-de-igor_150974

weakened Kievan Rus and played a key role in the internecine wars between the feudal princes of Kiev and the rest of Rus²³.

Moscow, after the fall of Constantinople, is the Third Rome²⁴ whose symbols it has adopted. The "Paschal Canon, Metropolitan Zosima and, above all, the epistles of the monk Pilotheus of Pskov, addressed to Basil III and the secretary Vluniejin, formulate this theory as follows: "The first Rome and the second [Byzantium or Constantinople] have passed away, the third is already gloriously born, but there will never be a fourth..."²⁵

The country has produced countless musicians, writers, researchers, artists... significant members of the European cultural elite from Tolstoy to Rachmaninov. Although the Renaissance did not take hold in the country - it was then suffering from Mongol invasions - since the 18th century, its elites have felt Western. Russia was in the First and Second World Wars (which killed 40 million people in the country); and it ruled the countries of Eastern Europe for 40 years. The facts prove its European vocation. Indeed, Russia has always looked favourably on Europe.²⁶

The gap appeared in the 19th century when bourgeois revolutionary waves barely affected Russia. In 1917, the triumph of the Revolution again isolated the country from Western political and cultural movements. Then, as a result of its own internal vicissitudes, Russia suffered from a lack of democratic experience because first tsarist autocracy and then communism prevented it.²⁷

Admitting this lack of experience, we must remember that this also happened with countries such as, for example, Spain itself in 1975; therefore, it cannot be deduced that Russian axiological codes are substantially different from those of the rest of Europeans in order to constitute a civilisation of their own and not be part of European culture.

²³ According to Ángel Luis ENCINAS MORAL in *El Cantar de las Huestes de Igor*. Miraguano Ediciones, 2015.

²⁴ ANTELO IGLESIAS; Antonio. "Notes on "Moscow, third Rome". Genesis and evolution of a political theology". *Space, Time and Form, Series III, H.* Medieval, t. V, 1992, pp. 441-450.

²⁵ H. BILLINGTON, James. *The Icon and the Axe. An interpretative history of Russian culture*. Siglo XXI, 2011.

²⁶ MORALES, Javier. "A more European Russia for a more secure Europe". *Fundación Alternativas Working Paper No. 78/2015*.

http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex_documentos_archivos/a4b29dec0237c06619c8f50b9ad79621.pdf

²⁷ H. BILLINGTON, James. *The Icon and the Axe. An interpretative history of Russian culture*. Siglo XXI, 2011.

Another issue is the historical messianism of its foreign policy, which is the guiding principle of its actions: the aforementioned Third Rome, the leading nation of the Slavic world, the motherland of international communism. However, there is a certain contradiction in that Russia's historical standards of living are not comparable to those of the countries seen as its rivals.²⁸

Certainly, freedom is not among the core values most protected by the Russian state today - the isms: feminism, environmentalism, freedom of sexual orientation... much appreciated in Europe do not fit in that country - and are replaced by other keys promoted by political power: power, patriotism, pride, resistance. We are, and this is not a minor problem, facing a proud country with a great capacity for suffering and resistance, as was seen during the Second World War.

Moreover, there is the problem of Russian minorities, as Mira Milosevic-Juaristi reminds us, the Russian concept of national identity - "Russians are a nation divided by post-Soviet borders" - does not coincide with Russia's current territorial borders. Vladimir Putin himself claimed after occupying Crimea that "millions of people went to sleep in one country and woke up in many other states, becoming the ethnic minorities of the former Soviet republics; thus, Russians became one of the largest, if not the largest nation in the world, separated by borders".²⁹

Russia claims a special pre-eminence, a great power status endowed with its own area of influence, especially in what has come to be called the 'near abroad', i.e. states that were once part of the former USSR, while complaining about the lack of recognition and treatment it received after the Cold War: Russia lost some 2 million km². In his narrative, Russia was not defeated but liberated from communism; however, he believes that in practice the West has treated it as if this were not the case. And it should not be forgotten that the country embodies a security dilemma insofar as the Russian plains, the underbelly of the country, were used by both Napoleon and Hitler to propitiate their invasion.

²⁸ MILOSEVICH-JUARISTI Mira. "El proceso de "reimperialización" de Rusia, 2000-2016." Elcano Royal Institute. Working Paper 11/2016.

²⁹ Ibid.

Russia as a state

History has made Russia the object of NATO's special attention since the state to which it is the successor, the USSR, is at the very roots of its constitution. But Russia is not the USSR; for starters, its GDP in 2022 is 2.116 trillion euros, while Italy's is 1.946 trillion euros and Germany's is 3.876 trillion euros. However, the GDP of the United States, by comparison, is 24.162 trillion.

As imperial as Russia wants to be and as long-suffering as its people are, being an empire is onerous, and goes beyond rhetoric and occasional gestures of effort. Far beyond what it can afford.

	GDP (billions)	Population	Area Km2
GERMANY	3.876	80,854,408	357,022
U.K.	2.913	64,088,222	243,610
FRANCE	2.647	66,553,766	643,801
ITALY	1.946	61,855,120	301,340
SPAIN	1.346	48.146.134	505,000
RUSSIA	2.116	142,423,773	17,098,242
E.U.	13.423	508, 000, 000	4,463,600i
USA	17.970	321,368,864	9,833,517
NATO	44.660	951,515,051	25,416,094

Despite its obvious wealth, Russia is a backward, deindustrialised country whose source of profit is the export of raw materials. Moreover, the state is weak - some studies describe it as both strong and weak - a situation that is exploited by private actors to prosper. This is manifested in the existence of mafias, corruption... Russia ranks 73rd out of 178 in fragility, according to the Peace Foundation, and 137th in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2022.

Although 22 per cent of its territory is European, historically it is inhabited by more than three quarters of its population. European Russia is approximately 3,955,818 km2 (40%

of Europe, similar to the EU). Population density varies from 27 inhabitants/km² in its European region to 2.5 in Asia. Russia's centre of gravity is in Europe. And its total population is shrinking from 142 million in 2022 to 133 million in 2040.³⁰

The country is basically, as we said, an economically inefficient exporter of raw materials. It needs European technology for its development; and it is - or was - a consumer of European products. On the other hand, Europe needs energy security and raw materials that are found in the territory of Siberia. Russian markets are also excellent markets for European products.

Indeed, before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia and the EU were almost economically interdependent. In 2013, the EU exported 6.9 per cent of its total exports to Russia, 119.8 billion euros (65.7 in 2009). At the same time, the EU bought 206.1 billion euros (119.6 in 2009), 12.3 per cent of its imports. The figures show a certain trend towards economic integration. In 2015 the balance of payments balance was €133,855.8 million which decreased to €81,686.7 million in 2016, 7.04% (10.87% in 2015) of Russian GDP.³¹

The factor that throws the whole system out of balance is that it is four times the size of the EU and, as can be seen in the accompanying table, just below the size of NATO as a whole. This gives the country remarkable geopolitical potential and climate change could even enhance it significantly. Moreover, in the coming years and in the context of globalisation, there is likely to be a gradual loss of global GDP share for both the EU and the US.

Without regard to obvious considerations, the USSR is a better fit for NATO than for the EU, both because of its larger size and because of the greater political diversity and democratic quality indexes of this organisation (Russia ranks 146 out of 167 in the Democracy Index published by the British newspaper *The Economist*). And this framework is more favourable for solving problems, such as those caused by Russian citizens residing in third countries. On the other hand, membership in both organisations will put an end to Russian concerns about its own security and even provide security on its border with China.

³⁰ "World Population Review.<http://worldpopulationreview.com/>

³¹ Expansión Newspaper. Macro Data. Accessed 03 February 2018.
<https://www.datosmacro.com/comercio/balanza/rusia>

The assertiveness it has been displaying, especially since 2008, in its relations with the West, as noted above, has demonstrated its desire to regain a relevant place in global geopolitics, despite the fact that this does not correspond to its current capabilities, including, significantly, its economic capabilities. It seems a country that can only exist as an empire and with attitudes of this kind, given the lack of congruence between the geopolitical potential of its territorial extension and its real economic power.

Its intervention in Ukraine demonstrates the unreliability and unreliability of its relationship with Europe. This will affect its relations with Europe for at least a generation or two; and this is not to mention the caution it already arouses especially among its Eastern neighbours, who felt themselves governed from Moscow during the Cold War era. Moreover, it should be considered along the same lines as George Kennan himself pointed out in 1947 that such a sense of threat is not the result of military power but, rather, of political power.

For this reason alone, conllevanza is not a good political option in the medium term, as it makes conflicts possible, if not probable, as we have seen. In the long term, a process of convergence is necessary, involving a transformation and strengthening of the state on the basis of a democratic culture of European standards. But this must come with the time that all pedagogy requires and with an increase in relations. It is to be expected that time and the increase in relations associated with globalisation will eventually bring this about and with it the end of imperial fickleness. The problem is how much time.

Ukraine and Russia. The roots of dissent

It is impossible to separate Ukraine's geography from that of its surroundings; not for nothing is it part of Ruthenia, that is, the geographic space of the East Slavs, a racial term which, when applied to geography, encompasses several of the present-day European states. It has also been referred to with some equivalence as "Little Russia", which explicitly gives that country pre-eminence as a cultural base. It also has, and has always had, a great agricultural wealth which should also be taken into account.

The Intermarium is the broad area between the Adriatic, Black and Baltic Seas that would incorporate the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Belarus,

Ukraine, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, with the leading power, according to Marshal Pilsudski, its formulator, being Poland. But Ukraine is also at the centre of it.

In any case, Ukraine, the "Gateway to Europe", is part of a wider and more open territory in that it lacks significant mountain systems and rugged terrain. It is therefore a natural gateway from the Eurasian region to the Central-Eastern part of the European ecumenical area. It is an area of confluence, a religious, cultural and civilisational crossroads, and thus a geopolitical and historical crossroads, where the particular histories and narratives of the surrounding societies meet and intermingle in the context of the wide plains, giving the borders a variable geometry.

Think, for example, of Nikolai Gogol, author of works such as *Taras Bulba*. *The Inspector* and *Dead Souls*, which are great classics of Russian literature. He was born in 1809 in Soróchintsy, a Ukrainian village, apparently into a family of Ukrainian-Polish nobility. Untangling the skein of history, as can be seen, is complex and, to say the least, debatable.

Thus, not a few Ukrainians are not Orthodox Christians, but belong to the Uniate Church or Eastern Catholic Churches of Roman obedience; a confluence. Such things are the result of the emergence on the same territory of two civilisations: the Slavic-Orthodox one (incorporating identities different from the Russian one and giving rise to different states); and the Western one, whose consolidation took place between the 16th and 20th centuries.

This period is also, and moreover, a time of transition in which modern states will develop. Societies would gradually equip themselves with an increasingly complex and effective institutional apparatus that called for an integrating uniformity: the state demanded nationhood for the consolidation and efficacy of the model it proposed. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 will mean in Europe - also in this region, which did not take an active part in the Thirty Years' War to which it served as a colophon - the dynamisation and definitive implementation of the model of society advocated by the new administrative order: *eius regio cuius religio*, the religion of the prince as the religion of the state, in Joachim Stephani's felicitous phrase.

This will lead to a strengthening of the central powers as controllers of the state apparatus. This, the backwardness or forwardness of the actors in its implementation and

the very effectiveness of the apparatus itself, helps to explain the recurrent changes in the balance of power in the region.

The fact is that four powers will be dominant in the regional environment; to these will be added other circumstantial powers, such as the case of Sweden. Their development will mark the administrative future of the territory in this turbulent period of time.

The Ottoman Empire took Constantinople in 1453, conquered the Crimea in 1475, and unsuccessfully besieged Vienna in 1529. In 1683, after attempting a second siege, it gradually decayed, resulting in a permanent retreat and loss of influence in the area.



Fuente: Elaboración propia
ABC / CG. SIMÓN

Figure: Intermaria in 1560

Source: Nieto, Silvia. "Ukraine, a land in permanent dispute in the heart of Europe". ABC newspaper 24.02.2022 https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-ucrania-tierra-permanente-disputa-corazon-europa-202202200229_noticia.html -

An expanding tsarate repeatedly confronted the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which, in the 17th century, brought the lands east of the Dnieper River under Russian control. That region, as we shall see, is known as "left bank" Ukraine; the lands to the west are known as the "right bank" and were controlled by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Crimea was conquered by Catherine II the Great in 1783. The Ottoman Empire gradually

shrunk in size to the benefit of Russia, which moved its border westwards to the Dniester. The decline of the former thus paralleled the rise of the latter.

Another actor to intervene in the region was a political form that emerged from the Holy Roman Empire and linked to the House of Habsburg, the Austrian Empire, which in 1867 crystallised in the form of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This was to be the great geopolitical rival of Tsarist Russia, blocking its rise to the warm seas.

It should be noted that this Empire was endowed with a much more open and tolerant multinational nature than the Russian Empire. This allowed not only the maintenance of Ukrainian culture but also the development of a pan-Slavic nationalism. Thus, in a period of prosperity that lasted until the First World War, the region of Galicia was aware of its belonging to a specific ethnic group and nationality, the Ukrainian nationality.

But these territorial divisions led to around 3.5 million Ukrainian soldiers in the Tsarist forces facing 350,000 Ukrainians in the forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the First World War.

The fourth actor is the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or Republic of the Two Nations, formed by the 1569 Lublin Union of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This was one of the largest and most populous states in Europe.

However, this political form was subject to successive partitions in 1772, 1793 and 1795. It is a highly fluctuating territory as a result of geopolitical events, which, in addition to the countries that give it its name, at its greatest extent, came to include Estonia, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Smolensk and Bryansk, as well as a large part of Ukrainian territory.

The consolidation of the Commonwealth caused Ukraine and Belarus to drift apart as the two came under different spheres of influence. Ukraine was placed in the shadow of the Kingdom of Poland and Belarus in the shadow of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

In 1648, in the Ukrainian part of the Commonwealth, an uprising of Cossacks and peasants, supported by Crimean Tatars, led to the creation of a Cossack Hetmanate, an administrative form headed by a hetman, i.e. an elected military commander. However, pressure from the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth on the one hand, the Muscovite tsarate on the other, and the Crimean Tatars on the third, led the Hetmanate to sign a treaty of vassalage with the tsar in 1654, turning the territory into a kind of protectorate,

which led to increasing Muscovite dependence. In 1667, with the Treaty of Andrusovo, the lands east of the Dnieper passed to the tsar.

As can be seen, this was a time of the utmost complexity in which mutable alliances were established, but in which the Tsar's strength would gradually prevail to the detriment of the Hetmanate, which would suffer as a consequence territorial amputations and a progressive loss of its political autonomy and, having left the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, would end up integrated into Russia.

With their integration into Tsarist Russia, the movement of cultural assimilation intensified through changes in administration, forced relocations, deportations and the arrival of many emigrants from other parts of the empire, along with restrictions on the use of the language. In fact, the Ukrainian language was banned by Tsar Alexander II.

To this time and practice correspond the so-called "colonies" which, today endowed with a colour (grey, green, yellow or raspberry), were used to designate human groupings of Ukrainian majority that were forcibly displaced in the past, in the form of repopulations, and were located mainly in Siberia.

In 1917, in the context of the disaster that was the end of the First World War for Russia, and which ended the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the central empires, the Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed in which, in addition to what is today Ukraine, part of Poland, Belarus and some areas of Russia with a Ukrainian majority such as Kuban were also claimed; this territory is as vast as it is undefined.

On the other hand, in 1918, the People's Republic of Western Ukraine was proclaimed in the Ukrainian territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, namely in the eastern part of Galicia. The two republics were unified in the Zluky Act.

The picture that emerges could not be more evanescent. It is the result of successive shifts in the balance of power in a continuous and accessible geographical space of which Ukraine is a part. The rise and fall of three empires took place here, no less. Ukraine, because of its location, was caught up in the history of the empires that surrounded it.

THE GEOPOLITICAL CHESSBOARD

The corners of the chessboard on which the game is played in Ukraine are determined by the rise of China, the strategic involvement of Russia, the decline of the West, the emergence of the global South, the resurgence of India and nuclear weapons.

