Era of COVID: A new security paradigm?

Abstract:

The world, from the certainties of the cold war, presents more and more uncertainties and a greater number of threats to international peace and security.

The events and facts that have occurred throughout the planet since then have apparently weakened the pillars on which the security paradigm was based, undermining the leadership, cohesion and expectations of the populations.

The COVID pandemic, a new threat - despite the fact that infectious diseases were already considered as such two decades ago – that generates to tensions and apparently contributes to accelerating the breakdown of this paradigm.

A reflection on the matter articulates and closes this document.

Keywords:

COVID, Security, State, International Organizations, Cohesion, Paradigm, Leadership

Era COVID: ¿Un nuevo paradigma de seguridad?

Resumen:

El mundo, desde las certezas de la guerra fría, cada vez presenta más incertidumbres y un mayor número de amenazas a la paz y seguridad internacional.

Los eventos y hechos que desde aquel entonces han acontecido por todo el planeta aparentemente han debilitado los pilares en los que se basaba el paradigma de seguridad, minando el liderazgo, la cohesión y las expectativas de las poblaciones.

La pandemia de COVID, una amenaza nueva –pese a que las enfermedades infecciosas ya eran consideradas como tal hace dos décadas- genera tensiones y contribuye, aparentemente, a acelerar la ruptura de dicho paradigma.
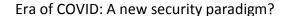
Una reflexión al respecto articula y cierra el presente documento.

Palabras clave:

COVID, Seguridad, Estado, Organizaciones Internacionales, Cohesión, Paradigma, Liderazgo

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From a world of certainties...

After the end of the Second World War and during the so-called cold war, the planet could rely on relative "certainties". On the one hand, due to the existence of two opposing blocs –plus a third, that of the "non-aligned" and some neutral countries–, and due to knowing "on which side each one was" and "who were the enemies". And also, who the "friends or allies" were.

On the other hand, the existence of strong global leadership, both at the level of nations and individuals, at least the heads of the great powers, made clearer choices and perceptions possible, or at least easier to adjust to the priority threat, the other bloc, a fact that overshadowed almost everything else.

And all this without forgetting that despite the wars that the decolonisation process and the struggle of the blocs in third countries entailed, the standard of living and the development indicators were improving globally[1], although there were still great differences between developed and non-developed countries, and between different economic models. Expectations and perceptions related to being able to improve, to advance in quality of life and wealth, in opportunities and desires, despite the existing crises and difficulties. Children, in general, had serious hopes of living better than their parents.

During this whole period, the institutions of regional and global governance experienced a great development: the reality and definition of wars as "global", as well as the possibility of the destruction of humanity as a whole in a nuclear holocaust accelerated this feeling of a "global village", of the vision of the world as a single space and that, therefore, it should be tended to be managed as such. The United Nations (UN), which emerged at the end of the Second World War (1945)[2] with a preamble full of words such as peace, security, justice, rights, progress, etc., in an ode to a better world, was occupying spaces and areas of work; and the very active management and legendary

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[1] PRADOS DE LA ESCOSURA, Leandro, World Human Development: 1870-2007, The Review of Income and Wealth, series 61 number 2, pages 220-247, June 2015. Available (pre-publication) at https://frdelpino.es/investigacion/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/LPE-World_human_development_pre-publication.pdf NOTE: all web links in this document are active as of 9 November 2020.

[2] UNITED NATIONS, Charter of the United Nations, San Francisco, 26 June 1945. Available at https://www.un.org/es/charter-united-nations/

General Secretaries –just remember the Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld, the "inventor" of the "peace missions"– were filling the UN and its agencies with prestige, while new regional associations of different types –military, commercial, political, etc.– were appearing all over the planet. The process of supranational partnership, making good the secular motto "together we are stronger" seemed to be gaining momentum during the cold war; and like the United Nations, these organisations have a significant degree of endorsement and prestige. What these organisations say carries international weight.

Relative certainties, cohesive states with united populations, valid supranational organisations and an adequate leadership capacity provide serious support for the security paradigm which, with nuances, has come down to us today. Surely enough?

...to another one full of uncertainty?

Since the end of the cold war, the planet has been undergoing a complete reconfiguration. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the bipolar world, hope lords over a world that sees the Kantian ideal of perpetual peace as real. This is the stage of the "End of History"[3], of the proposal of a possible end to armed conflicts, and of the expectation that in the world there are only economic differences and the triumph of democracy.

