

Reflections on the roots of Europe's decay

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Abstract. The last vestiges of the international order following World War II have come to an end. Europe has ceased to be the center of international relations. The supposed world under U.S. leadership since 1989 has proven to be a brief mirage. Russia, China, India, and other states follow their own policies regardless of the U.S. and the West, as the war in Ukraine has demonstrated. With the return of Trump, what little remained of a Western presence in the world has vanished; by attacking Europe, Trump has separated himself from the only ally he had left. Europe is now a secondary actor in the international scenario".

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In 1973, Alain Peryrefite published a book entitled 'Quand la Chine s'éveillera... le monde tremblera' (1973). In fact, Asia had woken up in 1955, at the Bandung Conference, and together with some African states, formed the Non-Aligned Movement, led by Indonesia itself, India and Egypt.

In the seventy years since that meeting, the international scene has changed completely, not only in terms of framework and structure, but also in terms of new leading actors, mainly in Asia. The West can no longer impose its rules unilaterally.

The Cold War gave way to coexistence, which led to the demise of the Soviet bloc paving the way for the ultimate triumph of the Western liberal-democratic system: in 1989-91, Western capitals exulted in what they believed to be their triumph. Kahn, speaking of French socialism, wrote that it "looked like a Lebanese luxury hotel after the passage of the Hezbollah" (1995, 16) and the same was true of all socialism.

Some optimists believed that the happy era proclaimed by Hegel was beginning to become a reality (Fukuyama, 1993). Conversely, a more sceptical viewpoint, which I shared, posits that the world was entering a period of significant political and social upheaval (Laïdi, 1994; Touraine, 1995), not letting themselves be carried away by the joyous image of the fall of the Berlin Wall, realising that the perception of the West was not the same in all countries and environments: "Large parts of the urban intelligentsia absorbed Western liberal values before the

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revolutions... But the influence of the progressive intelligentsia in the largely agrarian societies of Southeastern Europe, remain small” (Glenny, 1993, 18). However, and although it is a striking title, ‘The Rebirth of History’, and he is not the only one to use it, like Parmentier ‘Le Retour de l’Histoire’, or Kagan ‘The Return of History and the End of Dreams’ (2008), I do not share this viewpoint. My approach is completely different: history did not stopped in Eastern Europe in 1945-47, as history does not stop, does not absent itself, nor does it step back, because history is a continuity in which there are no deviations ‘from the initial plan’, as there is no initial plan: as the Spanish poet wrote “there are no paths, only wakes upon the sea”, and consequently the future is not predetermined, history does not repeat itself: what repeats itself is human ignorance. There was no rupture, nor should the past be forgotten in order to build a different future, “the past does not need to be known to weigh heavily on the present. It leaves in the depths of the unconscious instincts, more powerful than exact memories” (Gautier, 1927, 414). Some, more pessimistic, saw the beginning of a new kind of confrontation (Huntington, 1998). However, in those moments of euphoria and unbridled optimism in a globalism that would bring peace, wealth and equality all over the world, it was not acceptable to think of a negative scenario. But Cassandra was right again.

Many dangers loomed over the West. Khan (1995, 21) had already warned, quoting Mendès-France, of the danger that lurked in the reflection and evolution of society, contrary to official optimism: ‘We can hear the creaking in the subsoil of our broken society, no longer allowing us to believe that a simple cleansing will be enough to tolerate any longer the lies and injustices suffered’. No, the world was not going the way Hegel imagined, (and Fukuyama repeated) but towards a general crisis resulting from the disappearance of an international order, with no other to replace it. The only certainty is that more than forty years after the end of bipolarity, the West finds itself in the triple deficit of which Kahn spoke, ‘budgetary, human and social’ (1995, 48).

There were more than a few who, to reassure the fear of a vacuum on the international stage, drew a parallel between times in the past when one international order had succumbed and another had arisen: other empires had fallen, Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, Athens, Alexander, Rome, etc... However, the parallel was not appropriate because those empires were defeated by the force of others or the colonial struggles for independence in the 19th and 20th centuries. One scenario was substituted for another on known bases. These empires underwent a series of relatively orderly collapses. However, the collapse of the bipolar world order resulted in an implosion that left the world in a state of uncertainty, with no clearly defined future scenario other than the speculative predictions of professional optimists, naïve individuals, or the snake oil salesmen.

