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**One-sixth of the world cannot
determine the international order
on its own**

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Abstract:

The US National Security Strategy states that "we are in the midst of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order" and proposes to the world a grand coalition based on its values to close ranks against authoritarian powers.

So far, the response has not been as expected. Only Washington's closest allies, who represent only one-sixth of the world's population, have joined in. The Global South, more than half of the world's population, sees this as contrary to its interests and is unwilling to let a declining West continue to define what it should do and how it should think.

In the US itself, there is much debate about the dangers and consequences of this strategy and many leading figures advocate some kind of alternative international system based on coexistence.

By calling for a democratic crusade in the name of its own values, the possibilities of understanding are greatly reduced, which could be counter-productive and favor the revisionist powers. The recent BRICS summit seems to confirm this trend. Moreover, it is contradictory since the US is deeply divided precisely on what its values are.

Keywords:

International order, USA, National Security Strategy, values, revisionist powers.

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

Un sexto del mundo no puede determinar el orden internacional sin contar con el resto

Resumen:

La Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional de los EE. UU. afirma que «nos encontramos en medio de una competición estratégica para configurar el futuro del orden internacional» y propone al mundo una gran coalición entorno a sus valores para cerrar filas contra las potencias autoritarias.

De momento, la respuesta no es la esperada. Únicamente los aliados más estrechos de Washington, que solo representan un sexto de la población mundial, se han sumado. El Sur global, más de la mitad de la población mundial, lo entiendo contrario a sus intereses y no acepta que un Occidente de poder menguante siga definiendo lo que debe hacer y cómo debe pensar.

En el mismo EE. UU. existe un gran debate sobre los peligros y consecuencias de esta apuesta estratégica y muchas figuras relevantes propugnan como alternativa algún tipo de orden internacional de coexistencia.

Al convocar una cruzada democrática en nombre de sus propios valores se reducen mucho las posibilidades de entendimiento, lo que puede resultar contraproducente y favorecer a las potencias revisionistas. La reciente cumbre de los BRICS parece confirmar esta tendencia. Por otra parte, resulta contradictorio, al estar la gran potencia norteamericana profundamente dividida precisamente por una cuestión de valores.

Palabras clave:

Orden internacional, EE. UU., Estrategia Nacional de Seguridad, valores, potencias revisionistas.

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Introduction

In 2018, in *El mundo que nos viene* [The World to Come] Josep Piqué stated:

Centuries of trade and decades of globalisation have done their job. They have woven a web that makes it impossible to approach the future of international relations as a zero-sum game. Thus, in contrast to the advocates of the deterministic, almost Hegelian, thesis of Asia's rise, I will here put forward the idea of a global (post-Western) synthesis that I see as not only more likely, but also more desirable. [...] The West continues to shape the debate on values and, as in the legend of El Cid, will continue to win battles long after it is dead; if it is dead at all.¹

By then, it was already clear that the world was entering a new era, leaving behind a period of hegemonic Western domination and the illusion of the "End of History"—in some nascent epoch of generalised westernisation.² However, the rivalry between Washington and Beijing had not yet degenerated into full-blown mutual distrust, nor had the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine accelerated and intensified the transformations and contradictions of this process.

Today, the global outlook is less promising. A synthesis will undoubtedly take place, but in a context of greater antagonism and therefore probably also more traumatic and less fertile. In the US National Security Strategy (NSS), published in October 2022, we can read:

"We are in the midst of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order. [...] the United States will lead with our values, and we will work in lockstep with our allies and partners and with all those who share our interests. [...] We will partner with any nation that shares our basic belief that the rules-based order must remain the foundation for global peace and prosperity."³

Clearly, the rivals to beat in this democratic crusade are China and Russia, which together with their close allies account for almost a quarter of the world's population.

¹ PIQUE, Josep. *El mundo que nos viene* [The World to Come]. Ediciones Deusto. 2018.

² Ibid.

³ Available at: [Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy.pdf \(whitehouse.gov\)](#).

When President Biden signed the document, he was optimistic that his proposal for leadership that “is as great as it has ever been” would be well received across much of the globe. The starting point of the US strategic design, as Kissinger explains, is the conviction that American values are universal and should therefore be embraced by the whole world.⁴

Well, almost a year later, only Washington's closest allies: the Western countries of Europe, North America and Oceania, plus its stalwarts in East Asia, Japan and South Korea – which account for only one sixth of the world's inhabitants – have taken a positive view of this strategic proposal. More than half of the world, known as the Global South, interprets this as contrary to their interests. Moreover, it has decided in its heart that the time has ended for when the West could determine the values and rules of the game. In doing so, it has greatly reduced the chances of success of such a geostrategic design.