But the facts are stubborn in the face of illusions; the loss of control of the powers in their areas of influence, due to their disappearance (Soviet Union) or the lack of geopolitical interest in maintaining them (United States), filling the planet with conflicts and revolutions, while the UN multiplies its efforts and its peace missions trying to stabilise a planet in growing disorder. And although after 9/11 a certain feeling of facing a common enemy was generated, international terrorism, which apparently allows the great nations to be somewhat cohesive, the truth is that they are looking for their space in the new world that is being forged, and, rightly or wrongly, the so-called "clash of civilisations" fits in as an argument in sectors of societies that are increasingly radicalised and lacking in leaders, contributing to the fracturing of alliances and nations.

The geopolitical vacuum is being filled –constantly filling– by emerging powers: Putin's reborn Russia, an unstoppable rising China, the United States is in a certain process of

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[3] FUKUYAMA, Francis, The End of History and the Last Man, Free Press, New York, 1992

retreating into itself and the European Union –perhaps due to the complex "digestion" of some enlargements carried out at full speed, or perhaps due to its own vulnerabilities and contradictions– does not seem to be the world reference for a supranational regional organisation; and meanwhile, the United Nations is falling into inoperativeness – among other things, because of the inability to stop the huge number of existing armed conflicts.
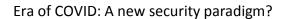
However, the world is becoming more and more globalised, with flows of goods, ideas, financial resources and people circling the globe at greater speed and intensity. The new wave of globalisation[4] that began in the late 1980s is characterised by the creation of long and complex value chains, which would translate into an exponential increase in international trade[5]; the strengthening of maritime infrastructures and networks, due to the lowering of maritime transport costs and the ease of foreign investment, led to the massive transfer of manufacturing to Asia, with the consequent relocation of many companies and the loss of business fabric in the United States, Europe and Japan and of a large number of jobs in the industrial sector in developed countries, while the world market was filled with products from overseas at much lower costs than those produced locally, also contributing to the erosion of local trade structures.

Although globalisation posed a wave of prosperity at all levels –and, to some extent, with nuances, that is so–, the truth is that various issues of internal and external nature ended up meaning that certain countries contemplated that a great part of their wealth and potentialities were left in the hands of a few –as it happened with Russia and the oligarchs, among others–, increasing the inequalities gradually, creating a powerful resentment against that "western globalisation" feeling that still lasts; the new world economic structure left many populations tense and fractured and left many states weak, sometimes unable to compete against the tide of low-cost Asian products that invaded their markets, and against the financial flows managed by large investors and global funds.

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[4] While there are certain differences among analysts when it comes to adjusting times and deadlines for the globalisation waves of the past, a good essay on the subject can be read in LEVINSON, Marc, Outside the box. How globalization changed from moving stuff to spreading ideas, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2020

[5] LEVINSON, Marc, The box: How the shipping container made the world smaller and the economy bigger, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2006 (there is a second edition with a new chapter published in 2016)

This change in the poles and in global growth patterns has major geopolitical consequences, and tensions are being exacerbated in a centrifugal sense throughout the planet, increasing unrest. The financial crisis of 2007-2008 was a severe blow to international trade and, above all, to the perception of future hope since, for the first time since the Second World War, the possibility was raised that children would live worse than their parents.

Tensions are growing, with internal effects on states and external effects impacting and fracturing global governance; and events such as the Arab Spring 2011 and the "outraged" movements in Europe and around the world, the UK's yes to Brexit, and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016 can be included[6] as products of this population anger. This social unhappiness not only translates into an increase in disorder, general strikes and anti-government demonstrations –from 2011 to 2019, throughout the planet, these actions have increased by 244%[7]– but also into a powerful lack of cohesion and internal fracture in States and international organisations and the apparently unstoppable rise of populist parties of both signs.
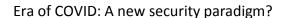
And there are no leaders who mark out a clear path that makes growth and values, stability and democracy compatible –and this was a role that the European Union could or not very well play, paradoxically; it seems that unless there is a powerful change of course, it could disappear as an actor from the geopolitical point of view[8]–; and the leaders who can put their success on the table –Putin, Xi Jinping– are not the desired referents of freedom, and even, feeding back into populism, they pose the false dichotomy between development and freedom.

QUARTZ, Brace yourself: the most disruptive phase of globalization is just beginning, 7 December 2016. Available at https://qz.com/854257/brace-yourself-the-most-disruptive-phase-of-globalization-is-just-beginning/

[7] INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMICS & PEACE, Global Peace Index 2020, JUNE 2020 Available at https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GPI_2020_web-1.pdf

[8] GSTÖHL, Sieglinde, The geopolitical commission: learning "the language of power", College of Europe Policy Brief, 19 February 2020 Available at https://www.coleurope.eu/system/tdf/research-paper/gstohl_cepob_2-2020.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=54724&force=

In a few years, the pillars on which the security paradigm rested seem to have largely cracked. Perhaps it was that, more than the end of history, we were on the verge of the end of the "Great Illusion" [9] in a globalised planet full of unrest and growing unhappiness.