In the 1990s, many argued that we were entering the American century: the United States was the sole winner in the international ring. The short-sightedness of these perspectives will never cease to amaze. Others, for example Biarnes, (1998),

announced: “In this new world, America will have its place, a big one no doubt, and even the first one for a long time yet. But it will increasingly have to take into account other powers, most of them steeped in history, which are asserting themselves or are being reborn and which are already saying ‘no’ (p. 17), and added ‘Russia will undoubtedly be reborn one day’” (p. 218). The change was far more profound than could be imagined, and the disorientation no less intense, though not really recognised. In 1933 A. Toynbee wrote, looking at what was happening in the world and was announced for the future: “The stage has ceased to be dominated by the great [Western] powers with their claim to be universes in themselves, and the characteristic communities of the new age are states whose independence is limited on one plane or another” (1951, I, 36). The limitation stems both from the multiplicity of actors claiming a leading position, and from the different civilisational origins of all of them. In the new international arena, no single civilisation dominates, i.e. there is no longer a single point of view from which to understand the world. The West is no longer synonymous with the world at large or the single pole of attraction. Gone are the days when Lord William Bentinck, an influential politician and historian, serving as a member of the Supreme Council of India., wrote in his renowned 1835 treatise, *Minute on Indian Education*: “I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia”.

In those early years of euphoria, after 1989, it was taken for granted that the United States would control the world: but the world was too big for one actor. Unilateralism was a fleeting vision, a product of Western inability, pride and ultimately ignorance. The West was unable or unwilling to see that the disappearance of bipolarity left an open field for other powers: and Asia woke up! These new powers, the exhaustion and division of Europe, its determined subservience to the United States, aware of the weakness of the old continent, confirmed the definitive end of the old international scenario and a thought inexorably ran through the peoples who for centuries had been subjected to the will of the West: now just as Cato declared that *Carthago delenda est*, modern discourse demanded that the old Eurocentric obsession must be dismantled to make way for a truly global perspective. Eurocentrism has been dismantled, but unfortunately, the resulting international landscape is no more just.

The new scenario started from the same premise: the principles that the West had proclaimed were no longer valid. It was possible to be a capitalist without being a democrat. Western civilisation was questioned: freedom was no more important than being able to feed one’s family and oneself. Western values were being challenged, even in parts of Western societies themselves: the Fourth World was becoming a reality and wanted more equity and wealth distribution. The inconsistency between Western language and praxis was already denounced by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s: the leader of the untouchables in India declared that a religion that treated all people equally would have the support of the millions of

untouchables. Immediately envoys from the Christian Reformed Churches, Catholics, Muslims, etc. came to the subcontinent. After a while, a pastor of the Church of England went to visit Gandhi, expressing his frustration at the lack of effect his preaching had had among the untouchables. The Mahatma replied, “The day you do what you preach, the whole world will join you”.

Well into the new century, Amin Maalouf (2009, 11) began his book with the observation that “we have entered the new century without a compass. Since the first months, disturbing events have taken place that suggest that the world is facing a major upheaval in several areas at the same time: intellectual upheaval, financial upheaval, climate upheaval, geopolitical upheaval, ethical upheaval”. Indeed, since the early years of globalisation, the world of peace and prosperity has been heading in the opposite direction: “The development of a world economy could be a breakthrough for mankind. It would be the beginning of a multicentric world... But the vain attempt to build a universal free market is failing to bring about such a world around us. In a world where market forces are not subject to any general control or regulation, peace is constantly threatened” (Gray, 2000, 249). Going further, there are current leaders, of unimaginable unconsciousness, who preach direct confrontation with Russia: President Macron called for a European coalition to go and fight in Ukraine in March 2024, an idea he repeated in April of that same year. Fortunately, only one European leader (the Czech president) supported him. Yes, the West is wandering on an international stage in which the new actors had no intention of allowing themselves to be dragged down by the attitudes of another era: with the calls to support Washington's policy in its cold confrontation with Moscow, one reality became clear: the West was alone. To understand the world, one must not stop at figures and data, but go beyond them, one must understand the essence of the new times. And the West has not fully understood this.