The rise of China

The consolidation of China's rise implies a change in the structure of the international system. Its rise means the creation of an "unbalanced multipolarity", i.e. a multipolarity endowed with major players that outweigh the rest. Thus, the country's return to international society has altered the status quo.

China's presence alters the established order both globally and regionally. But the political weight of this actor is not yet formally or factually recognised within the existing institutional and relational framework.

China and the United States have maintained - and still maintain - a relationship of interdependence, complementarity and mutual benefit that has made possible their progressive economic coupling and integration since 1972. China provided the United States with accumulated savings and cheap labour; and the United States with technology and markets. In practice, this is a co-evolution, a strategic partnership, which has certainly benefited China the most in comparative terms, for the simple reason that it was the least developed and therefore most susceptible to improvement in comparative terms.

It is worth remembering, in order not to lose perspective, that three decades ago the US economy was 28% of the world economy, and the Chinese economy only 2%. In 1988 the per capita income of Americans was 25 times that of China, whereas today it is only four times; in other words, the Chinese economy was then more than thirteen times smaller than that of the United States.³² Consider that the Spanish economy outperformed the Chinese economy in terms of overall GDP until at least 1994.

³² FRÍAS SÁNCHEZ, Carlos Javier. China, a giant with feet of clay?, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, DIEEEA 108/2019.

The United States, for its part, has watched helplessly as its relative power has declined. It went from 38 % of world GDP in 1970, 32 % in 2000, 28 % in 2008 and 22 % in 2018. It is therefore seeking to rebalance the framework of relations. Their relationship has led to China's 'peaceful rise', i.e. an increase in its relative power. This has been done largely without questioning the existing paradigm, the established order, and with discretion, which has implied a passive attitude in the international arena. This is known as the "24-character strategy".³³

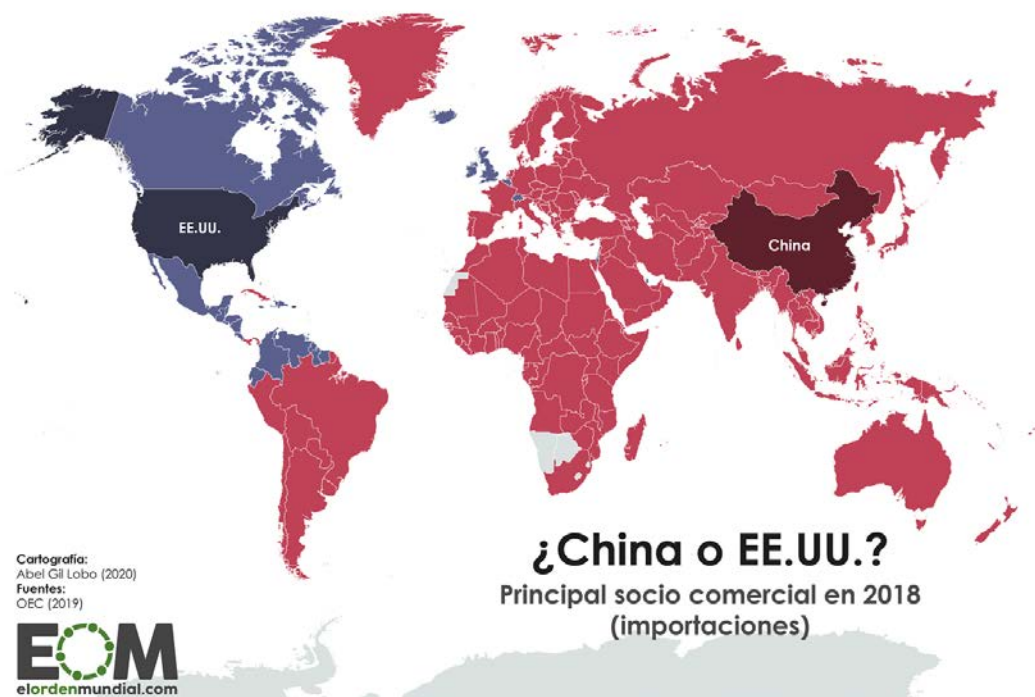


Figure: Top trading partners of the world's countries

Source: GIL LOBO, Abel. "La competición comercial entre China y Estados Unidos". The World Order, 2020. <https://elordenmundial.com/mapas-y-graficos/competicion-comercial-china-estados-unidos/>

Thus, the translation of this change to National Defence has been postponed - at least until 2015 - so as not to make the change in the framework of power relations visible, even though military spending has been increasing for 27 consecutive years. China has postponed covering its defence needs so as not to generate mistrust and not to make visible the alteration of the status quo. This has been done at the cost of maintaining a

³³ In the words of Deng Xiaoping "Observe calmly, secure your position, approach matters calmly, hide your capabilities and bide your time, keep a low profile, and never claim leadership",

military power that does not match the increase in its political power and clearly does not reflect it. At the same time, the resources obtained were invested in reducing the internal contradictions that the growth model provokes.

The *One Belt, One Road* (OBOR) Initiative is an ambitious project launched in 2013 and sponsored by China as a sort of re-enactment of the Marshall Plan. It is essentially an infrastructure loan programme with political strings attached. It is a strategy of influence and embodies an objective challenge to the existing order.

Such a strategy seeks to bring the two ends of the Eurasian landmass closer together by sea and land. The project may affect up to 70 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, 75% of the world's energy reserves, 70% of the world's population and 55% of the world's GDP. It now extends to the Arctic.

The visibility of a project of this magnitude clashes with US policy - the gaps of whose withdrawal it fills - and breaks with the practice of "peaceful rise". It is therefore at the very root of the US-China conflict, with whose interests in the region it openly collides.

Thus, Asia has made its position visible and is challenging the United States not only economically but also militarily (with its rearmament, its territorial water claims and its presence in the Arctic), diplomatically (with its Silk Road proposal and its presence in Latin America and Africa) and technologically (it has been able to create its own cyberspace and compete in areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing).

Measured in terms of purchasing power parity, and according to IMF data, China is as of 2018 the world's largest economy in terms of economic parity (17 % of world GDP), followed by the US (15.8 %) and the euro area as a whole (11.9 %, still including the UK). However, as a consequence of the above, China's economic overtaking has not yet translated into diplomatic, political or military terms. We are, at best, in a transitional phase or period. The United States is still the indispensable power.

Russian-Chinese relations. Strategic involvement

The consequence of this was a progressive cooling of relations with the West, which brought China closer to Russia (both had been part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation since 2001) in an attempt to gain strategic depth and avoid an eventual

encirclement. Events such as the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 would accentuate the rapprochement between the two countries, even if they do not maintain an intense trade relationship. China feels it needs a buffer with the West, and in this sense, Russia is it. As a famous Chinese proverb says, "without lips, teeth grow cold".³⁴

The agreement with Russia, the strategic alliance "without limits" signed in February 2022, that is, shortly before the invasion of Ukraine, is a reverse re-edition of the Kissinger-sponsored semi- (or pseudo-) alliance with the United States, which began with Nixon's famous visit to the country in 1972 and which protected China from the United States at the time. In any case, with its relationship with Russia, China protects itself in the North, in order to have its hands free to pursue its ambitions in the South: Taiwan and the China Sea, escaping the encirclement imposed by the "island chain". The United States is a "resident power" in the region, the other indispensable actor.

Its strategy, the backbone of its entire containment system, is based on the presence of a strong naval force as well as bilateral agreements with Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Australia and the so-called "6 guarantees" to Taiwan.

The so-called "island chain" strategy is a strategic maritime containment programme initiated during the Cold War. This was a kind of geopolitical encirclement manifested through island chains, set up by US Secretary of State Foster Dulles in 1951 on the basis of islands, reefs and islets of different physical ownership: China, the US, Russia, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Overcoming this space is essential for China to diversify its maritime routes.

The China Sea as a whole is constrained by a strategic perimeter known as the "First Island Chain", a maritime buffer that starts in the Kuril Islands, follows the Japanese archipelago and ends in Borneo. It is made up of a group of islands and bases that can be seen as a sort of retaining wall, since it has the capacity to block continental maritime traffic and contain Chinese naval activities by controlling its oceanic access, according to the logic of encirclement and counter-encirclement that prevailed during the Cold War. Its centre of gravity is located in Taiwan, which is located some 100 miles off the province of

³⁴ ZORRILLA, José Antonio (2006) China la primavera que llega. Editorial Gestión 2000

Fujian and divides China's maritime front in two, interrupting naval movements between the north and south.³⁵

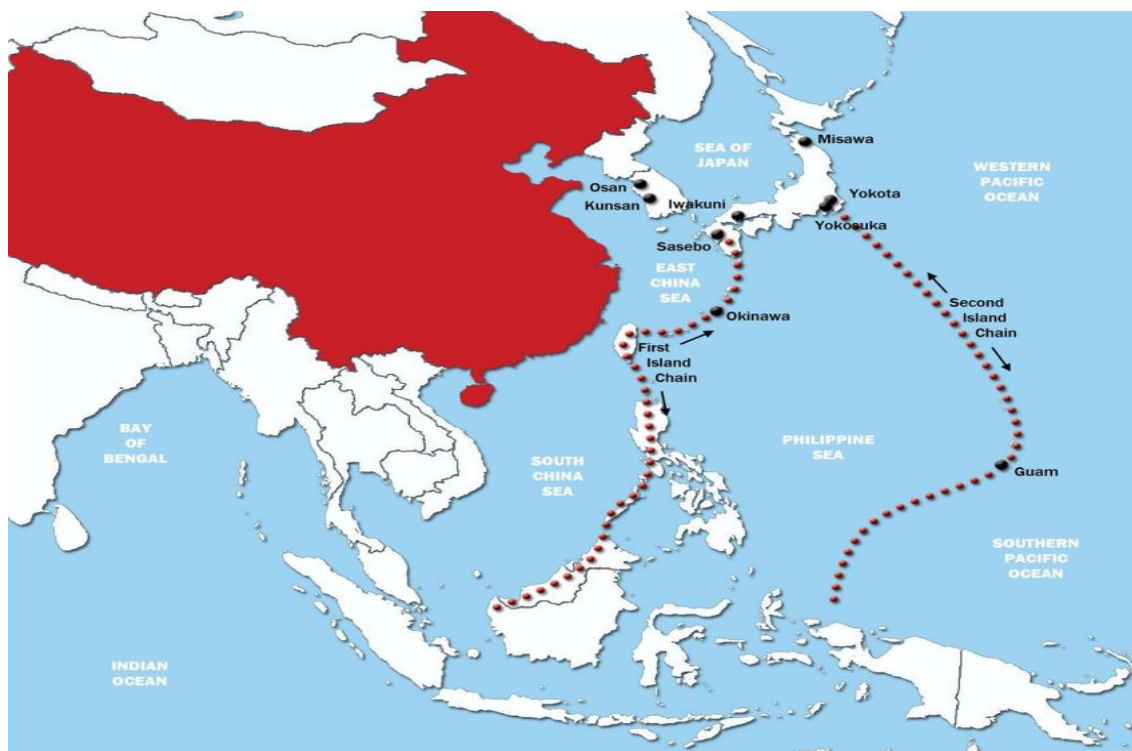


Image: First and second island chains

Source: Researchgate <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jan-Odrobinski-Staporek/publication/333663475/figure/fig5/AS:767535276363783@1560006078631/Overview-map-of-First-and-Second-Island-Chain-Source-Catama-2015.jpg> -

China is not a pro-Russian country with which it maintains cartelised, i.e. conjunctural, relations on the basis of non-conflicting interests and ignoring obvious divergences. China needs Russia's natural resources and geographical advantages. Russia needs access to technology and markets. That is why its support for the invasion has been far from as comprehensive as preached in the 'no limits' strategic partnership. China's role has been limited to little more than a few declarations of support and attempts at mediation if not modulation of Russian action, as it runs counter to the principles of its foreign policy.

Neighbouring Russia and China share a common vision on Central Asia; both seek to maintain its stability and prevent third party access. They also converge in the region as

³⁵ "China's naval modernisation: Is the dragon going global?" Georeality radar. 10.06.21. <https://www.elradar.es/la-modernizacion-naval-de-china-el-dragon-se-globaliza/>

members of three associations: the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), led by Russia, and the OBOR and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), led by China.

The two countries have established a sort of non-exclusive "division of labour" in economic and security matters, so that while both have managed to coordinate their often competing strategic interests in the region, they have not integrated the initiatives promoted by each of them because of the underlying rivalry between them. The SCO has not entered into the economic sphere, and the EAEU has not deepened its relationship with OBOR. This is without prejudice to possible overlaps.³⁶

In any case, Russia's presence was, until now, the cornerstone of balance in Central Asia. It is not for nothing that Russia has been in control for nearly 300 years and has many ethnic Russians living in the region. For this reason, and because of its experience and language, it has the best information and knowledge of the area.

Russia is also the preferred destination for emigration from the area and has invested heavily, with agreements to build gas pipelines for the export of Uzbek and Turkmen gas and the extraction of oil and gas³⁷. However, the Russians do not consider themselves to be treated with the gratitude that is due to them.

It remains Uzbekistan's main trading partner, accounting for more than half of the country's inward investment. The import substitution policy pursued by Putin's government following the imposition of US and EU sanctions has had positive consequences for Uzbekistan, which in 2017 increased Uzbek exports to Russia by 17 per cent.³⁸

The lynchpin of stability in the area is Uzbekistan. Moreover, Uzbekistan is the region's strategic pivot both in terms of population and focal point: it borders the rest of the countries, but not China or Russia, which gives its decisions a significant degree of autonomy. In fact, the other countries show significantly lower levels of consolidation as states than Uzbekistan.

³⁶ SIERRA, Ander. "China and Russia in Central Asia: cooperation without limits", op. cit.

³⁷ MARTÍNEZ LAÍNEZ, Fernando. "El corazón de Asia", in *Revista Española de Defensa*, July-August, 2009, pp. 71-77.

³⁸ "Uzbekistan Report" Compañía Española de Seguros de Crédito (CESCE) .09.10.2018. <https://www.cesce.es/documents/20122/352439/INFORME+UZBEKIST%C3%81N+-+-+>

In this regard, the country has joined the Russian-backed Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as an observer. Full membership would give it free trade access to Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Such an eventuality would serve to rebalance China's growing push in the region.



Image: The Silk Road in Central Asia

Source "Kazakhstan: The Belt & Road Highway To Europe & Central Asia".

<https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2021/06/30/kazakhstan-the-belt-road-highway-to-europe-central-asia/>

Russia's military presence is concentrated in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, a unique case, Russia opened a military base forty kilometres from Bishkek, balancing the presence of the US base at Manas, then opened with its licence to operate in Afghanistan. Russia controls the Baikonur, Sary-Shagan and Balkhash military bases in Kazakhstan, the Kant air base in Kyrgyzstan, and the Dushanbe military base in Tajikistan.

And this at a time when the war in Ukraine is reverberating in the region and generating contradictory feelings in countries that were once part of the Soviet space. Politically, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan cannot openly support Russia in this conflict because of parallels with Ukraine; but neither can they oppose it because of political and

economic ties. And in addition to economic concerns, there is also the fear of new 'special operations' for the protection of ethnic Russians.

Not surprisingly, Kazakhstan and Russia share the world's second largest land border (7,598 kilometres in total - 5,936 kilometres by land, 1,516 by river, 85.8 by sea and 60 by lakes) and the northern part of the country is home to a large Russian community. Kazakhstan also has enough population and territory to become the regional power in Central Asia, though not the centrality of Uzbekistan.

This is a country whose existence has already been questioned by President Putin himself, who asserted that the Kazakh state had not existed until Nursultan Nazarbayev - the first president of independent Kazakhstan - a point that is reiterated with relative frequency in public statements by members of the Russian political community.³⁹ In this regard, the deployment of Russian troops by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in the wake of the unrest triggered in January 2021 by the rise in the price of liquefied gas should not be forgotten. This intervention reiterates Russia's key role as a security provider in the region.

