

Towards a Peaceful Change of the International Order ¹ **What only wars were able to do... so far**

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The modern international order was born with the so-called Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that ended the 30-year war in Europe and gave rise to the concept of the sovereign State we know today. From then on, the international system began to evolve under a pattern imposed by the European empires until the beginning of the 20th century, in which France occupied a special place until the final defeat of Napoleon, in 1815. The French, however, have been able to settle and benefit throughout history thanks to the talents of their diplomatic and political negotiators¹. When examining the last 200 years, we see that the international system has changed only as a result of great wars or revolutions that have marked the future of humanity, as was the French Revolution which, together with the independence of the United States, marked the beginning of the loss of power of the empires of the Western world. Similar was the case of the Chinese dynasty and the Turkish Empire, which began their decline in the 19th century. The Vienna Congress in 1815², after the fall of Napoleon - even though it sought the restoration of the traditional European monarchies - generated a political, social, economic and cultural change that transcended the frontiers and ended absolutism definitively, rearranging the international system and initiating a long period of peace in Europe.

Napoleon's wars, which conquered countries and territories reaching Egypt and Russia, can be considered practically as a small world war or a great European war³, where France expanded its power and modified borders seeking to be a global empire and seize the power of the English. Its defeat gave rise to a new international order outlined in the Congress of Vienna and based on the principle of the balance of power to avoid imperialist ambitions and ensure peace⁴.

War orders the world

It's always been wars and their victors, with their successes and mistakes, which have determined borders and hegemonies and thus, the international order. The emergence of the German Empire, in 1871, aroused fears for its economic strength

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and the militarism that inspired it, generating new military alliances in Europe, the development of an arms race that encouraged nationalism and the rebellion of the peoples under the Austro-Hungarian hegemony that stretched from Vienna to the Balkans. It also awakened the imperialist greed for the riches of Africa and the Middle East and unleashed the First World War (WW1).

The beginning of the 20th century, marked by the arrival of modernity with its advances for the life of the cities and the promise of upcoming prosperity, was finished with the Sarajevo shot in 1914 and the beginning of WW1, which left an estimated 10 million dead and 20 million wounded and crippled. Germany had to surrender and paid its arrogance with the humiliating Treaty of Versailles, in 1918, which later became the raw material to feed Nazism.

The premiere of the League of Nations in 1919 launched a new international order that lasted for 21 years with the first Security Council, which included the right to veto and that would govern the destinies of humanity⁵. Weak in its composition (neither the United States, nor Germany or the USSR were present), without coercive power and at a time when a new conflict was incubated, there was little it could do. Anecdotes tell that in views of the successive violations of the Treaty of Versailles by Hitler, the Security Council kept sent him telegrams of protest which would have led Winston Churchill to point out that: "If Hitler continues to violate the Treaty, the Council will stop sending him telegrams...".

The generation that went through the Great War did not think it possible to live another. However, on September 1, 1939, Europe would start a new one that did not only involve the armies, but also meant the massive bombardments of cities, deportations and the systematic extermination of Jews, Gypsies, communists, disabled, homosexuals and patriots of the resistance in the concentration camps of the Nazi and their allies in the occupied countries. The final brooch was put by the United States with the launch of two nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945⁶. That same year, in Yalta and Potsdam, the new international order was officially born, imposed by the three great winners: the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. No one else. Borders were rearranged, areas of influence determined, Germany demilitarized and divided, and the creation of the United Nations was materialized at the San Francisco Conference - with a Security Council, the second in history, in place until today with 5 permanent member countries: United States, Soviet Union (today Russia), the People's Republic of China, the United Kingdom and France. It is only they who have the last word about global security, having the right to veto⁷.

A peaceful way towards a new world order

The challenge lies in changing the current order in a consensual and peaceful way, before the accumulation of tensions leads to another tragic outcome, as has happened in the past. Every war has been worse in terms of loss of human lives. Today there are 9 countries that have a nuclear arsenal and several that do not relent in their goal of getting one. The United States and Russia concentrate 90% of the bombs. On Feb 01, President Trump proceeded to unilaterally cancel the INF Treaty (Intermediate-Range

Nuclear Forces) signed in 1986 between the USSR and the U.S. The following day, Moscow announced that it also considered it finished.

The cancellation of the INF, that had given Europe peace of mind since it reduced the number of medium-range missiles from 63,000 to 8,900, opens the door to a new arms race that de facto is already underway and where all the great powers participate with hundreds of thousands of millions of dollars. The German Minister of Economy, Peter Altmaier, stated that he wishes to keep the INF but if not, he would not rule out the rearmament of his country: “Not doing so would weaken Germany’s negotiating position⁸”, he expressed in a clear sample of political realism, which puts the search of national interest first and which is the ruling doctrine.