The new scenario started from a principle that was demonstrated in the refusal to follow Western pretensions in Ukraine: the principles that the West had proclaimed for centuries were no longer valid. The pillars on which a civilisation had been built and established were crumbling because, as Mannheim wrote: “A society is possible in the last analysis because the individuals in it carry around in their heads some sort of picture of that society. Our society, however, in this period of minute division of labour, of extreme heterogeneity and profound conflict of interests, has come to a pass where these pictures are blurred and incongruous... and coincident with our vanishing sense of a common reality we are losing our common medium for expressing and communicating our experiences... When the cases of unified collective action begin to weaken, the social structure tends to break and to produce a condition which Emile Durkheim has termed anomie, by which he means a situation which might be described as a sort of social emptiness or void” (1954, xxv).

The West is in decline because Westerners themselves do not believe in its principles, and they do not believe in them because the very principles they proclaim are constantly being disproved in practice: freedom, democracy, justice, are, as

James Joyce once said, “big words that make us so unhappy”. Now, beyond Durkheim's use of the Greek term ‘*νομία*’, I would prefer its original Greek meaning to describe today's world: absence of norms (‘*α*’ absence of ‘*νομία*’ norms), disorder, injustice, evil (Jaeger 1967, 1986). Europe, the West, began its decadence the moment it forgot spiritual values in order to stick exclusively to what Spengler called “the value of the corporeal thing” (1976, II, 101). Thus, the renaissance, the awakening of Asia takes place on the terrain that Westerners thought they had mastered: materialism.

1. A NEW SCENARIO

The scientific world in which we live in, in which everything is expressed by data and formulas, may be necessary, but it is certainly not sufficient to understand history. I have never been able to take seriously the so-called studies of international relations that tried to analyse political problems as if they were physical or mathematical problems, using formulas, forgetting that behind a mathematical formula there is a lucubration, more or less certain, about a hypothesis that may or may not be true. But behind a doubt about international politics, behind a series of possible scenarios in relations between states, there is a feeling, a thought, a calculation that is often far from scientific. Were science the guiding principle, politicians would not be so prone to mendacity.

Since 1919, all politicians have been talking about publicity, but the politics of secrecy has been replaced by the politics of lies, exaggeration and excess, and the West, believing itself to be omnipotent and eternal, has not taken into account other civilisations and cultures, but has believed itself entitled to impose its values and ideas which, perhaps, for other communities did not have the same meaning. The borders drawn by colonial power in Africa are an example of the arrogance, the excesses that have characterised centuries of Western domination. The edifice on which Western power was built had two columns, capitalism and its antithesis, communism. With the fall of one pillar, the edifice of the international stage collapsed and the ground was left free for other actors and ideas to build other scenarios. The consequences of what the West has done during the years of rule was warned by Aeschylus speaking of Xerxes through the shadow of Darius: “Arrogance in full bloom bears a crop of ruinous folly from which it reaps a harvest all of tears” (2008, 820-823). The West, more and more blinded by the desire for immediate profit, succumbed to a predatory capitalism, piously called ‘liberal’, has become the worst propaganda of itself. Without any restraint, Western decision-makers make statements that would make anyone with a little sensitivity blush: Roselyne Bachelot, the French health minister, asked on TV what she would do with the millions of expired flu vaccines, replied shamelessly: “We will give them to African countries as aid to combat underdevelopment”. The gravity of the situation is evidenced by the apparent insensitivity of the French political class and the press, as the minister's statement received minimal criticism. At a 2011 session, the chairman of the WIPO Development Committee, the Minister Counsellor of the French mission to the international organisations in Geneva, interrupted the Senegalese delegate by saying

“Well, that's enough, you've said enough”, an attitude he would not have dared to take with a state that was not a former colony (4). Having sown the seeds of scorn, the West now reaps a harvest of hate.