China's interests begin at the Xinjiang border. The country is trying to integrate this territory economically and prevent it from being contaminated by instability in the area, which, according to some analysts, seems to have generated a kind of obsession among the country's leaders. For these reasons, China favoured a securitarian approach in the context of which it pushed for the resolution of existing border disputes between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as progress in defence cooperation with a view to protecting its interests in the region.

China is home to populations of Hui (ethnic Han Chinese Muslims, some ten million), Uighurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims, eight million worldwide), as well as groups of Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Mongols with relatives on both sides of the border⁴⁰.

China is also approaching the region in line with its overall policy of access to and control of resources. This is the programme known as the Silk Road and Strip. The idea of the

³⁹BUSTOS, Alex. "¿Cómo ven el conflicto Rusia-Ucrania en los países exsoviéticos?" in *Diario Público*. 23.04.2022. Available at: <https://www.publico.es/internacional/ven-conflicto-rusia-ucrania-paises-exsovieticos.html>

⁴⁰ AHRARI, M.E.: "New Great Game in Muslim Central Asia" in *Institute for National Strategic Studies*. National Defense University. McNair Paper 47, January, 1996

Silk Road, after which it is named, is a concept defined in the 19th century by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen to describe the trade and caravan network linking China to the Mediterranean. It is in this region that it takes on its full meaning.

We have a political, investment and infrastructure programme that attests to China's relevance in the region. In fact, it has become one of the region's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade exceeding \$40 billion - 20 times more than at the beginning of the century - and representing approximately 20% of all exports and 37% of imports of the five countries in the region.⁴¹ Trade is also growing. Uzbekistan alone has more than 1,500 Chinese companies within its territory. In 2018, trade between China and Uzbekistan increased by 48.4% to USD 6260 million.⁴² However, anti-Chinese sentiments still persist in the region as a result of many years of Soviet propaganda.

Thus the war in Ukraine may have upset the existing balances of this cartel-like cooperation/competition relationship. Russia has been gradually losing economic and political presence in the region; and this war may have accelerated this decline, even if it maintains its military potential and cooperation. Further evidence of this are the clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus over the departure of Nagorno-Karabakh; and between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Central Asia proper.

This is compounded by the geopolitical vacuum resulting from the US exit from Afghanistan, which moves away from the Middle East and South Central Asia and towards the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, China's economic presence is growing in a new iteration of its peaceful rise locally. The opportunity for China is undeniable.

The region is a trade corridor connecting China to European markets. Added to this are not insignificant geopolitical considerations: direct land access to Iran and the approximation to the Western world through the construction of the Trans-Asian Railway.

Until 2009, 90 per cent of Turkmen gas was destined for Russia, which, acting as a monopsony, resold it to Europe. But in that year a Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China pipeline was opened and gradually expanded with new branches. Also in the same

⁴¹ SIERRA, Ander. "China y Rusia en Asia Central: ¿cooperación sin límites?" in Descifrando la guerra. 04.04. 2022. Available at

<https://www.descifrandolaguerra.es/china-y-rusia-en-asia-central-cooperacion-sin-limites/>

⁴²<https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2021/07/02/uzbekistan-an-economic-role-model-for-central-asias-belt-road-initiative/>

year, a new pipeline came on stream with the capacity to significantly increase gas exports to Iran, thus diversifying demand.⁴³

As a result, in the gas field, China has been displacing Russia, although its purchases are not at the same level and are made at preferential prices. In 2019, due to financial and pricing disputes with Iran and Russia, China was once again the sole buyer of all Turkmen gas, re-establishing the monopsony regime but with a different client and price-setter. But the profits obtained were used to pay for all the infrastructure built by the Asian giant in the country, resulting in a serious liquidity crisis in the Turkmen treasury.⁴⁴

On the Northern frontier, China's presence in the Arctic also reflects its revisionist policy, that is, the rethinking of its status as a global power, insofar as this is a relevant geopolitical space from which, for that reason alone, a global power cannot be absent. Moreover, its presence contributes to improving its intermediation capacity in other regions.

Thus, in 2005 it began to express its willingness to become more active in the Arctic. In 2013, and after moving closer to Moscow, it was granted observer status in the Arctic Council. In 2017, President Putin invited President Xi to link the Silk Road to the Northwest Arctic Route. All of which led to the publication in 2018 of a strategy for the region under the name of China's Arctic's policy, in the context of which it defines itself as a 'quasi-Arctic state', despite its closest point being 811 miles from the Arctic.

The Asian country acts in the Arctic with the same principles and political logic as it does in other territories: a policy of compromise and seduction oriented towards the long term. In local terms, this translates into the generation of cooperation networks and economic influence. This is a political strategy for the area defined as the Polar Silk Road, a name intended to signify the global nature of the Chinese project, whose Arctic strategy has a dimension and is a coherent part of its project.

Through this strategy, as in Central Asia, it aims to gain access to hydrocarbons and raw materials, but also, as a result of a thaw that would completely free up new shipping lanes

⁴³VV.AA. "Country profile: Turkmenistan". Bureau of Diplomatic Information. Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Documents/FichasPais/TURKMENISTAN_FICHA%20PAIS.pdf

⁴⁴"Turkmenistan's natural gas. Diversification as an obsession". The Asian Century. Available at: <https://elsiglodeasia.com/2022/01/12/el-gas-natural-de-turkmenistan-la-diversificacion-como-obsesion/>

by 2035, to have an alternative route - 30-40% shorter - in anticipation of an eventual closure of the strategic Strait of Malacca and as an escape route from the West's "island chain" strategy.

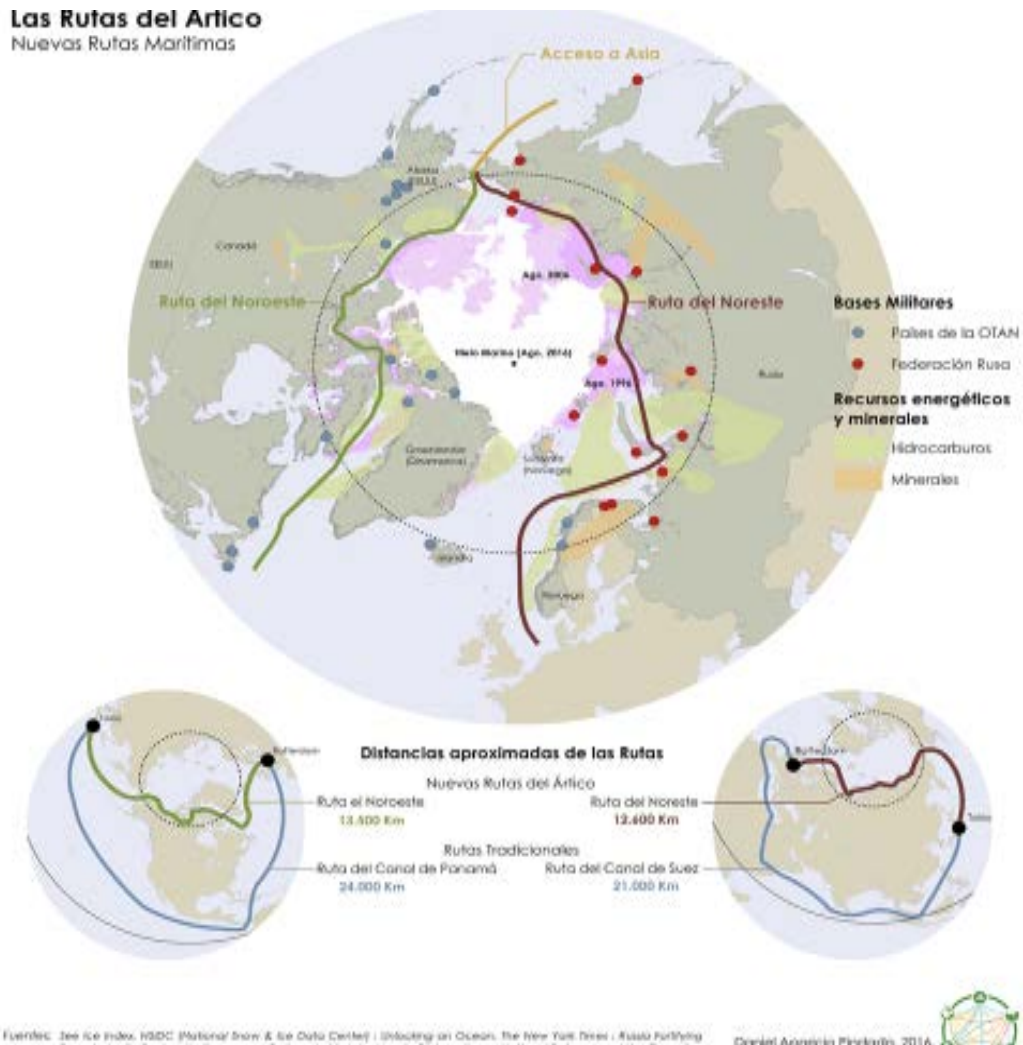


Image: New routes and bases in the Arctic.

Source: "Towards the Arctic Route - Maps of The World Order - EOM", The World Order.
<https://elordenmundial.com/mapas-y-graficos/hacia-la-ruta-del-artico/?nab=0>

China has been discreetly entering the region through soft, often scientific and cooperative, actions that also bring it into contact with the physical and political environment and readapt its actions to it. In this way it can take part in Arctic policy-making and promote the development of the Russian Arctic to its own advantage. In doing so, it implements its strategic partnership with Russia while using its geo-economic and

geo-strategic weaknesses to ensure that Russia does not hinder its presence in the area, as it has done in the past.

The Russian-Chinese manoeuvres that have been taking place in the region since 2017 and have even been used to put pressure on Asia-Pacific countries such as Japan deserve to be highlighted for their symbolism. The two countries have been conducting joint air patrols in the East China Sea since 2019, and in 2021, during the Maritime Interaction exercises in the Sea of Japan, these patrols crossed the Japanese Tsugaru Strait.

The Russian Arctic accounts for the lion's share of Chinese investment in the region. There are economic aspects to the relationship such as the 2014 agreement between Gazprom and China's National Petroleum Corporation to export more than one trillion cubic metres of Russian gas from Eastern Siberia to China over the next 30 years. This has been reinforced by other hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation deals in the Russian Arctic, thus directly inserting China into the region.

The most important project has been the Yamal LNG project, which started production in December 2017 and in the context of which China is cooperating with Russia (Novatek) and France (Total). This project consists of a complex of natural gas production fields in the east of the Yamal peninsula, as well as a liquefaction plant and a logistics port in Sabetta, from where the extracted gas is liquefied and transported to East Asia⁴⁵. Russia needs Chinese technology to export liquefied gas.

In addition, Arctic LNG-2 is currently being completed and is scheduled to be commissioned in 2023. In this project, Chinese state-owned oil corporations have a 20 % stake, along with Novatek, Total and Japan Arctic LNG, a Japanese consortium. China National Chemical Engineering and Russian firm Neftegazholding signed a \$5 billion contract in 2019 to build infrastructure at the Payakha oil field⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ FUSTER LEAL, Rubén. Russian-Chinese Connivance in the Arctic: Explaining the Polar Silk Road. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. 16 November 2021. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2021/DIEEEO128_2021_RUBFUS_Artico.pdf

⁴⁶ GREENWOOD, Jeremy and SHUXIAN, Luo. "Could the Arctic be a wedge between Russia and China?", War on the Rocks. 4/4/2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/could-the-arctic-be-a-wedge-between-russia-and-china/>

Notably, China's COSCO Shipping Company has partnered with Russia's PAO SOVCOMFLOT to operate LNG carriers from the Yamal refinery. And it is building - currently in the planning stage - a deepwater port at Arkhangelsk as a logistics base⁴⁷.

The Ukraine war puts China at a juncture of maintaining its relationship with Russia, but separating environments and maintaining its ties with the other Arctic states, if only as a way of trying to dodge sanctions, particularly on business and technology.

This forces it to make a number of trade-offs, since on the one hand it has a cartelised relationship that sets limits for it in every sense of the word, and at the same time it needs to balance and rebalance this relationship with the West. And Western Arctic actors, for their part, are obliged to redefine their relationship with China in the region depending on their attitude to the Ukrainian conflict and to Russia. The 2022 invasion has ended the Arctic's exceptional isolation from European conflicts by integrating it into the global space. However, at the cost of losing governance instruments such as the Arctic Council, which has been rendered inoperative.

Moreover, the technological and financial sanctions imposed on Russia and on companies that cooperate with Russia are likely to affect the complex and advanced projects developed in the region, altering the business landscape. And all this against the backdrop of the current slowdown in the Chinese economy.

Russia and China share more than 4,250 kilometres of border and a past fraught with disagreements. Desert Siberia is the natural hinterland of an overpopulated China - and even more so with global warming; China, unlike Russia, has 19% of the population and 7% of the planet's territory and water resources - on which Russia runs the risk of becoming economically dependent. This is why this relationship is perceived as being of a short-term nature, but nevertheless prioritised by China.⁴⁸

Thus, the opportunity presented to the Asian giant is undeniable, but it also accredits the conjunctural nature and limits of the relationship between the two, which are being reached as a consequence of the tension imposed by the logic of war.

⁴⁷ ALAEZ FEAL, Octavio. "China in the Arctic", Global strategy, n.º 27/2022. <https://global-strategy.org/china-en-el-artico/>

⁴⁸ WEISBRODE, Kenneth. "Central Eurasia: Prize or Quicksand" in The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001. Adelphi Paper, 338. 11. 12 Ibid. 215

Russia's loss of weight in its natural hinterland of Central Asia and the Arctic, accentuated by its technological and economic dependence on China, would result in the strategic envelopment of this country and would even threaten its existence as a state. And all this while the war in Ukraine makes it an international pariah and closes the doors to Europe and the West as a whole.

The decline of the West

Strictly speaking, China and the US do not properly collide, but complement each other. China occupies the spaces that the United States has abandoned in terms of power. This does not detract from the fact that the perception is one of competition, if not of a clash between the two countries. This, de facto, has not taken place, as a result of China's shift towards the Asia-Pacific, in the Chinese regional environment.

For years, the United States has been trying to reduce foreign policy spending to accommodate its economic power. But such an allocation of resources has brought with it a loss of political weight in key regions, or at least in those where it had a traditional presence, such as the Middle East and Latin America itself, as well as the unsatisfactory resolution of interventions in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Such shortcomings explain why the vacuum left behind has been filled by China, which has favoured agreements such as the one signed between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This is not a recent process of geopolitical reversal. It began with the second Iraq war and was consolidated during the so-called Arab Spring, in which the United States did not support the like-minded regimes, allowing them to fall and even encouraging their fall. Its turn towards the Asia-Pacific, which has a bearing on the aforementioned lack of continuity and political coherence as a power that claims to be global, is a geopolitical necessity and an economy of effort, but at the cost of taking resources away from other regions and, therefore, and with it, a loss of credibility and prestige in global terms.

The leadership of the United States, given the magnitude of the challenge it faces, requires, in order to exist, as we have already seen, the concurrence of other actors to which it can add its power and lead. This, incidentally, implies a strengthening of its position both politically and militarily.

Brzezinski, in his proposal for a trans-Eurasian security framework, called for "strategically compatible partners who could fit into the "great accommodation" under the leadership of the United States, which would play a role of "stimulus and arbiter" among the other powers⁴⁹. For this line of thought, Europe has traditionally entrusted its security to the United States, which is why it has a political culture that leads it to a more residual or reactive use of force, if not to its systematic rejection. It was thus considered, or perceived, by the revisionist powers as a subordinate and declining actor, lacking in means, strategy and will.