This paper argues that if it is already difficult to sustain an international order in opposition to two powers like China and Russia, it is chimerical to try to determine it with only the firm backing of one-sixth of the world, and that trying to do so risks inducing a counter-productive outcome. All of this is aggravated by the contradiction that the country that summons the world behind the banner of its values is deeply divided precisely because of its values, to the point that today we can speak of a nation with two incompatible souls.

Background

The international system can be organised on three basic foundations: a broad consensus, as was the case in the three decades following the end of the Cold War; coexistence, which at the moment would be the least bad, as the former has been discarded; or confrontation, which is what the world seems to be heading for. Only in the first case would it be correct to speak of an international order, albeit an imperfect one.

As early as 2012, Graham Allison was warning of the dangers of confrontation between the great powers as a result of the rise of China, which the US political scientist referred to as the "Thucydides's Trap"⁵.

⁴ KISSINGER, Henry, Interview by Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic*, 10 November 2016.

⁵ See ALLISON, Graham. "Thucydides's trap has been sprung in the Pacific", *Financial Times*, 12 August 2012, Available at: [Thucydides's trap has been sprung in the Pacific | Financial Times \(ft.com\)](https://www.ft.com/content/2012/08/12/thucydides-trap-has-been-sprung-in-the-pacific). He would later publish "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?" *The Atlantic*. 24 September 2015. Available at: [Allison](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2015/09/thucydides-trap-are-the-u-s-and-china-headed-for-war/41111/).

However, optimism and the belief that the world was marching inexorably towards a democratic and liberal end of history, according to Fukuyama's thesis, meant that, until its 2017 NSS, Washington did not put great power rivalry at the centre of its strategic agenda.⁶

Leaders in both China and the United States appear genuinely interested in trying to stabilize their relationship, which is now in its rockiest point in 50 years. Both countries recognise that the tension between them has become so acute that they face a real and growing risk of war. [...] But a fundamental issue stands in the way of truly solidifying this progress (of the needed dialogue): the two countries lack a mutually acceptable narrative to define their relationship. U.S. leaders, in their diplomatic engagements and public remarks, routinely assert that they are engaged in a great-power "competition". [...] Chinese leaders will not let "competition" define U.S.-Chinese relationship.⁷

Recently, Kissinger has gone so far as to warn that:

We are in the classic pre-World War I situation where neither side has much room for political concessions and where any upsetting of the balance can have catastrophic consequences. [...] The fate of humanity depends on whether America and China can get along. [...] The rapid progress of AI, in particular, leaves them only 5 to 10 years to find a way.⁸

To interpret the geostrategy of our time as a global ideological battle between democracy and autocracy is to bet on the self-fulfilment of this prophecy, with the danger, as Hugh White says, of sleepwalking into the abyss.⁹

Until a few years ago, the benefits of globalisation and its modernising and westernising effect were commonly accepted dogma.

In the early post-Cold War years, US theorists and policy-makers ignored the potential risks of integration with an authoritarian counterpart. Globalisation was

[2015.09.24 The Atlantic - Thucydides Trap.pdf \(harvard.edu\)](#), as well as his famous book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2017.

⁶ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Office of the US President, December 2017. Available at: <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2017.pdf>.

⁷ LEVINE, Nathan. "A Clash of Worldviews: The United States and China Have Reached an Ideological Impasse". *Foreign Affairs*. 30 August 2023.

⁸ "Henry Kissinger explains how to avoid world war three". *The Economist*. 17 May 2023.

⁹ WHITE, Hugh. "Sleepwalk to War: Australia's Unthinking Alliance with America." *Quarterly Essay* No 86. 2022.

based on liberal economic norms, democratic values and American cultural norms, which economists and the foreign policy establishment took for granted. The United States set the standards for international institutions and multinational corporations, most of which were American or relied heavily on access to American technology and markets. In these conditions, economic entanglements were seen as opportunities for Washington to exert its influence and impose its rules. The incursions and distortions of one market by another were Washington's strategy, not its flaw.¹⁰

The decline of the Western-inspired international order, whose definitive triumph seemed to be driven by globalisation, is largely due to a deliberate strategy agreed by Moscow and Beijing when the process was in full expansion, its march seemed unstoppable and both great powers—far behind in the world economic rankings—could hardly claim such a status.