When the challenge of the new international players, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, emerged, the West found itself intellectually disarmed, but refused to change its way of looking at international reality: at the G-7 summit in Hiroshima in March 2023, a communiqué was adopted in which it: “urged all nations to rally to Ukraine’s defence. This is the G-7, most elevated role...: to speak for the community of nations” (Ikenberry, 2023 p.4) and Brown (2023, 54) summarises: “The G-7, not the G-20, is now the “steering committee of the free world”. The West in general, and the United States in particular, continues to be obsessed with possessing the hegemony of a world divided into good guys and bad guys, with special emphasis on military power. The explanation, according to Bacevich, in a very interesting analysis, for this view of the international scene is a consequence of the Second World War “Just as U.S. leadership in World War II had defeated the Third Reich and imperial Japan, so, too, would Washington turn back the Soviet threat and ensure the survival of freedom. As the two events merged in the country’s collective imagination, they yielded a canonical lesson: U.S. global leadership back by superior military power had become a categorical imperative” (2023, 8). We can deduce that, although the scenario that emerged from the Second World War does not obey today's reality, the mentality of some actors remains the same. According to Chomsky, this world order was destined to be transient because the rest of the world would recover from the devastation of the Second World War and the Third World would gradually become independent (1984, 8). What is certain is that the Third World has not benefited from globalisation as promised. Wild capitalism, piously called ‘liberal’, became lost in its own contradictions; it proclaimed democracy, but supported dictatorships that allowed them to exploit its natural resources; it encouraged Christian values, but exploited children in the Third World; it prided itself on its aid to fight underdevelopment and hunger, but much of that aid was either unsold goods or conditional: Kenya's delegate to the WHO publicly denounced that the Gates Foundation made its aid conditional on the purchase of Monsanto seeds, just as US tobacco companies made tobacco purchases conditional on pro-smoking propaganda. Dostoyevsky demonstrated his understanding of human beings and reality by foreseeing that liberalism would destroy the values of Western society. Echoing this sentiment, Senik (2024) believes that Western values are under attack “precisely because they have lost their strength”.

2. THE END OF HOPE

The collapse of the Soviet ideology and system was the great triumph of liberalism and above all of the USA. It was the victory of Good over Evil, remember President Reagan calling the Soviet Union the Evil Empire, in a Manichean presentation that did not take into account that, for millions of human beings, it was the end of a hope and the spectre of irremediable poverty, of the return of the hated

colonial power, which came back to haunt them like a ghost resurrected from the past to impose itself without alternative. The end of communism left millions of orphans looking for new alternatives. But from the past, a definitive conviction emerged: the responsibility for their adversity, their stagnation, and their desolation was attributed exclusively to the Western world, particularly the United States.

The vacuum left by communism was quickly filled by radical Islamism. Gradually, it became the relief and lost hope of millions of totally destitute families: when the earthquakes in North Africa struck, it was the Muslim Brotherhood who immediately rushed in with water, food and blankets to help a population left to its own devices by governments that took more than a week to react. In Algeria or Egypt, when there was an attempt to hold truly free elections, sponsored and supported by the West, the victory of Islamic extremism led the West to support new military coups d'état. Democracy yes, but with pro-Western results. Religious nationalism has replaced a political system that has not been able to build societies that overcome the colonial heritage and offer a future to young people and end poverty. Europe and the United States have had the profit motive as their only compass. It is true that it is not the religious question that is stifling the youth: according to Sophie Landrin (2024) “more than 40% of university graduates under 25 are unemployed, forced to work informally and occasionally”.

3. DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE EAST

While China, India and Indonesia were emerging as regional or global players, Europe was weakening as nationalisms resurfaced in the wake of the economic crisis (Poletti 2023), defending ideas that were supposed to have been overcome (8), Europe was showing a weakness that was now impossible to deny.

D. Walton wrote in 1993 that “it is no easier to bring about a political Europe than it is to bring about a transition to a market economy and democracy in the East [of Europe]” (p.7). The Western promises of a Hollywood world were soon negated by the realities that Westerners had been unwilling to recognise. While the former states of the Central Empires relatively quickly picked up the thread interrupted by communism, thus demonstrating their Western tradition, old ways of acting and customs resurfaced in the Balkans: institutional corruption, intransigence, political instability, etc. were one of the many barriers separating them from the rest of Europe.

This, which was predictable and known, was hidden under the new slab that was gradually falling on freedom in Europe: ‘la pensée unique’, whereby a policy was condemned simply because it was ‘other’ (Kahn, 1995,7): “the media... act today less as supports for plurality than as professionalised zones of convergence on the fringes of this plurality” (42) until if in the old communist paradise non-conformism

was a symptom of insanity, in the West “it was assimilated to a barbaric way of thinking” (45).

Since that time, the most negative fears have been realised, with public freedoms and fundamental rights being curtailed by laws purporting to combat terrorism. Thus, while much more freedom is demanded of Asian and African autocracies, some European states, such as France, Poland, Hungary, Italy... have taken the opposite path.