But as Professor Sanahuja points out, the invasion of Ukraine has created a tectonic shift in the European security architecture. And it has meant a vindication of Eastern European security visions - more Atlanticist and securitarian - against those of the Franco-German axis, or those of Southern Europe itself. The result has been a sharp shift of the centre of gravity of European security towards the East. This also implies, in the absence of an avowedly Asia-Pacific-focused US, a de facto "Europeanisation" of the European theatre of operations.⁵⁰

The invasion of Ukraine was a resurgence of NATO as a Cold War born and consequently a product of its logic. Its demise brought a kind of "mission crisis" that operations outside the Washington Treaty area were unable to fill. In post-modern times, NATO, while its geopolitical relevance was appreciated, was misunderstood. A *hard* power institution in a *soft* world. The war in Ukraine, which is also misunderstood from a postmodern point of view, has thus restored its *raison d'être*.

Support for Ukraine, as Professor Sanahuja points out, places us before a paradoxical reality: on the one hand, it reveals the EU's deep degree of dependence on the United States. But also that the US could not have acted alone in Europe vis-à-vis Russia. Moreover, the capabilities and agency that the EU has accredited to the case elevates it from its already recognised status as a 'civilian power' and 'peace actor' - and which act as legitimisers of its engagement in Ukraine - making Europe a geopolitical power⁵¹.

⁴⁹ VANAİK, Achin. "The Strategy after Bush." *New Left Review*.

<https://newleftreview.es/issues/42/articles/achin-vanaik-la-estrategia-despues-de-bush.pdf>

⁵⁰ SANAHUJA PERALES, José Antonio. "La Unión Europea y la guerra de Ucrania. Dilemmas of strategic autonomy and green transition in a changing world order" in *Policrisis y rupturas del orden global*. CEIPAZ Yearbook 2022-2023 (pp.23-58).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

To return again to Brzezinsky, to achieve stability in the international system, the European Union and NATO would have to expand eastwards, China would have to be co-opted and, together with Russia, eventually integrated into a transcontinental system that would "absorb the inevitable political and social upheaval and pressure"⁵².

The Global South

The change in the international order, the new unbalanced multipolarity, means that there is no such thing as what Brzezinsky rather indelicately called "vassal states". That is, less developed states should automatically align themselves with the rest of the actors according to the interests and dictates of the West; least of all for what is or can be presented - the Ukrainian War - as an internal conflict within the East, a distant war between targets. As, on the other hand, the war between India and Pakistan could have been, in the West's perspective.

It should not be lost sight of the fact that, as a result of the economic convergence brought about by globalisation, the sum, at least in terms of economic parity, of the economies of China, the United States, the EU and Russia is less than 50% of world GDP.

The development of a global south, which, incidentally, is part of the Russian narrative, had its beginnings in the new millennium and materialised in the emergence of groups of states such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa). emerging countries and developing economies that seek economic cooperation and promote trade between them, and these represent an alternative or "post-American" international order as well as a mode of South-South cooperation.

This, of course, was at the antipodes of Brzezinski's proposal which, although he ultimately advocated global leadership rather than domination, considered that the foundations of such leadership were transatlantic and transpacific alliances that were behind the US geopolitical victory during the Cold War, as they allowed the control of all potential challenges, even preventing the possibility of the emergence of counter-

⁵² VANAİK, Achin. Op. cit.

alliances or permutations between France, Germany, Russia, China, India, Iran and Japan⁵³.

The criticism of this model is that increased South-South cooperation is posited as a reproduction of the North-South model of relations. Its members impose their conditions as new emerging powers on the less developed countries with which they are linked, Northern-style. And the competition of India, Brazil and China for resources and markets in Africa does not disprove this hypothesis.

In the case of the BRICS, whose first summit was held in 2010, it incorporates a relevant structural contradiction by including three democracies and two autocracies in the same space. We are dealing with a market of 3.268 billion people and 27 trillion dollars⁵⁴. This group incorporates more than a few contradictions, such as the rivalry between India and China - which compete in the Indian Ocean and Africa - and, despite the current harmony, the rivalry between Russia and China. South Africa, India and Brazil are close to the West.

It is no coincidence that January 2024 marks the second expansion of this association - the first was to incorporate South Africa in 2010 - and has served to admit Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It is worth noting that, according to the South African presidency, more than 40 countries have expressed their willingness to join the group, and 23 of them have formally expressed such interest⁵⁵.

With enlargement, their combined economies will account for 37 per cent of global GDP, up from 25 per cent previously; and demographically, they will account for 47 per cent of the world's population, up from 42 per cent previously. Moreover, from a geopolitical perspective, enlargement will position the organisation in the Arabian Peninsula⁵⁶.

The IBSA Trilateral Forum was created in 2003, and has been dormant for the past ten years, serving to strengthen relations between the three countries that are democracy. It is known as the "southern trinity". The three countries are also the most important

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ BATALEME, Juan. "IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) as a strategy for global insertion." Clarin Newspaper 03.08.2023 https://www.clarin.com/opinion/ibsa-india-brasil-sudafrica-estrategia-insercion-global_0_YdfJHUpcPD.html

⁵⁵ Ibidem

⁵⁶ NATIONAL SECURITY DIRECTION. <https://www.dsn.gob.es/es/actualidad/sala-prensa/cumbre-brics#:~:text=The%20acronym%20BRIC%20was%20used,and%20the%20economies%20in%20development.>

countries in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and a maritime link can be established between them, facilitating naval integration. This is the sense expressed by the IBSAMAR naval exercise that takes place annually in South Africa, in which naval geopolitics is given relevance⁵⁷.

And it is this loss of power of the West in general that will become evident in the context of the aforementioned war. Thus in the UN General Assembly vote, although there was a majority condemnation of Russian aggression - by 141 votes out of 193 and only 5 votes against - it is also true that 35 countries abstained and 12 more did not participate in the vote, most of them African - no less than 17 abstained - or Asian⁵⁸.

After the disappearance of the Soviet world, theorised as the Second World, Ukraine, Russia and the rest of Eastern Europe were integrated into the First World. The rest of the countries that are heirs to the so-called Third World or Non-Aligned have been integrated into a space that Carl Oglesby called the "Global South". This group, which incorporates not a few of the former colonies, has a high level of anti-Western resentment. The concept of "Global South" is a geopolitical term that brings together a wide range of particular interests, but serves to express a desire not to submit to an order that they see as unjust, while expressing a demand for greater autonomy.

Thus, in the economic sphere, the position of Latin American countries on Russia and sanctions is highly conditioned by domestic political issues. In sub-Saharan Africa, states with important relations with Russia, which rely on the services of the Wagner group and its successors, try not to get involved. And in the Middle East and North Africa the problem is intertwined with energy and food policy issues.⁵⁹

Arguably, far from following the sanctions that the West signals, the countries of the 'Global South' have benefited from the new framework of relations with a weaker Russia.

⁵⁷BATTALEME, Juan. Op. cit.

⁵⁸ROMERO PEDRAZ, Belinda. "Guerra económica contra Rusia. Documento de Análisis del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, number 58/2022

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2022/DIEEEEO58_2022_BELROM_Rusia.pdf

⁵⁹PARDO DE SANTAYANA Y GOMEZ DE OLEA, José Maria. "La guerra de Ucrania y la rebelión del Sur global" Documento de Análisis del Instituto Español de estudios Estratégicos número 63/2022.

Indeed, the circumstances of the war have allowed them to enhance their economic benefit with below-market access to Russian energy resources .⁶⁰

India's emergence

In Asia, India - the most overpopulated country in the world today, with 1.445 billion people and which, like China, refrained from condemning Russia - is the champion and expression of this movement; in fact, it has displaced Brazil as its possible leader and main mediator in an eventual peace process. The country is a geopolitical and regional rival of China - which also maintains a strategic alliance with Pakistan, its perennial enemy - and therefore has competing interests with the United States, to which it is close, but also has a solid and historic relationship with Russia, which is key to its strategic autonomy in order to establish itself as a great power. These contradictions are even internal, as it is poorly integrated and intra-regional trade barely reaches 5 % of the total volume.

It has therefore refrained from condemning Vladimir Putin as an aggressor and has defied sanctions to obtain oil at heavily discounted prices - imports from Russia have increased from 1 to 20 per cent - and is New Delhi's largest military partner - its main arms suppliers during 2016-2020 were Russia (49 per cent), France (18 per cent) and Israel (13 per cent). For its part, the US has pressured India to no avail, but maintains its relationship to contain China.⁶¹

The Indian Ocean is a sea where sea lanes incorporate long distances without support. The "String of Pearls" is a strategy for the protection of these lines initiated by President Hu Jintao, which serves to designate a chain of maritime (bases and ports providing logistics and military support) and political supports that stretches from Sri Lanka to Djibouti and includes the ports of Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Sittwe (Myanmar) and Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Sittwe (Myanmar) and Gwadar (Pakistan), the Maldives (which in 2017 broke its agreements with the United

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José. "La guerra de Ucrania y la rebelión del Sur global" Documento de Análisis del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos número 63/2022 de 13 octubre 2022.

States to move closer to China) and Djibouti (which began to be built in 2015 and entered service in 2017 to combat piracy). We should add the Kyaukphy Special Economic Zone in Myanmar, a key *hub* for China's future direct access to the Indian Ocean; and even Malaysia.

However, the "String of Pearls" is not comparable to the network of bases that countries such as the United Kingdom, France and the United States have in the Indian Ocean. These also act as a counter encirclement to China's deployment in the Indian Ocean, which in turn is close to India. Political support must also be included in this effort, and not just in second place.

In any case, a perimeter has been closed around India. We are dealing with an immense land platform surrounded by a major power simultaneously by land and sea, and which therefore perceives its security to be concerned. This encirclement incorporates military components and, moreover, takes place in an area that has been its traditional zone of influence and natural leadership due to its size and centrality in this space to which it even gives its name. In fact, China uses its alliance with Pakistan and its ties with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh in its approach. ⁶²

⁶² ESTEBAN G. MANRIQUE, Luis. "India, China and the US and the great Indian Ocean game". *Revista Política Exterior*. 07.12.2020XJournalist. International analyst. <https://www.politicaexterior.com/india-china-y-eeuu-y-el-gran-juego-del-indico/>

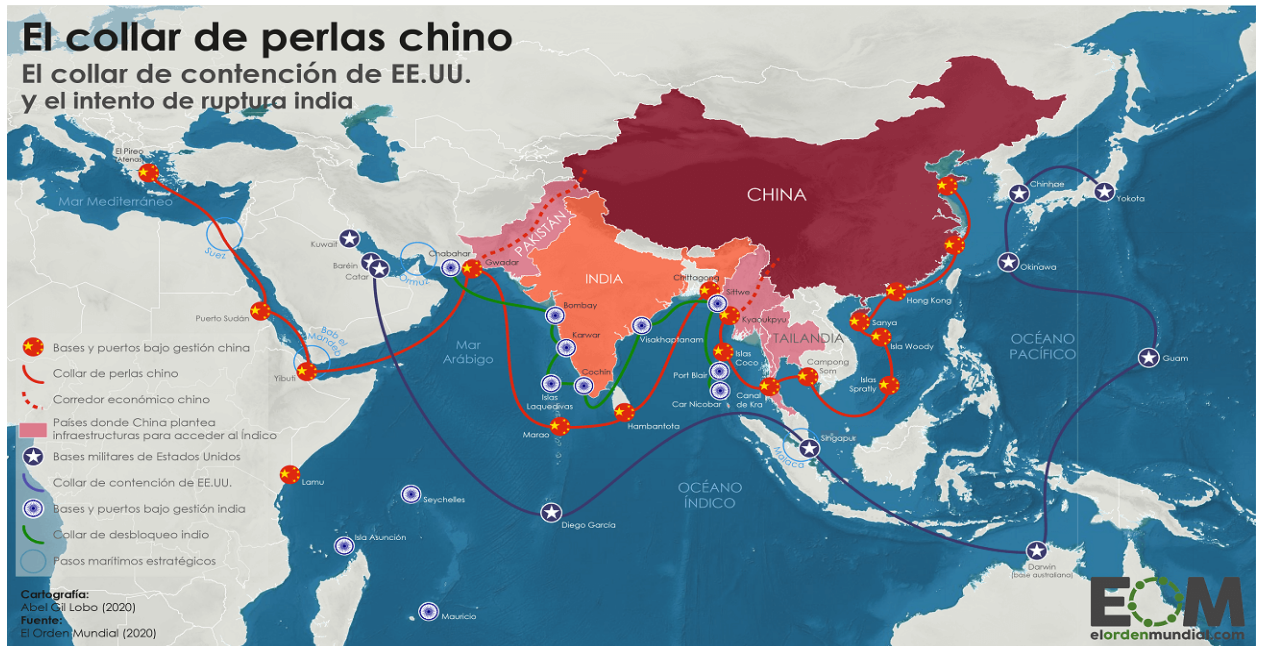


Image: The Chinese pearl necklace

Source: GIL LOBO, Abel. "La geopolítica china y su collar de perlas" El Orden Mundial.
<https://elordenmundial.com/mapas-y-graficos/china-y-su-collar-de-perlas/>

As can be understood, relations between China and India are not easy because of the simultaneous status of giants, neighbours and regional leaders that they both hold because of their history, demography, geography and economy, which makes each of them, according to Huntington, even civilisational hubs. British and Americans are to China what Portuguese and Chinese are now to India.

Their proximity thus brings together important contradictions. On the one hand, the complementarity of their economies and the size of their markets could make the two powers the world's largest trading bloc; in fact, Chinese, Indians and Russians belong to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. On the other hand, the problems they have with each other are neither few nor small. Thus, India does not belong to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a great Chinese success of 2020 that brings together 20 countries (China and, among others, the 10 ASEAN countries, Japan, Australia, South Korea and New Zealand) created after the United States withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and Progressive Agreement, which left a space of power that China has occupied in view of the political gap that such withdrawal implied, signifying, once again, the need for commitments that, beyond gestures, make the United States' turn towards the Asia-Pacific credible.

The two countries share a 3,380-kilometre border that is not fully defined, as China has since the 1950s rejected the former British demarcations under which the British had taken control of the sources of China's major rivers.⁶³

Moreover, given the interconnectedness and similarity with Pacific dynamics, it seems logical to treat the "Indo-Pacific" space as a single space that reaches almost as far as Central Asia; it is not insignificant in this regard that, in 2018, the United States renamed its Pacific command the Indo-Pacific.

This seems to be confirmed by the fact that India has maintained a presence in the Indian Ocean since 2016. At the same time, India has expanded its presence in the ocean, opening new bases in Mauritius, Seychelles and Madagascar, while it has signed an agreement with France to use its facilities in the Indian Ocean, while promoting collaboration with other countries in the region and the United States.⁶⁴

India's tradition, including its historical leadership of the non-aligned movement⁶⁵, and also its own status as a regional power explain much of its reluctant behaviour towards alliances. In fact, this fear has brought India closer to the United States and has led it to sign agreements with Australia and Japan, and even to speculation about greater integration in the *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue* (Quad) of which the United States, Japan and Australia are members, an informal strategic dialogue group of which it is a "reluctant partner" after its reactivation in 2017 and which could be considered in the logic of the counter-encirclement of China, even though India denies its character as a military alliance. India could be trying to respond with the creation of another Trans Himalayan Quad that would also include Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

But it has also resulted in the rearmament of India, which is, let us remember, a nuclear power. In 2010 its defence budget was 38.4 billion dollars (India was the world's largest

⁶³ ESTEBAN G. MANRIQUE, Luis. "India, China and the US and the great game of the Indian Ocean". *Revista Política Exterior*. 07.12.2020XJournalist. International analyst.

<https://www.politicaexterior.com/india-china-y-eeuu-y-el-gran-juego-del-indico/>

⁶⁴ VILCHES ALARCÓN, Alejandro A. "Armada India. The powerful unknown". *Revista Ejércitos*, 28.09.2012 <https://www.revistaejercitos.com/2018/09/28/armada-india/>

⁶⁵ For Nehru, without the presence of major extra-regional powers, India was the dominant actor in South Asia and its non-alignment allowed it to obtain economic and technological assistance from both blocs. (DE PEDRO Nicolás. "La India, potencia global en ciernes y clave del Indo pacífico" *Análisis del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos* núm. 17/2023 3 de marzo de 2023.

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA17_2023_NICPED_India.pdf)

arms importer that year⁶⁶), which in 2019 will become more than 60 billion dollars, 4 per cent of the world total, behind only the United States and China.