In 1996, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China signed a strategic partnership agreement, which has continued to deepen to this day, with the main objective of opposing a world led by a single power: the United States.¹¹ At the time, historical and geopolitical reasons meant that the rivalry between the two revisionist states was far greater than that which distanced them from the American hegemon. Overcoming their differences and making a virtue out of necessity, their firm will to play on the chessboard of the great powers and the successive disagreements with Washington have turned this strategic partnership into a veritable battering ram that has weakened the foundations of the international system which, in recent decades, had allowed for enormous global economic and social development, including that of the powers that have sought to undermine it.

Another determining factor is what Brzezinski called "the global political awakening": the fact that, just as the French Revolution made the whole of French society aware of its

¹⁰ CASS, Oren and RODRIGUEZ, Gabriela. The Case for a Hard Break With China: Why Economic De-Risking Is Not Enough. *Foreign Affairs*. 25 July 2023.

¹¹ SINKKONEN, Elina. China-Russia Security Cooperation. FIIA Briefing Paper No. 231. January 2018. Available at: [China-Russia security cooperation: Geopolitical signalling with limits \(fiia.fi\)](#).

political agency, the globalisation revolution has, for the first time in history, made most of humanity politically active, politically aware and politically interconnected.¹²

Thus, the nations of the Global South have become aware that they are subjects—and not just objects—of the international system. For a long time, their wishes and objectives had been relegated to footnotes in geopolitics.¹³

The Global South exist not as a coherent, organised grouping so much as a geopolitical fact. (...) It is beginning to constrain the actions of the great powers and provoke them to respond to at least some of its demands. (...) Their drive to "catch up" with wealthy states is a common and, if anything, more urgent imperative. Their desire for both strategic autonomy and a much greater share of political power in the international system is strong and only getting stronger, particularly among middle powers, such as Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa.¹⁴

Most of these countries also retain deep-rooted resentment towards the West inherited from the imperialist and colonialist era, a perception fostered and intensified by the Marxist interpretation of history that many of their elites have actually assimilated from Western universities.

Moreover, the unsupportive behaviour of the Western powers during the COVID-19 pandemic and in relation to climate policies—burdening those countries with the solution to a problem that has primarily been created by more developed countries—has only deepened the already existing resentment.¹⁵

It does not seem that the countries of the Global South, many of which are beginning to approach levels of development close to those of the most advanced countries, will simply accept the dictations of former colonisers on what they should do and how they should think.

¹² See, BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew. "Geostrategic Challenges Facing the United States" Conference delivered at Brigham Young University on 12 January 2010. Available on video: [Geostrategic Challenges Facing the United States - Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski - YouTube](#).

¹³ SHIDORE, Sarang. "The Return of the Global South: Realism, Not Moralism, Drives a New Critique of Western Power". *Foreign Affairs*. 31 August 2023.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ MILIBAND, David. "The World Beyond Ukraine: The Survival of the West and the Demands of the Rest". *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2023.

This was clearly evidenced by the Hiroshima meeting of the G7—which has become the main forum for policy coordination vis-à-vis Beijing and Moscow ¹⁶ and which Francisco Marhuenda referred to as an "outdated and misguided concept" ¹⁷—in which attempts were made to convince the Global South to join the West in confronting Russia and containing China.

As Prince Michael of Lichtenstein explains:

These efforts are likely to prove futile. Most countries in the Global South do not see any benefit in entering the struggle between so-called “democratic” and “authoritarian” nations. During the Cold War era, a non-aligned movement emerged. Something similar could occur in the present context as well, but the difference now is that the Global South is substantially more developed. It has gained political, strategic and particularly demographic influence, which will continue to grow. [...] The group of traditionally leading industrialized countries will have to recognize that they could end up in a dual confrontation. They appear to want to uphold outdated models and Western paradigms, and at the same time they are misinterpreting the needs of the Global South in a multipolar world. The aid projects proposed reek of paternalism.¹⁸

However, the war in Ukraine has been the great catalyst for differences between Western powers and the new non-aligned movement:

Many non-Western elites see the war as a European issue and reject the Western interpretation that it is an attack on the UN legal order and, thus, a global existential threat. They wonder why it should get more attention than conflicts closer to their home. They ask why the West is providing massive funding for Ukraine instead of spending more on climate change, accusing it of double standards. They believe wealthy nations could do more to help countries in debt. They are less concerned

¹⁶ BLANCHETTE, Jude, JOHNSTONE, Christopher. “The Illusion of Great-Power Competition: Why Middle Powers—and Small Countries—”. *Foreign Affairs*. 4 July 2023.