The former people's democracies are faced with the choice of ceding much of their recently regained independence to Brussels or being left in no man's land. In contemplating the historical precedent of 1938, 1939, and 1945, when Western Europe demonstrated a lack of commitment, these nations are seeking a more robust security assurance from the United States. Their support for the Iraq war, their acquisition of American military equipment, and their strategic alignment during the Ukrainian conflict are indicative of this shift. Additionally, their rapprochement with Moscow, akin to that observed in Hungary and Slovakia, further underscores this strategic realignment. The EU Court's decision to block the election of the most Eurosceptic candidate in the Romanian elections is an indisputable example of how Brussels repudiates its own principles, engaging in an unacceptable and undemocratic interference in the internal politics of its member states. Brussels dared to challenge Romania, yet it remained silent with Italy—just as it will likely refrain from acting against France, should the far-right emerge victorious tomorrow.

Economically, Europe has ceased to be a port of refuge where social services were envied the world over: the UK has virtually dismantled the NHS, despite having promised to invest three billion a year if they left the EU; France has closed hospitals, removing over 150,000 hospital beds, reducing public education to the bare minimum, etc. The pressure of immigration, legal or illegal, has awakened a nationalist, xenophobic, racist sentiment that was thought to have been overcome after the German horrors of 1933-1945.

If the ‘fourth world’ started out as that of immigrants, in three decades it now includes the new poor, so that the picture from 1946-1989 to the present has deteriorated so much that the very stability of the EU is in danger of breaking down. Europe, clearly divided between the powerful and the rest, between the fiction of what it was and the reality of what it is and will be, Europe, incapable of creating sufficient employment, of controlling immigration, of creating wealth and distributing it fairly, the deindustrialisation of certain states (France in the first place), the dependence on the outside world for strategic minerals, markets, etc., cannot hide a decline that puts an end, at least in the medium term, to any pretensions of first-rate international prominence, since the new era has ushered in a new era in which latent confrontations, international tensions, rivalries between the powers, as in times gone by, return to the forefront: “Great Power competition is back” (Kupchan 2022).

This era that has now ended began in the Renaissance and lasted more than six centuries: it witnessed the birth and fall of several empires, as noted by Duroselle (1998) and Kennedy (1989), Gueriffey and Lentz (2016). The West has been obsessed with imperial power, but the greatness of a civilisation lies not in the empires it has hosted, but in the cultural heritage it has left behind: Athens, empire or confederation of polis, is still alive today because the West is partly its heir, and these kinds of cultural, civilisational empires do not disappear because before they die out they have already sown a cultural wealth that survives all the contingencies of power. Chinese, Indian and Japanese cultures have survived beyond the disappearance of their strength as states or empires. All of them existed when Europeans were barely leaving the caves: defeated for centuries by the military might of the West, but not defeated; despised, but not humiliated; cornered, but not forgotten; condemned to the past, but resurrected.

However today, there is an essential difference between how the United States and Europe view the present and future international scene: Washington has global interests, but despite the grandiloquent declarations of some European leaders hibernating in the past, no European country has them, and if it does, it lacks the means to realise those interests.

4. THE WEST AT THE CROSSROADS: THE EAST AND THE FUTURE

The West has found itself almost completely alone in the war in Ukraine. Within its borders, a groundswell of discontent has emerged such as has not been seen since the Wall Street crash of the 1930s. It must choose between continuing unbridled capitalism and wanting to remain a hegemonic power, or recognising that this is a new era, sharing gains and dealing as equals with the new big players in international relations. The old glories, such as the UK or France, are no longer taken into account. If the West decides to carry on as if nothing is happening, a social revolution on a global scale will be inevitable.

The West, and above all the United States, have used their dominance of the media (Chomsky/Herman 2008) too much to transmit ideas, propaganda (Colon, 2021) and messages that have disappointed too many people to think that anyone can trust their promises any more: the invasion of Kosovo, the Iraq war, the alleged weapons of mass destruction, the American disaster in Afghanistan, have shattered the reputation of the West in the eyes of the rest of the world. The so-called EU representative for foreign policy (what foreign policy?) Josep Borrell declared that Europe was going to bring Russia 'to its knees', and the French finance minister, Bruno Lemaire, said in a French radio the Europe "will ruin Russian economy". President Putin's supposedly very serious illness, the coups in Moscow and so many lies told over the years have left the West's reputation in an impossible situation, and Europe can be said of Europe what one of Oscar Wilde's characters said of another: "He has a great future behind him". Today, in the conflict in Ukraine, the world has made it clear that it no longer trusts that West.