Moreover, in the second decade of the new millennium, and in pursuit of its strategic autonomy, it has become one of the world's main arms importers, diversifying the range of countries of origin and including the United States, which even supplies it with aerospace intelligence, thus accrediting the rapprochement efforts that both countries have undertaken.

The Indo-Pacific space, of which there is room for different perimeter readings, as the strategies for the region of the European partners demonstrate, is posited as an integral space on the perimeter of which Australia and the United States are situated along with the UK's desire to appear on a global scale, even if this is not in accordance with its economy and real capacities, explains AUKUS.

Nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons are political and even geopolitical weapons, if only because of the consequences of their mere possession. There is no such thing as a tactical nuclear weapon because, whatever their destructive capability, their use is a political decision at the highest level. Moreover, the mere presence of nuclear weapons defines the boundaries of the battlefield and limits any eventual resolution of the problem. And in the case of Ukraine, too. Mao called them "paper tigers" because their use is impossible. This makes them, at the very least, landmarks marking the territories of the superpowers.

The strategy of nuclear deterrence was substantiated in different phases before its intended final use. Thus, its incorporation into public discourse is a step forward in this strategy that has been followed by others such as exercises, the abandonment of treaties, its internal deployment and external deployment.....

Nuclear deterrence is anything that makes nuclear weapons present in the opponent's mind and affects his strategic calculus. It is thus a manipulation of risk by abdicating responsibility. It takes the form of a threat - often vague, as is now the case - seemingly

⁶⁶ Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy of Spain in Mumbai. "The shipbuilding market in India." ICEX, 2011.

left to chance. The problem is that it can end up being assumed by the other, making the process unpredictable. The problem is that "resorting to a strategy of coercive diplomacy, because one is unwilling to assume the risks of a military confrontation, will only rarely bring about a change in the adversary's behaviour and will ultimately lead, unless he capitulates, to the military confrontation that one wishes to avoid".⁶⁷

Deterrence depends on three key factors, a triangle of availability of means, uncertainty (with the setting of an employment threshold) and the credibility of the threat-maker.⁶⁸ Aron also cites three factors: psychological (credibility and estimation), technical (means) and political (benefit).⁶⁹

MILITARY ALLIANCES

The Security and Defence area brings together vital interests that are constant over time and have a long-term vocation; the path taken together strengthens these interests and smoothes the rough edges.

Military agreements imply the existence of a framework of shared values, a similar vision of the world, that is, without serious incompatibilities and common interests, if not a threat or an enemy to confront. In turn, these agreements, because of their nuclear nature, tend to expand to other areas: commercial, technological, industrial... They are, or should be, state policies that transcend the internal situation of the country that adopts them. These are long-term processes, based on trust.

The basic requirement is that there should be no disputes between the parties. This is difficult between neighbours, as it is enough for one of them to perceive them. But the United States and Spain are geographically distant and, with the dispute with Cuba having been resolved unfavourably for Spain in 1898, there are few disputes that could arise. Thus, as Ángel Viñas points out:

"There has been no other association between Spain and any other country that has been protocolised over so many years. There have, of course, been orientations of greater or lesser significance towards the three major countries

⁶⁷ DAVID, Charles-Philippe (2008) *La guerra y la paz*. Icaria, Barcelona 2008, p. 277.

⁶⁸ ESCRIGAS FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. "Deterrence and Nuclear Strategy". Working document of the Strategy Department of the 10th General Staff Course of the Armed Forces, September 2008.

⁶⁹ ARON Raymond. *Guerra y paz entre las naciones*. Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1985, p. 487.

whose action has, in one way or another, constrained the room for manoeuvre of Spanish foreign policy (France, the United Kingdom and Germany), but in no case has this led to a permanent link duly embodied in a succession of agreements covering the period from 1953 to the present day, a period in which Spain, the United States and the international system have undergone essential changes".⁷⁰

The nature of bilateral agreements depends substantially on the potential of the parties; they usually provide greater political support, but are more fragile. If the parties are manifestly heteropotential, as is the case here, they make it difficult for the relationship to be biunivocal and for adequate compensation mechanisms to be established, and thus generate a high dependence on the weaker party. However, they make mutual knowledge possible and facilitate otherness.

Multilateral cooperation, by diluting individual differences, can serve as a means of counteracting imbalances in power relations between the parties, as it reduces the loss of sovereignty implicit in any agreed relationship and gives it a more egalitarian and thus more democratic dimension. Multilateral agreements allow for a better articulation of interests, broaden the framework for negotiation and exchange and give it a stable and lasting character. The Security and Defence area brings together vital interests that are constant over time.

One issue arising from these relationships is that they limit the scope for disputes between parties with competing interests as a natural consequence of the limits imposed by the framework. The fact that the range of negotiating options is widened gives more scope for encounter, which in turn legitimises decisions affecting any of the members, not only with their acquiescence, but also with the force of the concert of wills of a community of nations formed on the principles of dialogue and cooperation. This gives rise to a remarkable practice of exchanges of support for the most diverse international bodies. The support of countries such as the United States becomes critical in this context.

It is an empirically established fact that military agreements are the most stable over time, followed by economic agreements and, finally, regional agreements. Moreover, it can be affirmed that military agreements not only enjoy great stability, but also contribute to the

⁷⁰ VIÑAS, Ángel. "La negociación y renegociación de los acuerdos hispano-norteamericanos, 1953-1988: Una visión estructural" Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea 83 2003, 25 83-108. ISSN: 0214-400X, p. 85.

<https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/CHCO/article/viewFile/CHCO0303120083A/6902>

prompt recovery of diplomatic relations after the cause that led to their disruption has ceased. There is no shortage of examples, and Spain may even be one.

They have proven to be capable of withstanding changes in the political situations of the parties and even in the international scenario, since, as has been said, relations between the armed forces of the same strategic environment directly affect their vital interests and require a common cultural basis. And these interests are not usually altered by a mere change of circumstances, so the link is maintained, providing the system with a stability that enables new ties in other areas that in turn contribute to the strengthening of the system. Other reasons lie in the culture of the army as an organisation, in the prosaic nature of military routine and its tendency to perpetuate what is already in place.

And military culture acts as a bridge, building trust through mutual knowledge and enabling mutual understanding between the parties. Consider that the military uniform is Western in style and that all countries in the world tend to imitate it. Military culture today is a Western subculture that facilitates the existence of shared values and at the same time facilitates interpenetration.

Military agreements, better than any other, withstand the challenges and vicissitudes that common relations suffer, effectively helping them to recover from their tension. And regular tension with what appears to be good; submission, in the long run, is bad, very bad for everyone.

They are, after all, the expression of state policies, which guarantees their continuity over time, and are therefore linked to reliability. They are therefore long-term projects: for example, no one equips a country with bases or technologies that could, in the short or medium term, be turned against it.

Security and Defence organisations, such as NATO, can be the result of the moment, of the need to respond to a common enemy, which forces differences and contradictions to be put aside and makes a solid and lasting construction possible. But once they are created, they transcend the causes of their creation, and even their own success.

However, if the sum of the parties' powers and the synergetic effect attached to any union does not exceed a certain threshold, centrifugal forces, often atavistic, coupled with cross-cutting interests will not allow the agreement to function efficiently or even formally. Thus, multilateral agreements between Third World states have empirically proven to be weaker

than their Western counterparts, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), which nominally even has a good military component, being a good example of this.

The fact that the range of negotiating options is widened gives more scope for encounter, which in turn legitimises decisions affecting any of the members, not only with their acquiescence, but also with the strength of the concert of wills of a community of nations formed on the basis of the principles of dialogue and cooperation. And all the more so if they are democracies.

The existence of a permanent and institutionalised forum for discussion turns the agreement into an intergovernmental organisation; its structures make it possible to modulate the whole process and facilitate the creation of informal channels that contribute to the strengthening of the system and of inter-state relations. Moreover, they are permanent and arbitrated tables for political encounters and the resolution of all kinds of common problems.

They can also grow over time as a result of a spill-over process, following the opposite steps of Maslow's pyramid; first the economic aspects are covered and as a result new interests emerge which determine the emergence of a common foreign policy. From the harmonisation of all these interests, a common security policy emerges as the culmination.



Image: Inversion of Maslow's Pyramid in building international organisations.

In any case, the definition against a common enemy helps the construction to be faster, as it forces the articulation of interests. Once the cause is over, once the parties are freed from the pressure, if the pieces are not well connected, divergences begin to emerge that destroy the organisation.

In the bilateral sphere, the case of relations between Spain and Portugal in the framework of the EU and NATO is textbook. The overall balance of Spanish-Portuguese relations over the last thirty years is very positive. After centuries of complex bilateral relations, with periods of rapprochement and others of hostility, the last four decades have seen a rapid rapprochement between the two countries and their respective societies.⁷¹ It remains, however, to develop the border area between them, fulfilling Saramago's Iberianist dream and ensuring that Spain looks to Portugal and Portugal to Spain, replacing defensive nationalism with rational and responsible citizenship.

The entry of both states into the European Union and their permanence in the hard core of the European architecture of international relations - with multiple negotiating tables that enable meetings and even *forum shopping* (the search for the most favourable of the various possible frameworks for concertation) - has made it possible to dilute differences and rivalry while opening up new spaces for cooperation, concerted action and the maintenance of a common position, while maintaining the level of relations with a healthy tension, that is, permanently limited by the framework of international coexistence.

Spain's Security and Defence architecture is built on four pillars that overlap and complement each other (OSCE, 5+5 Initiative...), without contradicting and reinforcing each other. The pillars of Spain's security architecture would be its membership of the European Union, which provides it with values; NATO, on which the defensive schemes would rest; the Spanish-American agreements which, by providing political support, would allow both pieces to be well interwoven with the national reality, acting as a counterforce to the system while; This dilutes the effects of the heteropotential nature of the relationship at the other levels and strengthens Spain's position with other countries and in other organisations with such backing; and then there is an unshared threat. These spheres reinforce each other and generate a compact whole.

⁷¹ MAE http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/portugal_ficha%20pais.pdf

THE TRANSATLANTIC LINK

The West would be made up of the United States, which would have a share of 25.06% of world GDP in constant prices, 4.2% of the population and the greatest military power (36% of the total). But the core of values would be provided by the European Union, with only 18.6% of GDP and 5.6% of the world's population. This would be the backbone of the West. The UK's presence in the EU strengthened the whole; its departure from the Union weakened the link. Therefore, if Europe and the United States want to operate in the international environment they must first accept that there are other equally powerful actors, and then go together; and this will become increasingly common as necessary. Relations between Europe and the United States, what has been called the transatlantic link, are thus of the utmost interest.

NATO's survival is explained by the fact that it has structured a space of stability and constant dialogue. Moreover, as the Ukraine crisis demonstrates, the risks and threats have only become more diffuse and, although they have lost some of their intensity, they have gained in spectrum. NATO is necessary in a rearming world; military spending is growing, in global terms, at least since 2015; and in regions such as Asia-Pacific, it has never stopped growing since the Fall of the Wall.

The transatlantic link - which is a diplomatic shorthand for US-European relations - had suffered as a result of the US pivot towards the Asia-Pacific declared by President Obama, and particularly during the Trump administration for its contemptuous political treatment of Europe, but the pivot is a geopolitical constant. And Europe will have to follow suit, not only to avoid a twisting of the relationship but as a matter of course.

As early as 1997, Brzezinski, assuming as inevitable the loss of relative power of the United States, the development of multipolarity and international disorder as anomie, proposed trying to prolong the existing order, the *Pax Americana*, as much as possible, and for this purpose to create a trans-Eurasian security framework led by the United States. In order to achieve this goal, Brzezinski believed that the European Union and NATO should go together and, moreover, expand eastwards. "An essentially multilateral Europe and a somewhat unilateral United States opens the door to a perfect marriage of global convenience". He recommended maintaining political form by making concessions to the European Union in order to strengthen it.

However, there is a difference in perceptions in terms of both effort and situation that will mark the distribution of work. The United States is presented as the god Mars (for its management of *Hard Power*, it uses 3.61% of its GDP) while the EU is assigned the role of Venus (1.47% of its GDP in 2020). This implies a complementary distribution of effort.

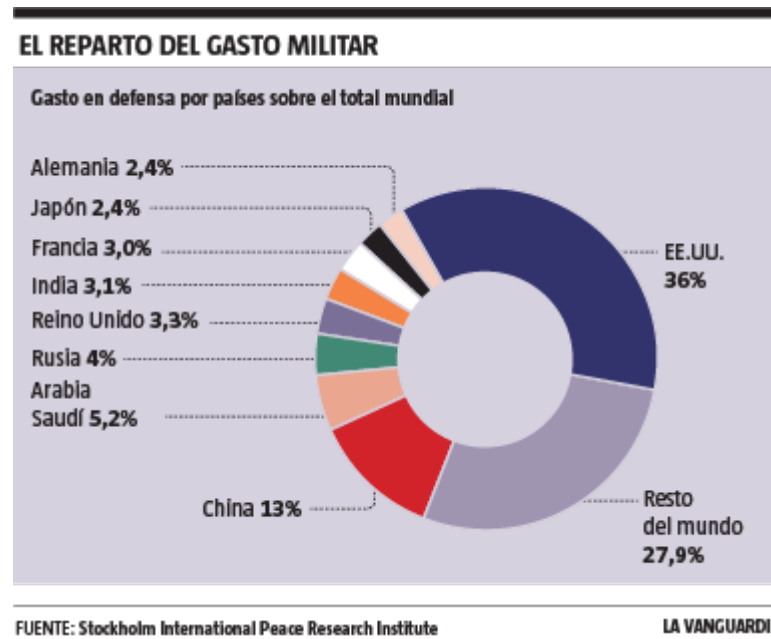


Figure: The 2020 Military Spending Shift

Source: SIPRI. La Vanguardia.

The most important organisation that brings together European and North American interests is NATO, a security organisation that guarantees the vital interests of its members and demonstrates the existence of a shared vision of the world. There are no trade organisations, not even trade agreements (remember the failure of the Free Trade Agreement between Europe and the United States, which, by contrast, succeeded with Canada), but competition between different actors rather than rivalry. NATO is a bridge linking the two shores, east and west, of the two continents. Indeed, it is arguably the only bridge that de facto unites them.

NATO and the EU are two equally complementary organisations. The Lisbon Treaty itself recognises that NATO is the foundation of their collective defence. In this context, the European Foreign and Security Policy, and even an eventual European Army, are neither

contradictory nor duplicative and therefore require increased coordination between the two organisations.

NATO brings together no fewer than 32 democracies (when Sweden's final, but bumpy, accession takes place), some of them the most advanced in the world. And its decisions are taken unanimously. The legitimacy of NATO's involvement in a conflict is reinforced by this fact.

But not everything is consensual or easy. US complaints about Europe's low military spending go back a long way. Nixon had already complained about it. US defence spending, which during the Cold War years was around 64% of the Alliance's total, has risen to 72% in 2013, while European countries' spending, then 37%, has fallen to 25.7%, and Canada's is 2.3%. While US defence spending during the Cold War exceeded European defence spending by 136 per cent, by 2012 the difference had grown to 180 per cent.⁷²

Europe's commitment to Ukraine and the destabilisation that this war brings with it is causing an ostensible increase in military spending, which is likely to continue, given the security dilemma it has generated and which has led many European countries, including Germany, to reduce the deadlines for reaching the level of 2 per cent of GDP in military spending, the once mythical figure that has always been an unattainable historical commitment of NATO members. But this is a source of other problems, including, looking back, those arising from German rearmament.

The end of the Cold War after the Fall of the Wall was an unqualified success for the organisation. More than a few people questioned NATO's very existence in the aftermath, including George Kennan himself. The cause for NATO's existence was gone. But there were also important reasons for its continued existence, as we have seen.

Moreover, the armed forces are sized in accordance with national interests and their security interests. And if collective security had evolved from collective security to individual security, this would have ultimately led to the rearmament of states, which would have increased conflict. This would have meant a return of Europe to the 19th century Bismarckian models that eventually led to the First World War.