¹⁷ MARUHENDA, Francisco. "Los amos del mundo" ["The masters of the world"]. *La Razón*. 28 May 2023.

¹⁸ LICHTENSTEIN, Michael (Prince of). "The West still misunderstands the Global South". *G/S*. 25 May 2023.

Available at: [The West is alienating the Global South - GIS Reports \(gisreports.com\)](https://gisreports.com/).

about the causes of the war than about its consequences, especially rising food and fuel prices.¹⁹

As Emmanuel Macron said at the Munich Security Conference in February 2023: "I am amazed at how we have lost the confidence of the Global South". He is right. Western conviction about the war and its importance is matched elsewhere by scepticism at best and outright disdain at worst.²⁰

This circumstance favours the revisionist powers because, if the Global South does not align with the US leadership of the international order, a multipolar configuration emerges. This allows China and Russia to redirect their chains of trade, economic and technological flows towards this immense space, reducing the West's influence over them and, conversely, reinforcing their weight on the global stage. "According to Dongwu Securities, so far this year, for the first time, China exported more to developing countries than to the United States, the European Union and Japan combined".²¹ The 15th BRICS summit has only confirmed this trend. Beijing, strategically partnering with Moscow, is thus expanding its spheres of influence to create a more tailor-made world.

The issue surrounding values

As Ambassador Ricardo Lopez-Aranda explains in his contribution to the IEEE Panorama Estratégico 2020, the West has always considered its values to be universal.²² For values to be considered universal, at least one of the following two conditions must be met: they must be recognised as such by a very significant part of the international community or they must emanate from the profound nature of human dignity and therefore be essentially permanent. Neither of these two premises is met.

First, the basic consensuses that emerged from the horrors of the Second World War and which, despite the deep division of the Cold War, allowed the birth and development of the United Nations and a dense multilateral network, have faded. As UN Secretary-

¹⁹ BRENDER, Reinhold. "Strengthening multilateralism in a multipolar world". *Egmont Policy Brief* 311. July 2023. Available at: [Strengthening multilateralism in a multipolar world: On the contribution of this year's G7 and G20 Summits and suggested next steps for the EU - Egmont Institute](#).

²⁰ MILIBAND, David. Op. cit.

²¹ "BRICS+: China creates its alternative G7". *Informe Semanal de Política Exterior* no. 1335. 4 September 2023.

²² LÓPEZ-ARANDA, Ricardo. "El futuro de Occidente en el orden global" [The West's Future in the Global Order]. *Panorama Estratégico 2020*. IEEE. March 2020. Available at: [Panorama Estratégico 2020.pdf \(ieee.es\)](#).

General Antonio Guterres stressed in Johannesburg, the current multilateral institutions, the Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, reflect "a world that no longer exists".²³

Secondly, the values espoused by the West have changed in recent decades and the dominant view in both the US and old Europe is that, according to Kantian categories, they are the result of an autonomous act of will that determines those values, in this case an autonomous act of Western societies' will. For these to be universal, it would therefore have to be accepted that the will autonomously exercised by the West is globally applicable, something that the rest of the world would only accept from a position of moral subordination, which is no longer the case.

Thus, for example, Reinhold Brender in a paper entitled *Strengthening Multilateralism in a Multipolar World* argues:

Many countries in the Global South have refrained from condemning the grave violation of international law that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine represents. [...] Given the growing weight of the Global South, finding common ground with it is essential for the EU and like-minded countries to strengthen multilateralism. [...] The EU could develop and implement a dedicated Strategy for Engagement with the Global South to support multilateralism in the run-up to next year's UN-led Summit of the Future, which aims to rekindle multilateralism with the UN at its core. [...] From the EU's perspective, multilateral cooperation is inclusive and designed to be universal. [...] Ultimately, the EU and like-minded countries must win over world opinion to build a sufficiently large coalition to ensure that Western values remain influential in UN-led multilateralism.²⁴

This push for the UN to adopt Western values as universal is contradictory to the idea of making the United Nations more inclusive. It risks UN becoming even less relevant because it will be seen by many countries as a Western instrument of global power and influence. Worse still, such an endeavour can be interpreted as a "moral supremacy" to fill the vacuum once occupied by "racial supremacy".

²³ "BRICS+: China creates its alternative G7". Op. Cit.

²⁴ BRENDER, Reinhold. Op. Cit.