The 21st century will be Asian

The geopolitical map will radically change over the next few years thanks to Asia’s growing breakthrough as an economic, demographic and military force which today concentrates 60% of the world’s population (4.4 billion of inhabitants) and where China with 1.4 billion and India with 1.3 billion become increasingly relevant actors⁹. We can add Japan and the two Koreas that at some point will reach reunification. Asia, due to its numbers, economic and military strength, will require greater participation in global affairs, as well as Germany, that has legitimated its obscure past, and which today is a bulwark of democracy.

It is no longer possible to talk of a struggle between the capitalist and the socialist system, or of ideological rivalry, when socialism practically does not exist anymore and what’s left will quickly disappear. The dangers which are common to all countries are the multiple global security threats: climate change, pollution of oceans and cities, military spending, disarmament, water, migrations, projections of demographic growth, human rights or cybercrime, among others, demand a collective responsibility that advances towards a global governance.

There is a growing danger of natural disasters of which we do not know to which extent will affect the planet and its species. Neither should one minimize the danger of military conflicts that may involve the powers with unpredictable outcome, if they ever happened. The higher military spending which President Trump demands from the NATO allies, the expansion of this alliance that continues fencing Russia in, as well as the annexation of the Ukraine on behalf of Moscow, or the hegemony that China seeks in Asia, only bring us closer to disaster. We assist to a rivalry of spaces of powers where egos also count, but where no force, however powerful, can solve the problems alone.

The global economic system based on consumption and/or economic growth at any price, along with competition and profit, are key elements that need to be rethought, as they threaten our future. Money has corrupted many political systems, and citizen discomfort runs through the developed and developing world. Authoritarian surprises can occur today in the North as well as in the South through popular vote, such as it happened in Germany in the last century. The growth of populist forces appears to be the response of civil society to the disenchantment that politics provoke and has

been already installed in many countries. It is even threatening integration processes that have cost a lot to build. It is time to act, and the main responsibility lies with the main international actors. The legitimate pursuit of national interest must have a limit to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Civil society, responsible politicians and the scientific, academic and cultural community must press hard to democratize the international system and move towards global and responsible governance to secure the peace and the planet where we live.

References

- ¹ One should just remember the role of Talleyrand in the Congress of Vienna where France, despite the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, kept being treated as a great power; it was only confined to return to its borders and not even paid war compensations. At the end of WW2, General De Gaulle appeared together with the allies in Berlin managing to be treated like a victorious country and became one of the four occupying forces of the German capital. France subsequently obtained a seat as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.
- ² From September 1814 to June 1815, a total of 18 countries met for the final signing while the negotiations were carried out only by the 4 main powers: Austria, Prussia, England and Russia, plus the defeated France that was treated as an equal, returning to its borders and without payment of war compensation. For 9 months, Vienna was capital of the empires with all the pageantry and etiquette of dinners and galas, which led the Austrian Prince de Ligne to say: “Le congrès ne marche pas, il dance” (The Congress does not advance, it dances).
- ³ The terrible dictatorship of Napoleon and its wars left several million dead, missing, wounded and crippled along with material destruction in many countries where La Grande Armée passed through.
- ⁴ See Kissinger H., *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994. There were practically 100 years of peace excepting the local wars between Austria-Prussia in 1866, called the “7 weeks”, and the Franco-Prussian war that lasted 10 months (1870-1871) and gave rise to the unification and to the German Empire that would last until 1918.
- ⁵ Formed by France, United Kingdom, Italy, Japan and the United States. The latter never assumed, because the U.S. Senate did not approve, even though President Wilson had been its main promoter. In 1926, Germany was authorized to enter, and in 1934 the USSR did. The number of countries with veto right increased progressively, reaching 15 by 1934. See *History of the United Nations*.
- ⁶ The number of immediate victims of the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki is esteemed in 80,000 and 40,000. The total victims of WW2 are estimated at about 50 million, including 24 million Soviets, 6 million Jews, 7 million Germans, 3 million Japanese, among many others.
- ⁷ During the negotiations in San Francisco, an attempt was made to approve the consensus for the implementation of the veto, but it was strictly rejected by the United States since the Senate would not ratify the Treaty in those terms.
- ⁸ See *El País*, 2019/02/10.
- ⁹ Africa concentrates 16% of the world’s population, Europe 10%, Latin America and the

Caribbean 9% and North America, Oceania 5%. It is time to take the demographic growth seriously, since according to the United Nations the world population will reach 8.5 billion inhabitants in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100. See World Population.