⁷² Ibid.

NATO may have its problems and its debates, but its dissolution would not be good news for its members; indeed, a certain level of tension in such an organisation is even healthy. On the contrary, like any bridge, it is in NATO's interest to reinforce and strengthen it. And let it also be clear that without US acquiescence and even sponsorship, the European Union would probably not exist.

Indeed, the dissolution of NATO after the Fall of the Wall would have brought about the disappearance of a functioning organisation and the dismantling of a consolidated space, a forum for dialogue, consultation, consensus and negotiation that was previously established and that links with others, fostering mutual understanding and trust. Moreover, NATO allows for the mediation of third parties, extending the framework for exchange to other areas, given the integral, political nature intrinsic to its nature. Indeed, it could be argued that it has contributed to the improvement of relations among its members in other areas.

This organisation brings together 32 countries, which represents a population of around 950 million people (8.3% of the total), more than 50% of the world's GDP, and an aggregate defence budget that accounts for 63% of the world's total military spending. We are, therefore, faced with an organisation that combines an important political power, currently the most important in the world.

It has no declared enemy. However, its 2022 Strategic Concept defined China as a 'systemic rival' and considers Russia as the 'most significant and direct threat' to the security of the Euro-Atlantic space because of its attempt to establish spheres of influence on the continent through coercion, aggression, and annexation.

Spain and the transatlantic link

The United States strengthens its role as a global power through a series of agreements that complement its leadership in NATO. It has a special relationship with the United Kingdom which, at the time, allowed it to project its influence over the whole of Central Europe and to use bases located in all the former British dominions. In addition, it has promoted Anglo-Saxon organisations such as *Five Eyes* and AUKUS itself, and has signed military cooperation agreements consistent with its regional policy. In the Asia-Pacific, for example, as we have already seen, it is based on three countries with Security

and Defence agreements with the United States: South Korea, Japan and the Philippines. Alongside them is Taiwan, also with a solid relationship based on the so-called "Six Assurances"⁷³ and the now elusive Singapore. As a result, in 2020 it had a large network of bases located in more than 70 countries and a significant military deployment involving some 200,000 troops that fluctuates according to the circumstances of the moment.

Spain defines itself as a middle power with interests all over the world. But it is something more. It is the head of an ancient empire and a reference for the countries that were part of it. Almost 500 million people have Spanish as their mother tongue; in fact, 6.7% of the world's population is Spanish-speaking. Spain, because of its history and past, represents a cultural model.

The United States, for its part, is a superpower. Because of its geographical position, installed on a continent distant from Eurasia and Africa, it is protected from conflict, as was the United Kingdom, and from this position of advantage and with a solid economic base - unlike that country - it exercises leadership of the Western world, choosing the conflicts of its interest in which, if need be, to intervene. The scenario that emerges is that of a disordered world, similar to that of 19th century Europe, in which the *status quo* is modified by the emergence of other actors and even by the shadows of the Cold War.

⁷³ In 1979, the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, a tacit commitment to intervene in the event of an attempt to change the country's status unilaterally.



Figure: Distribution of US commands

Source: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/national-security-and-arctic-deterrence-russian-influences-arctic-ocean>

The United States and Spain have a shared history that should not be forgotten, although this is not the place to recall it either. A man's destiny is written in his character, as Heraclitus (and Margaret Thatcher, who quoted him without referencing him) said. But a nation's destiny is written in its geography. Spain's historical successes are not coincidental, but are related to this fact. America was not discovered by chance, but first and foremost because the objective conditions were there.

Spain is the appendix of Europe, a flank of the Mediterranean - this sea pivots between our country and Turkey, and not by chance either, they are two cultural melting pots - and a bridge to Africa and America. The Strait of Gibraltar is a crossroads and the Peninsula has the capacity for independent projection to two seas, thus escaping any attempt at control or geographical limitation. Spain is one of the *Choke Points* in the world.

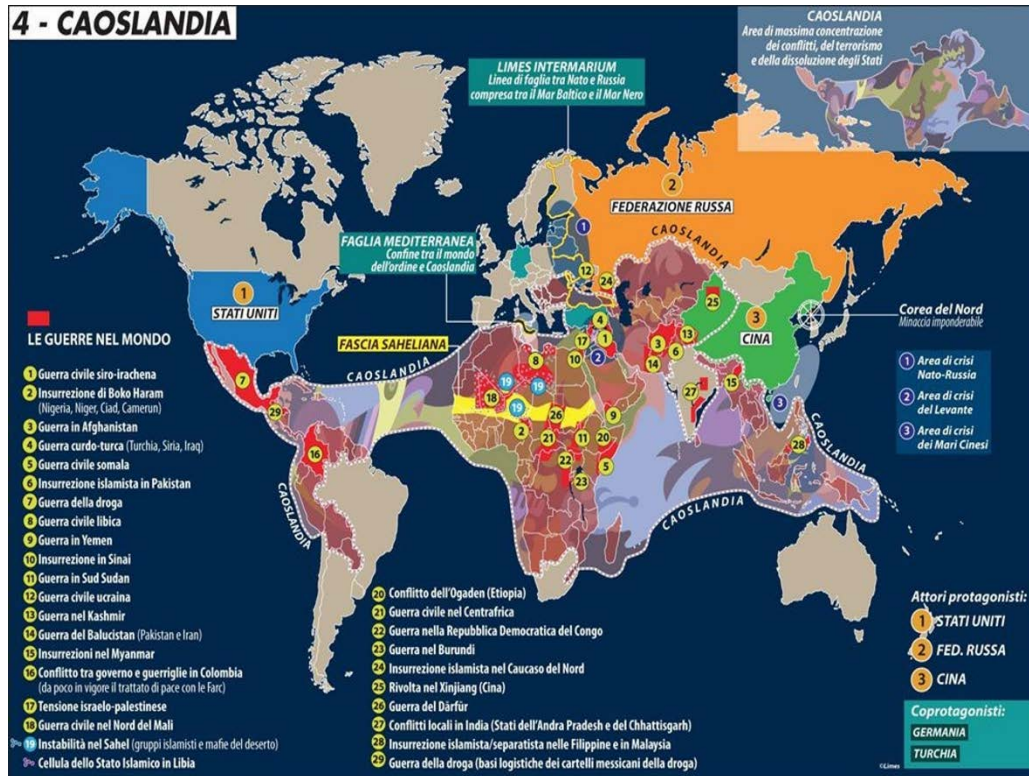


Figure: Barnett failure

Source: Rivista italiana di geopolitica. <https://www.limesonline.com/>

As can be seen in the graph, Spain is located on the immediate periphery of Barnett's area of disconnection characterised by conflict; it is an extension of Brzezinski's Balkan zone. It is therefore an advanced position, outside the conflicts, from which it has the capacity to both monitor and intervene.

It thus offers immediate and secure proximity to them (in all dimensions of the term, from citizen security to the reliability of their commitment), with Western standards of living and benign weather allowing year-round operation (unlike in the UK and Northern European countries) and the ability to directly access North Africa and its Atlantic coast without being constrained to the Mediterranean, as is the case, for example, in Italy (which had 113 US facilities in 2014) installed in its centre; or be prevented from entering it.

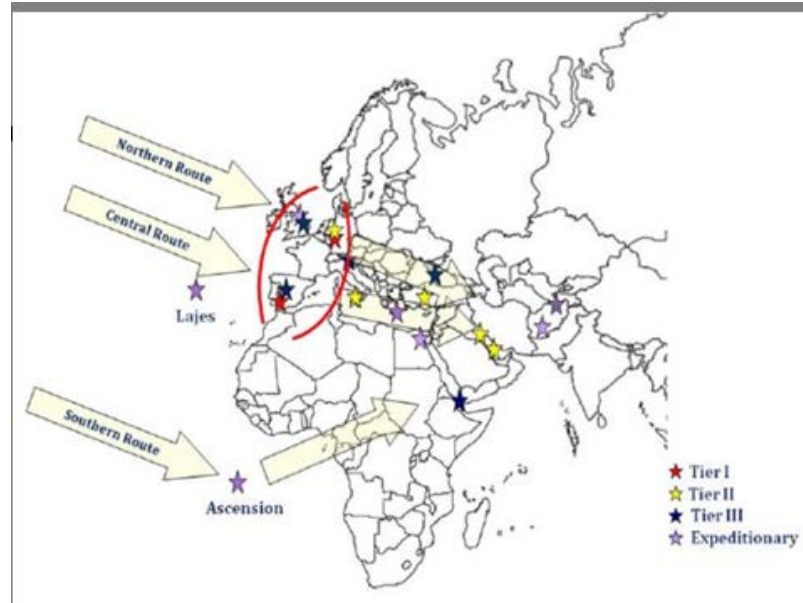


Figure: Transport Routes from the USA

Source: Morón Air Base "hidden 'jewel' of Pentagon's global deployment", *defensa.com* 3 September 2013 <http://www.defensa.com/frontend/defensa/base-aerea-moron-joya-oculta-despliegue-mundial-pentagono-vn9978-vst169>

Spain would be located in an intermediate position on the central access route from the United States to the Middle East, which gives it the possibility of swinging at any time from either of the other two; and also from Northern Europe to the West and North Africa. The country is thus a strategic crossroads straddling areas of interest to the United States and also to Spain.

Its strategic position on the central Atlantic route linking the United States, Europe and the Middle East means that it is integrated into the Strait-Balearic Islands-Canary Islands axis. Rota and Morón are bases of Spanish sovereignty and joint use that provide an exit to the ocean and allow control of the Strait without being confined to the Mediterranean, making the military capabilities of the British colony of Gibraltar redundant for the Allies and irrelevant. The Cartagena Naval Base complements the control of the Mediterranean side of the Strait by ensuring the deployment of a Spanish naval force in this sea.

What is more, the interests are convergent. Spain is committed to stability in North Africa and the Sahel region, and also to the Middle East.

The United States' pretensions in its relationship with Spain have been linked, in addition to geographical space and projection, to the search for stability in the area, the

maintenance of the *status quo* in the region and the reinforcement of the established system of alliances. The Rota-Morón binomial is thus a strategic pillar in the defence of the West.

INTERACTIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN WAR ON THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE SPACE WORLD

The end of the Cold War meant the gradual disappearance of the bipolarity of the time, that between the United States and the USSR. This was based on military balance and nuclear deterrence. Thus, it gradually integrated the rest of the international actors into a single space. This is the "rise of the others"⁷⁴ of which Fareed Zakaria speaks.

In this context, the Ukrainian war is an expression of Russia's revisionism, of its irrevocable will to alter the current geopolitical order and its dynamics. We are facing an attempt at reversal or involution which, if consolidated, would mark a geopolitical turning point that is accentuated if we consider the war in Gaza, which we intend not to go into. It would be a kind of antithesis movement within the succession of Hegelian dynamics on which globalisation is based, and therefore coherent with its logic. To say that, in the 21st century and in Europe, the lack of a country's industrial capacity cannot be replaced by the roar of the cannon.

The special status demanded by Russia implies in practice a kind of regionalisation of the globalisation process, and with it its fragmentation and asymmetry. This is a return to Cold War geopolitics, i.e. the compartmentalisation of the world into spheres of influence.

The point is that international society is in equilibrium, in haemostasis, and has a large inertial component. Any disturbance affects all its parts and generates uncertainty, so that the system as a whole reacts against its disruption. That is why Brexit experienced great difficulties; the modifications to the treaty between Mexico, Canada and the United States were not significant; and the effects of the implementation of sanctions are significantly delayed and reduced. In any case, it is not possible to unravel such an interwoven fabric due to its reactive and restorative nature of its automatisms.

⁷⁴ ZAKARIA, Fareed. *The world after the USA*. Editorial Espasa, 2009.

This is happening at a time when, as a consequence of the same process, the "world's centre of gravity" is shifting from the developed to the emerging economies and, in particular, to China.

Globalisation has brought about a convergence between advanced and emerging economies. This has been accompanied by an increase in interdependence between all of them. As a result, the world economy has become increasingly multipolar and, consequently, the West's dominance or capacity for influence has diminished.

Moreover, what has happened in Ukraine has also made it clear that the model of relations that has been followed with Russia since the end of the Cold War, a sort of conllevancy, has also proved to be very insufficient and has not achieved the integration that, pedagogically, it was intended to achieve through flows (trade, tourism...), the development of shared interests and mutual knowledge. This model lacked intensity. The example of the Federal Republic of Germany after the Second World War sheds light on other possibilities.

The dimensions of the war in Ukraine

It is common to define phenomena by what is most visible and notorious, downplaying and even neglecting what is hidden. In the case at hand, war, this tendency makes it a material and substantially violent phenomenon. However, it far exceeds such a parameter. So much so that there is no agreement on its definition, with its organised and political nature being the substantial element and not so much its bloody character.

War is not necessarily a violent activity, but it is a necessarily political activity. Moreover, as a human phenomenon, it escapes the physical dimension in which it takes place and moves to the emotional plane. We are faced with an act of communication, in which the physical, the violence, is not necessarily essential and has other parameters of measurement than the ordinary ones.

War is, above all, a clash of powers, a clash in all its dimensions. And it is neither an ethical, nor a just, nor an economic act, nor even a military one, however much it may be substantiated in this field. It is a political act, an act of power management, so that any analysis carried out without taking this fact into account, that is, referring to only one of the levels, is incomplete, and therefore false and profoundly erroneous.

In this context, globalisation has led to an increase in relations, favouring the expansion of countries' interests. At the same time, the growth of relations brings with it an increase in conflicts, as these are derived from the existence of such relations. But also their limitation, as they also stress the rest of the relationships they harm and react by seeking to restore the broken order. The problem is that, as we are seeing, local conflicts can become globalised.

War requires the existence of a wide range of conflicting interests on both sides, something that the growth of relationships - and thus of interests - makes increasingly difficult. The same is true of alliances. The result is that the reality becomes a hybrid: countries maintain a common base of shared interests and, on top of that, a much smaller set where this is not the case. As a result, states in most respects cooperate - which allows for common rules - but in others they compete; and in some - to a limited extent - they may even compete.

Thus, we can conclude that globalisation has made it so that there are multiple shared interests between countries that the grouping of interests and their alignment in the "friend-enemy" logic, which requires the non-existence of common or shared interests, is very difficult. What has happened in Ukraine shows that this is not impossible, even on European soil.

Returning to the case at hand, its dimensions also make it a complex confrontation. Russia is involved in two simultaneous political conflicts. One with Ukraine, of high intensity and, moreover, with hybrid components that takes place in the five known domains (land, air and space, maritime, cyber and cognitive). And the other directly with the West (understood in a broad sense and ranging from the US, the EU, NATO to Japan and South Korea), of which this war is a material expression; it can even be seen as a proxy confrontation in which Russia's place in the world is being determined and which is being transferred to other geopolitical spaces.

The root causes lie in the seemingly weak response to the first Ukraine crisis and the ineffective nature of sanctions imposed in the face of a growing Russia seem to be among the triggering factors.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ SANAHUJA PERALES, José Antonio. Op. cit.

The second part of the Ukrainian war had its prolegomena in the contrived migration crisis between Belarus and the EU that began in the summer of 2021, when Belarus encouraged the entry of migrants, mostly from Central Asia and the Middle East, who were brought here for the purpose of facilitating their infiltration into the EU. This crisis was motivated by the doubts raised in the West by the election of Belarusian Prime Minister Lukashenko. However, it is hardly conceivable that it would have happened without Russian acquiescence and even encouragement. It is a first test of strength before swinging the challenge to its final location in Ukraine.

This occurred while in its shadow, in the last four months of the year, there was a progressive and not very discreet build-up of Russian military forces on the Ukrainian border. Such action is a clear exercise in coercive diplomacy and a prelude to the invasion of Ukraine, and was combined with Gazprom's technical difficulties in energy supply, threateningly signalling the use of energy dependence as a political weapon.