Since 1946, as Kennan (1946) formulated in his famous telegram signed by ‘X’, it has ideologically underpinned its dominance with the claim that the Soviet Union of then and Russia of today is expansionist by nature and today as yesterday must be ‘contained’. The essential difference is that yesterday it was the Soviet Union, today it is China, Russia, India, Indonesia, etc., all of them international actors who will not allow Asia to become the prey of Western powers: if in the 19th century ‘America for Americans’ was imposed and Donald Trump won with ‘America First’, it would be lying to oneself not to recognise the right of Asian countries to impose ‘Asia for Asians’. With regard to Russia in particular, the West has swung from unconditional servility since 1918 to total incomprehension, especially when this incomprehension comes from leading intellectuals such as Raymond Aron (1977).

Since the end of the Second World War and after a long period of recovery, the East has once again taken centre stage in human history and on the international scene. If yesterday, if the era that ended in 1945 was one of withering of the great Eastern powers, the future is inconceivable without Asia.

Bacevich draws an interesting parallel between the humiliation suffered by the United Kingdom [and France] in Suez in 1956 and that suffered by the United States in Afghanistan: the past two decades might have functioned as an extended “Suez moment” for the United States, but the U.S. foreign policy establishment had refused to move on, clinging to the myth that what the world needs is more American military power. The failure in Iraq did not prevent Washington from doubling down on its “good war” in Afghanistan, an act of rashness that culminated in chaotic, humiliating withdrawal in 2021.

The United States intend to continue imposing its will, as it did eighty years ago, through a Manichean ideology of the good guys are the ones who are with me, the bad guys are the rest. Little has evolved since the era of Reagan and the Evil empire. In line with this distortion of reality, the United States and above all Donald Trump, in his infinite ignorance and lack of ethics, has repeated that the United States has spent countless amounts of money defending the borders of other countries. Not at all: the United States has spent countless amounts of money to defend the borders of its hegemony. But today that world hegemony is only a ghost of the past: the East, Asia, is there as a demonstration.

5. ECONOMIC CHANGE AND WORLD ORDER CHANGE.

As Kennedy (1989, 255) wrote, economic change at the end of the 19th century brought about a change in the international order and he adds that “the relative strengths of the leading nations on the world stage never remain constant” (14) because the relationship of economic power evolves with technology, trade,

finance etc. The danger of a conflagration comes not from the change itself, but from the precise moment, i.e. the time when the dominant powers feel threatened by the emerging powers and are tempted to resort to force for fear of losing their dominance: it is the 'Thucydides trap': "The real although unavowed cause I believe to have been the growth of the Athenian power, which terrified the Lacedaemonians and forced them into war" (I, 23, p-17).

The 2020's picture is much more complex because in the background there are a multitude of private international actors that can tip the balance of power one way or the other: Microsoft has greatly helped the development of Chinese technology and artificial intelligence to the detriment of US power. The new international private actors of the technological age do not need states: oil companies needed the US and the UK to get their hands on Iraq's oil, but Elon Musk does not need troops to go to Beijing to deal with the Chinese leadership.

Today's economic outlook bears little resemblance to that of the period up to 1946. After the rise of democracy in the world in the period immediately following the end of the Soviet system, the situation, according to the latest Freedom House Index, (2024,) has steadily deteriorated. If, on the one hand, Russia 'lacks any trace of democratic character-social, political and economic markets stabilized under his [Putin's] leadership' and this improvement in the economic situation has meant that 'society's wilfulness to protest declined'.

The situation in Europe does not allow it to lecture anyone: while the US is calling for Russia to be tried for crimes in Ukraine, Washington is not a member of the ICJ and has always opposed its citizens or allied countries being tried in that court. The UK has been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for sending illegal immigrants to Rwanda, but has paid little attention and gone ahead with its plans. France was condemned by the UN Commission on Human Rights, to which then President Sarkozy responded "that the country that created human rights could not be condemned". French Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin declared that he "Gladly accept if the EU condemns France if it is for the expulsion of migrants". All of the above has been summed up by Tardí, a researcher on migration and asylum policy: "We are witnessing today in Europe a questioning of the rule of law and democratic principles". In this situation, the Third World can no more be expected to trust the West than they can trust China or Russia, with the difference that these two states do not pretend to be giving lessons to anyone.

Economically, the Far East as a whole, including Russia, has greater economic power than Europe, and according to recent forecasts, China will overtake the US by 2050. At the moment, for example, China is ahead of the US in both rail and road infrastructure. Russia complements China very well with raw materials and Beijing also has a stronger footprint and better acceptance in Africa than the West, which gives it easier access to strategic minerals.