But, in any case, the security paradigm is strong enough to face whatever comes, even in this new "uncertain world", where everything is "new". Even the threats.

A rise in "new" threats!

After the end of the quintessential threat, bloc warfare in the bipolar world, as early as 1999 NATO pointed out in its strategic concept[10] the existence of a wide variety of risks, military and non-military, multidirectional and often difficult to predict, including the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as technology made it increasingly easy to obtain both the means of their dissemination and the facilities to manufacture them.

Another multinational organisation, the European Union, in its first security strategy in 2003, pointed out the need to confront the existing threats and risks together, recalling that no country, on its own, would be able to do so, and indicating that the advance of science could give more power to biological weapons[11].

And the United Nations, the global governance body par excellence, in the report of a high-level panel of experts on global threats, challenges and change, entitled "A more secure world: our shared responsibility" [12], covers the most important threats to peace and security in the world, among which the references to deadly infectious diseases are constant, as well as the need for biological security. And it also highlights the

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[9] SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, 1914-2014: The Return of History or the Great Illusion?, Army Magazine number 888, March 2015, pages 16-23 Available at
http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Nacional/2015/PSH_La_Gran_Ilusion_Revista_Ejercito_888_marzo_2015.pdf

[10] NATO, The Allliance's Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999. Available at
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm

[11] EUROPEAN COUNCIL, European Security Strategy, A Secure Europe in a Better World, 12 December 2003, page 4 Available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30808/qc7809568esc.pdf

[12] UNITED NATIONS, A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility. Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, General Assembly, document A/59/565, 2 December 2004. Available at https://undocs.org/es/A/59/565

vulnerability of our health systems –on a global scale– to new infectious diseases, by highlighting the dangers (and opportunities) generated by advances in biotechnology, which makes it necessary to prepare an effective defence against bioterrorism and against natural outbreaks of natural infectious diseases. And it expressly states that "Any event or process that causes large-scale deaths or a massive reduction in life chances and undermines the role of the state as the basic unit of the international system constitutes a threat to international security" (page 12), and that such threats include infectious diseases – included in the group of economic and social threats alongside poverty and environmental degradation.
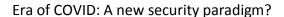
Since the publication of the above-mentioned documents, a multitude of documents from different nations, international organisations and think tanks have profusely addressed the presentation and analysis of the "new threats" –international terrorism, failed states, organised crime, etc.–, ideas and thoughts that have been materialising, to a great extent, during these years. The strategy has a forward-looking vision and mission, a strongly utilitarian component, as foreseeing, and more to the point of security, must involve foresight. Or does it?

Not-so-new threats... Do we have a plan?!

If already in those years there was a clear awareness of the danger that infectious diseases posed and that, in addition, would be a growing threat, the rapid development of technology and climate change –due to the fracture of habitats and environments, which favours the dissemination of microorganisms that did not previously exist in those areas– has only contributed to their reinforcement.

To a greater extent, this threat continues to appear, in most nations, in the highest level documents dealing with security and defence, in their national security strategies –or equivalent terminology–; without going any further, it is included verbatim in the Spanish National Security Strategy of 2017: "(...) Spain, a country that receives more than 75 million tourists a year, with ports and airports that are among the busiest in the world, a climate that increasingly favours the spread of disease vectors, with an ageing

population and a polarised geopolitical situation, is not exempt from threats and challenges associated with both natural and intentional infectious diseases. (...)"[13].

On the other hand, and in addition to the "lessons learned" from past pandemics, from the black plague that devastated Europe centuries ago to the so-called "Spanish flu" – because this was the country where its appearance was reported in the press, given that the other European nations were subject to censorship when they were immersed in the First World War– in recent times, although much less widespread, there have been outbreaks that have made the authorities –and the populations– extraordinarily concerned about the potential consequences they could generate: it is enough to remember SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003[14], the so-called "avian flu"[15] –with different outbreaks and virus strains– or Ebola in 2014-2016[16]. All of them generated a high degree of social alarm and all of them involved the activation of certain measures and protocols.

Given that they posed global threats, and that despite their remote origins –from the Western perspective, since the first two came from Southeast Asia and Ebola from Africa–, they arrived in the West, although with little incidence, and people asked themselves if something really remote was really in a global world, and thought or pretended "that it is not going to reach them". It seems reasonable to design contingency plans, and for these to be, as it has been proclaimed for decades, global and joint, since "in the face of global threats, we need global answers".