This move was intended, implicitly or explicitly, as a kind of forced negotiation. The lack of success of this strategy, coupled with serious military and political misjudgements, probably precipitated the invasion. The Russian intervention, the so-called "special operation", also prevented Ukraine from taking the military initiative with a counter-offensive, which it could be expected to be preparing, and recapturing Donetsk and Luhansk.

The Russian argument linked Western instigation of the Orange Revolution and its destabilising political effects with Kiev's harassment of the Russian-speaking population and the 14,000 victims of the war in eastern Ukraine. This, together with NATO's presence in what was once the USSR's western security glacis, was part of a discourse that provided a social and political-moral alibi to justify its intervention.

Russia's military action was intended to be swift and decisive, executed with large conventional means in the face of the passivity of a surprised and fearful West. Russia expected the operation to be little more than a military stroll in the presence of a largely supportive and cooperative population. With this strategy, which included a *shock and awe* component (resulting in at least 8 million refugees) and direct involvement in the conflict, Russia was raising the stakes. By doing so, it expressed its irrevocable

commitment and will while emphasising the vital and permanent nature of its return to the status of a major geopolitical actor.

To achieve Western inaction, Russia was also counting, on the one hand, on the deterrence provided by nuclear weapons and, on the other, on the economic, social and energy consequences of resisting Russian designs and intervening in the conflict by supporting Ukraine. And this, if only because of the uncertainty involved. A short conflict was therefore in everyone's interest.

War is part of politics, a function of politics. It can even be said that, during its development, war and politics - and even before - are one and the same thing. War, as a total confrontation and clash of powers, determines that the struggle also extends to non-military planes, expanding the framework of the conflict in demand of that plane that allows the achievement of the objectives pursued.

This expands geographically - horizontally - or moves vertically to other dimensions (public opinion, economy...), seeking a sphere of victory, geographical, sectoral or of domination, over which to overwhelm the opponent and build total victory in military terms. This must be translated into political terms - what we commonly call peace - in order to have any meaning or sense. In any case, failure to attend to one level of the conflict can be the cause of a general defeat.

In the case at hand, Russia has expanded the scope of conflict horizontally and intervened in Africa, threatening Europe's southern flank. And it has done so through the Wagner company, a private military company, which has been active not only in Ukraine, where it has acted as an almost ordinary military force, but also in Libya and, in general, in the entire Sahelian strip, where the intervention provides it with gold that helps it to save the embargo. As a private security company and through a less restrictive use of force, it has even managed to displace France from its traditional zone of influence, the French Francophonie, aligning itself with the regional powers that have control over natural resources.

Incidentally, the role of the Wagner company and its successors, beyond that of the "contractors" - an equivalent figure used by the West, although never with primacy or to the detriment of the armies but as a political or operational complement to them - refers to the lack of political consolidation of the Russian state. This is a way of waging war - in

which ex-prisoners are even employed - that harks back to pre-State Renaissance models, to figures such as the condottiere, if not to the warlords so characteristic of the wars of disintegration in the Third World.

At the vertical or domain level, it is worth mentioning the importance acquired by the cognitive domain in this conflict. The logic of war makes information a domain, a plane of confrontation at all levels: political, strategic, operational and tactical. In fact, Russia's actions can be classified as multi-domain actions insofar as they integrate strictly military actions with others of economic warfare and in the cognitive and cyber spheres.

In the digital era, cyberspace is emerging as a key element of the confrontation. It was not for nothing that the war was accessible from the Internet and social networks from anywhere. For this reason, some observers call it the "first cyber world war" of the 21st century. Indeed, the impact of the internet and cyber attacks on the war was unprecedented in speed and scope.

In this sense, the *IT Ukraine Army* is a kind of international civilian militia, that is, an army of volunteers who, from anywhere in the world and with the help of large civilian platforms and companies, together with the fundamentally non-military powers of the Ukrainian state, have contributed to a digital response.

From a cognitive perspective, it is also worth mentioning Ukraine's good work in countering Russian actions and preserving social cohesion and resilience. It is worth mentioning the successful management of a political discourse that was excellently aligned with strategic communication and this with the rest of the functions (*Cimic*, *Infoops...*) and decision-making levels.

Such alignment - in terms of content and, above all, timing - is essential, not only for international support - materialised in terms of legitimacy and resources and facilitating the political work of Western governments in their relationship with their citizens - fundamental for providing relevant capabilities to armed forces that, although trained in the practice of war since 2014, had meagre capabilities when compared to Russia's; but also for the very guidance of the war effort at all levels and with a view to providing actions with synergetic effects.

Cognitive issues are at the heart of democratic systems. The effective right to accurate information and plurality of information is a measure of the democratic quality of a society.

In this context, Europe has also done its homework in the form of standardised procedures which, although improvements are always possible and desirable, mean that the state is subject to the law.

This led to the suspension of important media outlets such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik News*, at the request of the European Council shortly after the invasion of 2022. This was later ratified by the Court of Justice of the European Union, given the evident alignment of the news of both channels with the theses held by Moscow and their capacity to influence public opinion, which could be altered to the benefit of a foreign state. These measures were presented as exceptional and the result of a war context. All major European digital platforms followed these blocking measures, ensuring their effectiveness.

This brings us to the question of the military use of the civilian capabilities of companies large and small, which has turned unsuspected technologies and applications into weapons. These - particularly the large commercial platforms - have provided the means - technological, but also the expertise - to effectively counter Russian action.

Thus, the most advanced commercial software, along with consumer-oriented technologies and applications, have been repurposed and used for weapons purposes. This ranges from thermal imaging to guidance systems, from washing machine chips to commercial drones, from 3D printers to hologram technology and virtual reality (VR) training systems.⁷⁶

Companies such as *Microsoft* and *Cloudflare* have helped strengthen the Ukrainian network by operating from other parts of the world. In fact, the company *Starlink* mobilised 5,000 satellites right after the invasion began to ensure the functioning of the internet, while other commercial space companies provided remote sensing and satellite communications, as well as intelligence. Others provided mobile phone applications with image uploading and geolocation systems or chatbots for information exchange that made ordinary citizens potential agents⁷⁷.

⁷⁶ MCGEE-ABE, Jason. "One year on. 10 technologies used in the Ukrainian war". Techinformed. <https://techinformed.com/one-year-on-10-technologies-used-in-the-war-in-ukraine/>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The transition from a war of movement - the failure of the attempted seizure of Kiev - brought a war of positions, a clash of economic and even industrial and arms capabilities.

GREY ZONE AND ECONOMIC WARFARE

The other element of conventional deterrence employed by Russia is economics. The invasion was accompanied by a combination of rising interest rates, rising inflation and uncertainty acting simultaneously on highly indebted economies. Thus, the prolongation of the conflict would also have a deterrent effect that would help to accept the results of the invasion as a given.

The uncertainty of the war has increased political risk markers, which is reflected in the economy, the price of raw materials, agents' confidence, trade links and financial instability. In fact, almost every country in the world has been affected by the invasion⁷⁸.

The Ukrainian war, from a Western perspective, was both timely and a rupture of an energy supply dependency relationship that had grown in the heat of mutual benefit and trust since before the end of the Cold War. Capital that is hard to count in terms of trust has been squandered.

The point is that delaying an invasion until February - when it could have been executed in October and even earlier - gave Europe enough time to reorganise its energy relations, even if it suffered in terms of efficiency and expenditure. It was, in Russia's strategic logic, a serious miscalculation that defused much of the intended effects. The "winter of our discontent" was not possible.

The war has also forced a redefinition of EU security and defence policy. With the Russian attack and the military instrumentalisation of energy, the EU has been forced to admit the failure of decades of constructive engagement with Russia. And it has also forced the

⁷⁸ DIEZ GUIJARRO, José Ramón. "The return of geopolitical risk: economic effects of the war in Ukraine". FUNCAS Report. Cuadernos de información económica Nº 288 (May-June 2022). <https://www.funcas.es/articulos/el-retorno-del-riesgo-geopolitico-efectos-economicos-de-la-guerra-de-ucrania//comercio/balanza/rusia>

return of the US - however partial - to Europe whose support and engagement with Ukraine does not make it a secondary actor⁷⁹.

Indeed, Russia and the EU, until the invasion, were evolving towards economic interdependence. Russia needs technology for its development; and it is, in turn, a consumer of European products. On the other hand, Europe needed energy security and raw materials found in the territory of Siberia. Russian markets were also excellent markets for European products.

The invasion of Ukraine can be seen, in a sense, as an act of economic and energy warfare against Europe and a complete break with the decades-long dynamic of rapprochement referred to above. But these figures only marked a trend that has not been consolidated, which is why the impact of the Ukrainian war has been only moderate.

Russia, in economic terms, is basically an economically inefficient exporter of raw materials and has undergone a process of deindustrialisation. More than 50 per cent of European supplies came from Russia as the infrastructure system made it the more efficient option. The war in this sense provoked a massive and historic energy shock - Russia reduced its gas exports by up to 80% - which, due to the uncertainty of its resolution, affected the European economy, which saw post-pandemic expectations collapse. Never before, not even in the Cold War, had Russia used energy as a weapon.

The confrontation between Russia and the West is taking place in what has come to be theorised as the Grey Zone. The complexity of international relations has given a specific space to relations that, in global terms, are not strictly friendly but which, not for that reason - and because of the interests in other spheres that anchor them - escalate to military confrontation, with all the consequences of rupture and destruction. We are faced with a strategy of political confrontation that combines, at the same time and in an almost undifferentiated manner, peaceful actions, in what are still shared interests, and others that are quasi-hostile in other areas but which do not directly involve destruction or bloodshed.

In this space, the parties' conduct is not properly peaceful; indeed, it is the aggressiveness with which they are also imbued that differentiates them from ordinary conduct. But neither are these actions openly hostile; they are situated in the space between the two

⁷⁹ SANAHUJA PERALES, José Antonio. Op. cit.

terms. They are materialised by means of tools, not infrequently of *Hard Power*, but not military, but frequently economic or otherwise. Economic power is conceptually located within *Hard Power*. And that is also while peace and war act as attractors and polarisers through the behavioural clarity they refer to.

These are unfriendly actions that take place while maintaining other actions that are not unfriendly and are not prevented. This undeclared action, however much the perpetrator may be suspected, allows the rest of the relations with the country that is the object of the hostile action to be maintained. Thus, the concept of the grey zone is a reminder that war, peace and political management are overlapping realities, inseparable functions, united in purpose. These are not strictly military tools, which are not very visible or ambiguous. In fact, this space restricts the possibilities for the use of the armed forces and obliges an unusual coordination of agencies.

It is, because of the advantages it offers and the few tolls it incorporates, the characteristic behaviour of revisionist powers such as Russia, i.e. those that seek the transformation of the established order that they defy while pretending to submit to it. Actions on this plane, however hostile, are limited, they do not involve direct physical violence, i.e. bloodshed, with all the international condemnation that this entails. Moreover, it is done in an undeclared, if not covert, manner.

In this theoretical context, the timing of the invasion of Ukraine could not have been more politically opportune to shift the confrontation to the economic level. The West had not yet fully recovered from the 2008 financial crisis, and had been forced into further debt to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As if the overlapping crises were not enough, the end of COVID had generated a significant imbalance between supply and demand as a result of changes in consumer behaviour patterns and the inability to adapt. This situation brought with it a supply shock parallel to the unleashing of hostilities that turned the confrontation with the West into an economic one, turning the prolongation of military operations, the chronification of the war, into an act of economic and social taxation. In fact, the world economy, and particularly the Western economy in the two years prior to the war, showed, on the one hand, its fragility in the face of the superimposition of crises and, on the other, its lack of

flexibility to adapt to the changes in demand derived from the modification of consumer patterns.⁸⁰

Russia, for its part, had over the past eight years prepared itself for possible responses to its challenge and had accumulated \$600 billion in foreign currency with which to cope with possible EU sanctions⁸¹.

To this we must add the Russian Federation's de-dollarisation effort which coincides with China's attempt to weaken the dollar as a reference currency and internationalise its currency. The ultimate battle for global supremacy between the two superpowers will be for the reference currency. Following this dynamic, the global financial system is gravitating towards fragmentation and monetary multipolarity.⁸²

The efforts that nations had made to mitigate the effects of the pandemic limited any short-term response in terms of economic policy. Thus, the economic, financial and social repercussions of the war were combined with diplomatic and military repercussions, and its effects on public opinion served to call into question the political framework that had been in place until then.⁸³ Societies did not understand their involvement in a distant conflict in a world that had previously been behind the Iron Curtain.

All in all, between 23 February 2022 and 25 February 2023 the EU has implemented 10 separate sanctions packages covering economic sanctions covering the financial, energy, transport and technology sectors. This involves 1473 individuals and 207 entities⁸⁴. The West froze some US\$324 billion of the Russian Central Bank's foreign exchange reserves, more than half of its reserves, then valued at US\$640 billion.

Russian banks have been disconnected from SWIFT and included in the full blocking sanctions lists, some of them, such as *Sberbank* and VTB, the largest in the country. More than a thousand multinationals have severed or significantly reduced their relations with Russia, whose greatest vulnerability is its level of technological dependence on

⁸⁰ DIEZ GUIJARRO, José Ramón. OpCit.

⁸¹ SANAHUJA PERALES, José Antonio. Op. cit.

⁸² PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José. Op. cit.

⁸³ DIEZ GUIJARRO, José Ramón. "The return of geopolitical risk: economic effects of the war in Ukraine". FUNCAS Report. Cuadernos de información económica Nº 288 (May-June 2022). <https://www.funcas.es/articulos/el-retorno-del-riesgo-geopolitico-efectos-economicos-de-la-guerra-de-ucrania/>

⁸⁴ Europa.eu <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/> EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine - Consilium (europa.eu)

European countries - such as Germany and France - and particularly with regard to semiconductors. This latter shortcoming has even affected military operations⁸⁵.

As a result of oil import restrictions, Russia in 2022 lost around US\$175 million per day, in absolute terms, i.e. at market prices. However, it has managed to redirect these exports to new customers, including China, India and Turkey - which purchase 70% of the oil transported by sea - who buy Russian crude at heavily discounted prices and at a significantly lower price than Brent. To assess the magnitude of this phenomenon, suffice it to say that, at the beginning of 2022, Russia supplied less than 2% of India's imports, but is now on its way to becoming its largest single supplier⁸⁶. This allows it to have a positive current account balance, which provides economic continuity to the war, something absolutely fundamental and decisive.

Thus, a year after the war began, with prices rising, and after redirecting its trade from countries that implement sanctions to those that do not, Russia has managed to maintain the level of its oil exports, even though the maximum price paid for the Urals is below the maximum set by the European Union. In fact, the country managed to increase its oil production by 2% and its export earnings by 20% to US\$218 million per day. In October 2022, total oil exports were already 7.7m barrels per day, only 400,000 barrels per day below pre-war levels. Russian crude oil exports thus remained virtually unchanged from pre-war levels⁸⁷.

An infinite standoff in Ukraine as has been postulated leaves the outcome of the conflict between Europe and Russia in the hands of the industrial and economic capabilities of both sides.

On this basis, the Russian economy appears to be robust, with growth by 2023 estimated by JP Morgan to be over 3-percent in 2023 and 1.8 percent in 2024, compared to 0.6 percent and 1.3 percent respectively for the EU economies. As with all wars, the level of government spending required to maintain military operations has helped sustain

⁸⁵ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José. Op. cit.

⁸⁶ BBC. "War in Ukraine: what impact have Western sanctions really had on the Russian economy a year on from the start of the invasion?" BBC News.
<https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-64556563>

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Russia's economic activity in the midst of turbulence, ensuring full employment (unemployment is at 3%) and even a 5.2% average wage increase.

The problem will come later, when the war stops and a new dynamic of market readjustment is generated, all the delayed commitments, particularly financial ones and the accumulated lack of social and infrastructure investment, will have to be addressed. This will be compounded by both mistrust of what has happened and dependence on Western capital goods, so that the long-term damage can be expected to be very considerable⁸⁸. But, as long as the line of failure is crossed, after is after; and in a war, prediction is very difficult and daring.