We must also consider that the right of human beings to live according to their own convictions is, within limits that are difficult to determine, a fundamental principle of respect for human dignity (as set out in Article 16 of the Spanish Constitution). If this is the case within a nation that shares culture and historical roots, it is all the more so in the international arena that does not enjoy this circumstance.

On the other hand, the fight for human rights cannot be considered as such if it is impregnated with geopolitical considerations, applying a double standard that depends on whether we are dealing with a rival or a partner.

Western civilisation, with its invaluable contributions, feels self-confident and maintains a great capacity for seduction as Emilio Lamo de Espinosa affirms: "The attractiveness of the Western bloc is still intact. And migrants all over the world attest to this by voting "with their feet".²⁵ But it is arrogant, which, in turn, is also repulsive.

Values, ideas and beliefs (in the Orteguian sense) are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they can act as a cement that forges, supports and gives consistency to human communities, as was the case in medieval European Christianity where the West finds its roots²⁶ or, more recently, in the process of westernisation that, until recently, has been followed by the nations of the world that have sought to modernise and industrialise—a process that, as the final report of the Munich Security Conference of 2020 states, has given way to the inverse phenomenon of their de-westernisation (Westlessness).²⁷

On the other hand, they can also lead to the greatest antagonism, as was the case in the Thirty Years' War, the most destructive war in relative terms of all those suffered by Europe. Similarly, when values and beliefs collide, it is much more difficult to reach agreements and consensus: values are not a bargaining chip!

In addition, it is becoming increasingly difficult to know exactly what values the West stands for. The United States, its standard-bearer, is mired in a political polarisation that makes the country almost unrecognisable and could lead to a profound change of strategic direction should Trump return to power.

²⁵ LAMO DE ESPINOSA, Emilio. "Tiempos de inflexión histórica. La invasión de Ucrania y el declive del poder occidental" [Historic turning points: The invasion of Ukraine and the decline of Western power]. *Panorama Estratégico* 2023, IEEE. May 2023, p. 64. Available at: [Panorama estratégico 2023 \(ieee.es\)](https://www.ieee.es/PanoramaEstrategico2023).

²⁶ LÓPEZ-ARANDA, Ricardo. Op. Cit.

²⁷ Munich Security Report 2020: Westlessness. Munich Security Conference. Available at: https://securityconference.org/assets/user_upload/MunichSecurityReport2020.pdf

The Republican party believes that the Democrats are endangering the future of the American nation and the Democratic party believes that the Republicans lack democratic credentials. In both cases, the legitimacy of the political opponent is questioned, something that dissolves the very foundations of democracy. Fukuyama explains it as follows:

For people on the left, the elites who rule the US are corporations and capitalist interest groups – fossil fuel companies, Wall Street banks, hedge fund billionaires and Republican mega-donors – whose lobby groups and money have worked to protect their interests against any kind of democratic reckoning. For right-wingers, the evil elites are the cultural power brokers in Hollywood, the media, universities and big business who espouse a secular "woke" ideology in contradiction to what American conservatives consider traditional or Christian values.²⁸

The same author in his book *Liberalism and its Discontents* has had to appeal to moderation, recalling that:

Classical liberalism can therefore be understood as an institutional solution to the problem of governing over diversity (of ideologies and beliefs), or, to put it in slightly different terms, of peacefully managing diversity in pluralistic societies. The most fundamental principle enshrined in liberalism is one of tolerance: you do not have to agree with your fellow citizens about the most important things, but only that each individual should get to decide what they are without interference from you or from the state.²⁹

Apply the same to states and it would be much easier to find a minimum basic consensus on which to build a viable international system more inclined to compromise and coexistence between rivals than confrontation.

For the time being, even if there are highly westernised sectors in the societies of the Global South, the trend is against accepting as universal the values espoused by the West as the basis of the rules-based international order. Rules which, in turn, are not clearly and precisely stated anywhere and which are certainly better suited to the Anglo-Saxon culture, which is capable of devising an unwritten constitution, but which for much

²⁸ FUKUYAMA, Francis "Rotten to the Core? How America's Political Decay Accelerated During the Trump Era". *Foreign Affairs*. 18 January 2021.

²⁹ FUKUYAMA, Francis *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York. 2022, p. 7.

of the world is too vague a concept. Western powers, on the other hand, have sometimes flouted these rules, which has led to accusations of hypocrisy³⁰ and damaged their moral authority.