China undoubtedly has significant rivalries in Asia, but it has achieved far greater economic deployment in Central Asia and Africa than the West. Even in Europe, Beijing's investment in the port of Piraeus in Greece has made a port that was not particularly significant twenty years ago as major port on the continent. China's penetration of Europe has not been like Europe's penetration of China in the 19th century: there have been no battles or humiliations but simply taking advantage of the opportunities that Europe or the United States offered. If China bought Piraeus Harbour, it was because France and Germany did not care what would happen in Greece once the debts to their banks had been paid. Again, it is an immediate profit motive that is giving every opportunity to the powers of Asia: yesterday, Rolls Royce was a token of British pride; today it belongs to the Indian builder Tata Motors. Asia is conquering Europe and the United States with the economic weapons that both used to exploit the Far East.

Tensions between India/China/Pakistan/Vietnam/Iran/Afghanistan/Saudi Arabia etc. are serious and undeniable, as are the internal problems, but none of them can lead to a major conflict. That tension is equally with the West, and indeed, according to Military Balance, “While Russia is often identified as the main threat in Western strategy updates, Germany, the UK and others are also signalling a more cautious approach to China. Berling described its relationship with Beijing as dealing with a systemic partner, competitor and rival” (2024, 11), and similarly, China is refocusing its own foreign policy: “Beijing is becoming more assertive, not only in its immediate neighbourhood. Beijing sustained its defence modernisation, while also stepping up diplomatic engagement, brokering an effort at détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia” (2024, 8).

CONCLUSIONS.

For someone, like me, who considers that international relations need essentially and necessarily a realistic approach, that they are inevitably unjust, and that if the most important objective of those relations is to live in a peaceful scenario, it is inevitable to have to choose between justice and peace, balance and hegemony, negotiation and imposition, unilateralism or multilateralism, worldwide institutions or only bilateral agreement. Concerning this essential question, Brown, in a highly interesting article (2023,52) wrote: “Biden Administration fixation on bilateral and regional agreements... is underplaying the potential of our international institutions, all while undermining any possibility of a stable and managed globalization. Without a new multilateralism, a decade of global disorder seems inevitable”.

Even if some ancient glories still behaving as if the world was in 1946, nowadays' scenario is very different. U.S. remains a super power, but is not “the” superpower; Europe is not a superpower as could be deduced from the sum of its members. On the contrary, Europe is torn between different inner conflicts, as Odent (2016) has pointed out: “European project is mined, progression of nationalistic forces, economic lethargy, deepened inequalities, extension of poverty, and an increased scepticism concerning the European project”. The extent of what

can be considered the West camp reaches Europe as the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. It is very uncertain that a European conflict will receive more than lip's support from the Far East allies', simply because they do not really have global interests and the same could be argued for European States. Neither the Far East countries have the military capacity nor do the Europeans to help practically each other.

On the other extreme, I do not think that a violent general confrontation is in the near, medium-term projects of Russia, China or India. Concerning long term projects, as Keynes said when someone asked him why he never made long term analysis, "because on the long term all of us will be dead".

None of the present's day superpowers is neither ready to be worldwide hegemonic, nor has any real interest in being one. Very probably, after a series of mutually controlled provocations to decide where is each of them, the world will enter a time of balance of power based in the division of the international scenario in spheres of influence. The balance of power and the spheres of influence are intrinsically unfair, but in a panorama as the one we have today and presumably next decencies, the election will be balance or war. And in this war only one thing is clear from the very beginning: there will no be winners.

And in this war, only one thing is clear from the very beginning: there will be no winners. Amidst this uncertainty, the return of Donald Trump to the White House, driven by a brutal obsession with the economic gain of his protégés, is isolating the United States and—as I have previously noted in these pages—granting Russia and China a free hand. These two powers will wait patiently as Trump continues his abuses, ultimately demolishing the last vestiges of International Law and any framework for global understanding. Once Trump finds himself (and the U.S.) isolated, except for a few states offering fleeting support only to abandon him at the first opportunity, the U.S. will realize that Trump's presidency has sunk the nation and left the international stage at the mercy of Russia and China. Never has a single individual inflicted such profound damage upon the West as Donald Trump, and we have to keep in mind that what has been destroyed in four years will not be recovered in another four. The dream of an Americanized world born in the wake of 1989 belongs definitively to a past that will not return

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