CONCLUSIONS

Occidere derives from the Latin *occidere*, to fall. It is thus the place where the sun falls, not so much a geographical space as a direction. An imprecise reality that, in any case, is losing relative power. As a result of globalisation, the world is moving towards an increasingly multipolar form of equilibrium. A multipolarity that, given its unstable nature, once again seems to be in transit towards a new bipolarity.

Its conceptual definition can be made as a sum of physical and intellectual terms. The software of the West would be a civilisation built on an idealisation of diverse and relatively close cultures, that is, on a core of shared axiological codes and the fruit of a common history. And the hardware, its physical dimension, would be embodied in a network of military alliances that would ensure convergence and congruence of interests, but above all of values. The transatlantic link proves to be crucial.

Spain occupies, not by chance, a central space as shown on maps in which, in turn, the West is depicted at its centre. The reason lies in geography, in a similar distance to notable geographical points (Cape Horn, Bering Strait, Cape of Good Hope...) But this heartland centrality, which has given our country such historical advantages, makes it difficult for it to escape the geopolitical dynamics of a globalised and interconnected world.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

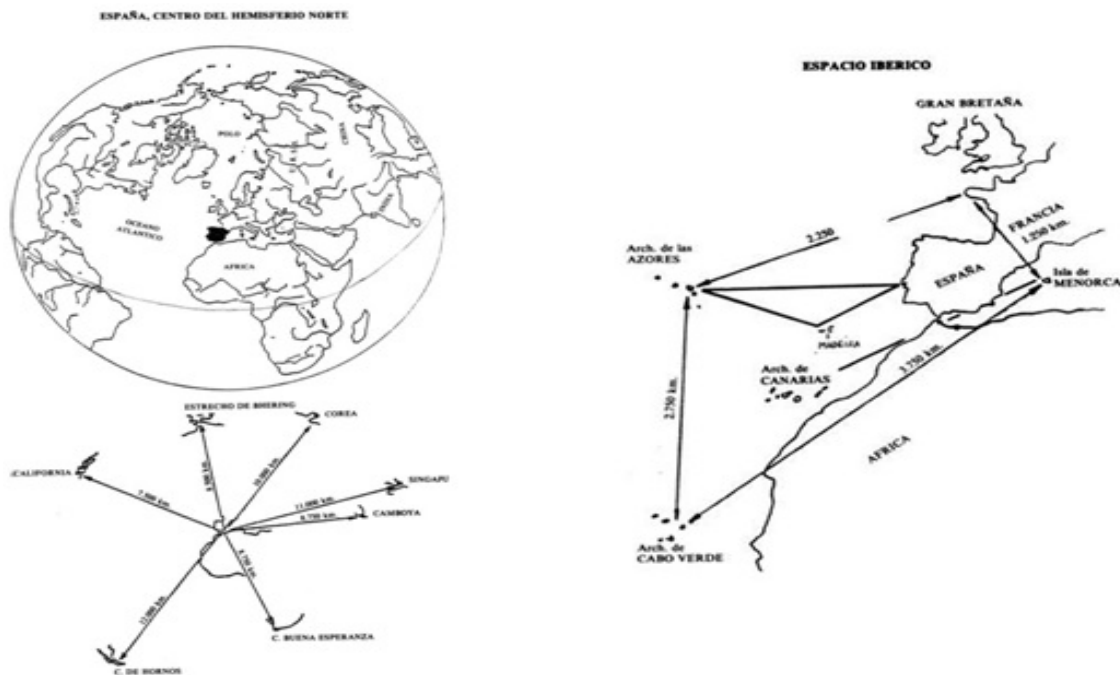


Image: Geopolitical centrality of Spain.

Source: NAVARRO, Fernando. "El valor estratégico de España". Revista Arbil núm. 11. <https://www.arbil.org/111nava.htm>

More than a few wars are a failure of diplomacy. The Ukrainian war in particular is. Liddell Hart, from his experience in the First World War, a prime example of such failures, concluded that the termination of a conflict must ensure future peace, which makes the best negotiated settlements. While Kissinger, in a similar vein, pointed out that "in dealing with the defeated enemy, the victors in designing a peace agreement must make the transition from the intransigence indispensable for establishing victory to the conciliation necessary for lasting peace".⁸⁹

In this vein, again in Liddell Hart's view, the end of the Second World War was delayed by the Allied demand for unconditional surrender. This was too direct an approach and caused stubborn German resistance. It is worth considering that no solution to the conflict at hand is necessarily good in itself, neither the defeat of Ukraine, nor the weakness and even fragmentation of Russia, nor the replacement of the framework of global relations. All incorporate, at the very least, a point of extreme danger.

⁸⁹ KISSINGER, Henry. *Diplomacy*. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 1994, p 80.

Moreover, and without going into other considerations and variables, Russia's positive current account balance gives it room to prolong its military operations. Nor are the positions and objectives of the European allies unanimous, which is important for a negotiated peace. In any case, a 21st century reissue of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty is far from a good idea for the future.

It is striking, and this may again be the case in Ukraine, that the negotiated end of many wars leads the parties to accept intermediate positions that they had previously rejected as contrary to their dignity and interests. The combatants thus return to their psychological starting positions once the aggression has been exhausted.⁹⁰

In this logic, the chronification of war has the positive element, in Luttwak's view, that conflicts must burn until they are extinguished in order to be in a position to achieve a lasting peace. And, at the point that has been reached, the peace achieved cannot be allowed to be a stepping stone to further negotiations, i.e. to a repeat of what is known as the salami strategy.

That said, and as Brodie notes, "wars have tended, since antiquity, to have a clear and sudden beginning, and an equally clear and sudden end... in the periods following wars reconciliation has been very rapid and remarkably widespread. In dynastic times, it was not difficult..., but we have seen something very similar in modern times when whole peoples have been involved."⁹¹

The warm sun of York is very deceptive. Napoleon spoke of the sun of Austerlitz in his Waterloo harangue. And while history does not repeat itself - however much it may rhyme, or do so as farce - it should not be forgotten that the multipolar models of 19th century Europe eventually led to the First World War and bipolarity.

Thus, if consolidated, the Russian attempt would entail a major structural change in the framework of international relations, which in turn would result not only in the stagnation but also in the reversal of the globalisation process. This, in turn, would lead to structural changes in the world economy - especially on the supply side - in addition to the rupture

⁹⁰ ALONSO BAQUER, Miguel in *Lecturas de Sociología Militar*. Documento de Trabajo Escuela de Guerra Naval. CESEDEN Library B22C1.

⁹¹ BRODIE, Bernard. *War and Politics*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico 1978, p. 223.

of the framework of international economic relations that has shaped the world since the Second World War.

On the other hand, an eventual Russian-American agreement on Ukraine that would take the world back to the Cold War would have similar difficulties in its implementation as the Portuguese-Spanish agreement of Tordesillas (1494) did at the time, even though the latter was legitimised by papal sanction and globalisation was not as advanced.

In the chapter on lessons learned, it is worth highlighting the importance of technology and domains such as the cognitive domain, whose entry into the fray puts the population under stress no less than the regulatory framework of states. The EU's action has avoided the tension and delegitimisation of these individually, by adopting - as a group of advanced democracies and with the legitimacy that this entails - decisions restricting rights and subjecting them, moreover, to the rule of law.

And in terms of technology, the contribution of large platforms to the success of the war. But it also highlights the use of civilian technologies for military purposes in a way that, due to its systematic and wide-ranging nature, transcends the concept of COTS - dual technologies - as it reaches aspects such as satellite intelligence, information integration, communications and even weapons (robotics, drones...). We could say that the Ukraine War has made governments rethink more their industrial bases for a high-intensity conflict (such as surplus ammunition needs...), and do so alongside the agility and resilience of supply chains.

Given the economic nature of the war that Russia has posed to the West, it is also not bad practice, in order to assess its stage and evolution, to look at economic indicators such as stock market indices, the Euribor or inflation.

The war caused an escalation in commodity prices by accentuating a rise that had already been occurring since 2021 and had not been corrected because it was considered transitory. This led to inflation levels that had not been seen in the region for several decades. This, in turn, was transferred to disposable income and, with it, shifted to growth and employment, increasing its sudden and unforeseen effects when markets and the

social fabric had been pushed to their limits during the previous crises⁹² The war against Europe was conceived as a supply and energy shock.

Finally, it is common to refer to the term geopolitics in the singular in order to underline the scientific and deterministic nature of the results obtained, but this is a fallacy. Geopolitics varies according to the reference chosen, the conceptions and logic of those who formulate it, and the timing and sequencing of its projection. There are thus many geopolitics, ranging from the Arctic to Central Asia, from Europe to Asia Pacific, from Indian geopolitics to Chinese geopolitics, or that of the global South. And they all vary, moreover, according to the time frame or the ideological or intellectual reference we choose.

A multipolar world necessarily incorporates multiple geopolitics. The upheaval of the Ukrainian war has unhinged more than a few of them. And a war is nothing less than a bloody realignment of geopolitical relations, whatever the circumstances in which they are constructed. This suggests an increase in global conflict, in a world that, since 2015, has been increasing its levels of military spending.

This is a highly complex scenario. Thus, the paradoxical logic not of war but of pure political action has meant that the invasion of Ukraine, far from being sympathetic to the population, has served to consolidate it as a nation-state. And it has taken us back to the moments and strategies of the First World War, a conflict that has even been evoked by those politically directing the war.

But some things are not the same, even if they are similar. The contradictions of China's rise - by the Japanese at the time - and its status as a systemic rival are, of course, one of the great variables that will determine the future. The economic binomial formed by China and the United States generates mutual benefits, even if China would be the most damaged party if this were to break down. This is why their confrontation is not only economic. The United States outstrips China in terms of nominal GDP - but no longer if the figures are considered in terms of economic parity - but fundamentally technological,

⁹² DIEZ GUIJARRO, José Ramón. "The return of geopolitical risk: economic effects of the war in Ukraine". FUNCAS Report. Cuadernos de información económica No. 288 (May-June 2022). <https://www.funcas.es/articulos/el-retorno-del-riesgo-geopolitico-efectos-economicos-de-la-guerra-de-ucrania/>

since technology and innovation determine the future and enable the paradigm shift. This, in turn, serves to preserve the present. And so we will continue, for as long as we can.

And if the Sino-American co-evolution had limits that were probably surpassed by 2013, so did the Russian-Chinese one, and these are likely to be found in Central Asia and the Arctic. More so in Central Asia than in the Arctic, even if the latter has definitively escaped marginality and joined globalisation. And with it conflicts.

Central Asia is capable of breaking the Russian-Chinese axis of convenience in the sense that Russia's withdrawal in the wake of the Ukrainian war together with the US exit from the region may have created an additive vacuum that is likely to be filled by China. First in economic terms, by replacing Russia as the first partner of the countries in the region, which is part of the 'near abroad'; and then in political and symbolic terms, as a consequence of a re-enactment of the 'peaceful rise' at the local level.

China's access to energy resources affects Russia's interest in controlling the energy sector in the region. And, as if that were not enough, the success of its ambitious Silk Road and Belt programme may result in Russia's strategic envelopment - for what is even its hinterland - and make it even more dependent on China.

China and India are the key players in the Asian century, but they have little or nothing in common; and, in historical terms, they have not perceived each other as neighbours until recently. India wants to be a key player and protagonist in the 21st century and not merely a balancing power. It therefore sees China's rise - and its support for Pakistan - as a profound strategic challenge. But it does not know how to achieve the former, nor how to address the latter. In this context, it has opted for a peaceful Indo-Pakistan, while remaining ambiguous about explicitly containing China and not closing the door on relations with countries such as Russia or Iran, which are themselves at odds with Washington. A country aligned, however, according to the issues and seeking its own strategic autonomy⁹³.

The war in Ukraine adds to the tension that Sino-US bipolarity is putting Europe under. This means that Europe as a whole, and then each country - in those competences that

⁹³ DE PEDRO Nicolás. "La India, potencia global en ciernes y clave del Indo-Pacific" Análisis del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos num. 17/2023 3 de marzo de 2023. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA17_2023_NICPED_India.pdf

have not been ceded - has to make its own decisions. This stresses the Union as a whole and leads to a lack of coherence.

The Russian invasion may have caused damage of more than twice Ukraine's GDP by 2021, and the question of war reparations and reconstruction of the country are issues that will resurface again.

The future is related to the strategy to be pursued with Russia, given the failure of the policies of engagement and rapprochement that the war has brought to an end. On the other hand, expelling Russia from Europe means handing it over to China. We need to put on our high beams and transcend the moment.

Thus, the preservation of Russia as a state is a geopolitical necessity for Europe to whose geography it belongs, if only out of self-interest, because of its potential, its resources and its adjacency. Not to mention its history. The contribution of Russian culture to Western civilisation is beyond doubt.

The only option is to persevere with the previous strategy of rapprochement, albeit more demanding in terms of deadlines, the intensity of relations and the forcefulness of democratic reforms. Conllevanza is not a valid option because of the permanent resurgence of the dangers that it has been shown to entail.

For, as Kissinger noted, "the negotiating position of the victors always diminishes with time.... the weaker side has only the option of buying time against an adversary who sees the negotiations as unfolding according to his own internal logic" . 94

The relative power of the United States has declined with the growth of other states. It needs an alliance with Europe and its concurrence to deploy its policies. To this end, the need for understanding and political concertation must be reiterated. The transatlantic link, and with it NATO, are more necessary than ever. Russia's definitive re-engagement with the West would undoubtedly strengthen the West's positions, in addition to countless other advantages.

It is also worth noting that the EU has responded successfully to three consecutive crises (subprime, pandemic and post-pandemic), which has undoubtedly contributed to the consolidation of all its policies. That it has been able to overcome a challenge such as

⁹⁴ KISSINGER, Henry. Diplomacy. Op. cit., pp. 269-272.

the one posed by Russia is a further milestone in its construction by overflow. And its engagement with Ukraine, to whose war effort it has effectively contributed, may even represent its birth as a geopolitical power, as well as an expression of its strategic autonomy, which has managed to Europeanise what is European, albeit also at the cost of increasing its members' military and arms spending; this eventual resurgence of the old problem of Germany's place in Europe deserves to be analysed calmly. As Shakespeare wrote: "the strawberry grows under the nettle, and the most savoury fruits thrive and ripen best in the neighbourhood of the coarsest species."⁹⁵ "

In this context, and as the world marches towards a new bipolarity, we can conclude that the war in Ukraine, beyond its reasons and causes, is difficult to understand in geopolitical terms. This war neither belongs to nor obeys geopolitical logic. It is out of place and out of time and will not make Russia the superpower it once was. Two per cent of the world's GDP is not enough. It is an intra-civilisational conflict from which nothing positive can be expected.

The international struggle is between the United States and China, with Europe as a third party and even as an arena for confrontation. What's more, Russia's natural outlet in the face of Chinese involvement is Europe, to which, moreover, it also belongs historically, culturally and geographically.

Neither an outright Ukrainian victory - which would be a sort of 21st century re-enactment of the outcome of the Russian-Japanese conflict - because of the destabilisation of Russia that it would entail and whose survival as a single territory could even be jeopardised; nor a Russian victory, which would make the country a pariah in the eyes of the international community, distancing it from the West for a long time, can de facto alter the dialectic of confrontation between China and the United States in whose framework Russia, displaced, cannot find its place no matter how much it wishes to do so.

Power is not born not from the tube of a weapon, as Mao argued, but from the capacity to create. This makes nuclear weapons "paper tigers", mute witnesses to a confrontation to whose logic and level they do not respond either, for they only grant victory at the cost of rendering it useless and even of everyone losing everything.

⁹⁵ Henry V, Act I.

It is more than 100 years since the end of the First World War, a conflict that claimed more than 25 million lives, and about which we still wonder today about its causes. The reason is the lack of strong political leadership which meant that war was used to resolve a commercial and industrial rivalry to which it was not the answer. This was best - but not only - found in international markets. The problem was not understood. As Joseph Fouché said of the execution of the Duke of Enghien: "it was worse than a crime, it was a mistake".

*Federico Aznar Fernández-Montesinos**

IEEE Analyst