A Heraclitean revolution

History, like the tides, is a cycle. After the high tide—of the westernisation of the world and the expansion of its values—the sea level has started to pull back. The US NSS is an attempt to stem the outward flow of the tide. Whether we like it or not, the world we knew and in which European nations built the welfare state and felt secure and comfortable has come to an end. For the United States, with its vocation to be “the city on the top of the hill”, losing its position of dominance is also a bitter pill to swallow.

For approximately 80 years, US policy has been based on US economic, military, technological and political dominance. [...] Today, most analysts agree that America's declining share of global GDP, shrinking military advantages, diminishing technological supremacy and diplomatic influence mean that Washington will soon face a multipolar world for the first time since World War II. Yet Americans remain captive to the ideas of a vanished era when their power reigned supreme.³¹

However, the current US NSS states in its first passage: "Our world is at an inflection point". Not only have the three decades of US hegemonic order come to an end, but, on a broader scale, we see that the international system that was born after the Second World War is also ending. The United Nations has lost the centrality it enjoyed during that period and both Germany and Japan have shaken off the yoke of defeat and are becoming military powers once again. Finally, the five centuries of Western domination of history, which began with the great Portuguese and Spanish navigations of the late 15th and early 16th centuries and the subsequent scientific revolution, is giving way to the rise of Asia. Add to all this the ongoing industrial revolution, which would in itself change the world as we know it without the need for further geopolitical considerations, and we

³⁰ SPECTOR, Matias. "The Upside of Western Hypocrisy: How the Global South Can Push America to Do Better". *Foreign Affairs*. 21 July 2023.

³¹ WINOKUR, Justin. "The Cold War Trap: How the Memory of America's Era of Dominance Stunts U.S. Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs*. 13 July 2023.

find a bewildering post-Western future that goes beyond the references from which our societies have interpreted the recent course of history.

On the other hand, the West tends towards narcissism and looks at the world through a mirror. In the past, this did not have serious consequences, but in the future, much more empathy will be needed to understand the points of view of others and overcome resentment.

Spain could play a mediating and bridging role in this great international misunderstanding, facilitating a less traumatic transition towards these, more than likely, post-Western future scenarios, where the balance of power and tolerance of different values seems a more appropriate approach than confrontation. Firstly, we are a country that does not summon the resentments of the Global South³² and is more empathetic in our relations with other civilisations. Secondly, the Spanish monarchy was privileged to have maintained a non-confrontational relationship with China during the three centuries of coexistence in the Philippines, boosting Asian trade through the silver standard,³³ with very different effects to Britain's imposition of the "opium standard".³⁴ Moreover, the Jesuits enjoyed an acceptance and prestige at the court of the mandarins that has not been equalled by any Westerner. We are a country with a great history, let's make the most of it.

Conclusion

The world is living through a time of growing great powers confrontation in which Washington has rallied the world around its values, considered universal, to defend what it defines as "the rules-based international order" and to close ranks against authoritarian powers.

There is much debate in the United States about the dangers and consequences of this strategy. Many leading figures advocate some kind of coexistence as an alternative

³² LAMO DE ESPINOSA, Emilio. *Entre águilas y dragones. El declive de Occidente [Between eagles and dragons. Western decline]*. Espasa, 2021, p. 321.

³³ LOPEZ-LINARES, José Luis. Document: *España, la primera globalización [Spain, the first globalisation]*. Lopez Li Films. 2021.

³⁴ In the document *Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament: China*, 13 July 2023, ordered by the House of Commons, we can read: "The UK's unique historical role in China – particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to Hong Kong – is likely to make the UK a higher-profile target". It is obvious that Britain is well aware of Chinese resentment over its ignominious performance in the Opium Wars.

international system. Moreover, only one-sixth of the world, the most developed countries, have joined it.

The Global South, more than half of the world's population, sees this as contrary to its interests and is no longer willing to let former colonial powers determine what it should do and how it should think. The 15th BRICS summit in Johannesburg seems to confirm this trend.

By the leader of the West calling for a democratic crusade in the name of its own values, the chances of understanding are greatly reduced and the opposite of the intended effect could be produced, to the advantage of the revisionist powers.

On the other hand, America's power is deeply divided precisely over the issue of values, which weakens its ability to project them and opens the possibility of a geostrategic rudder change.

We are living in a moment of historical inflection that seems to be leading the world into a post-Western era. Spain could play a moderating and bridging role in this great international misunderstanding, facilitating a less traumatic transition towards a very uncertain and undoubtedly disconcerting future. In the case of a confrontational order, what outcome would await us?

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