Therefore, what could be evident, at least in the richest and most powerful nations of the planet and/or in international organisations, is that there are, for this –and other– threats, already contemplated two decades ago, established plans, global protocols, validated and planned lines of action, etc. And a plan, *grosso modo* requires a real assessment of the threat, the establishment of a clear goal and purpose –especially if it

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[13] GOVERNMENT PRESIDENCY, National Security Strategy 2017, Department of National Security, 2017, page 74. Available at
https://www.dsn.gob.es/sites/dsn/files/Estrategia_de_Seguridad_Nacional_ESN%20Final.pdf

[14] CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Available at https://www.cdc.gov/sars/about/faq-sp.html

[15] CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, Highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N1) virus in Asia. Available at https://espanol.cdc.gov/flu/spotlights/hpai-avian-flu.htm

[16] WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, Ebola virus disease, 10 February 2020. Available at https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ebola-virus-disease
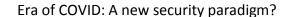
is to be carried out by several actors– the identification of existing and necessary means and resources, the design of lines of action with intermediate objectives and milestones, the prioritisation of efforts and actions to be carried out, and a leadership capacity that allows for adequate decision making in a timely manner. A plan, a high-level plan, like a high-level potential pandemic threat, presupposes the proper alignment of ends, means and ways and the existence of a leadership capacity that it is capable of taking decisions, even if they are difficult and tough, in view of the common good. Global responses to global threats, for the good of all.

Therefore, it seems that the conditions for a "grand plan" for a pandemic were in place. And then comes COVID-19.

COVID-19: The litmus test for international security

In the midst of this sea of uncertainties, tensions and lack of cohesion, one of the simplest organisms in existence, a virus, will soon appear, in a timid and limited way at first, then in a brutal and global way, which will end up putting the entire planet in check.
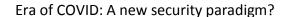
Given that, a priori, this is a health emergency, and that there is a global body, the World Health Organization (WHO), which is qualified to deal with these issues, there should be no problems or doubts, beyond those specific to the type of pathogen, in the management of this new flu or pneumonia that has appeared in a market in China. Or should there?

It is a pandemic!: what about global health governance?

On 31 December 2019, the WHO office in China was informed by the authorities of several cases of pneumonia of an unknown type, and that on the basis of preliminary information provided by the Chinese research team, it did not appear that there was significant person-to-person transmission of the pathogen[17]. From that moment on, beyond the fact that its existence and diffusion was previous to the notification, in less than three months (on 11 March 2020) the official declaration of the already known

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[17] WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, Pneumonia of unknown cause-China, 5 January 2020 Available at https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unkown-cause-china/es/

"coronavirus" as a pandemic took place[18], and therefore, the obvious confirmation of the seriousness of the disease.

The highest health authority on a global scale –without forgetting that the multinational institutions have the capacity for action granted to them by the Member States– falls into almost total disrepute, due to its inefficiency, doubts and contradictory messages when it comes to managing[19] –or at least making recommendations on– the pandemic: from the delay in declaring it to the lukewarmness in recommending the cessation of international travel to prevent the spread of the virus, to the contradictory messages regarding the use or not of facemasks, social distancing... and not forgetting the accusations of having been lukewarm in the face of China's attitude and its supposed lack of information and opacity, especially at the initial moments of appearance of the first cases.

A global health crisis, the largest in a century, was not adequately managed by a global governance health body. And, as in the past, a serious health crisis quickly becomes a multidimensional and global crisis. The time seems right, the opportunity for global governance bodies to show their potential.

It is a crisis!: And what does the UN say about this?

On 3 April, with the pandemic in full swing, the United Nations General Assembly issued resolution 74/270[20], entitled "
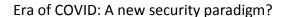Global Solidarity to Fight the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)"; it identifies, in the usual United Nations terminology, a number of issues, including the grave concern about the threat posed by the pandemic to health, security and human well-being, the severe disruption of societies and economies and the devastating impact on people's livelihoods that it generates, and the fact that the crisis will destroy hard-won development gains. And it continues to point to the need for collaboration of all

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[18] WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, COVID-19: WHO action timeline, 27 April 2020 Available at https://www.who.int/es/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19

[19] VVAA, Challenges of global governance amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Council on Foreign Relations, 21 May 2020, page 23. Available at https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/challenges-of-global-governance-amid-the-covid-19-pandemic.pdf

[20] UNITED NATIONS, General Assembly Resolution, document A/RES/74/270, 3 April 2020. Available at https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=es/A/RES/74/270

stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels, as well as the recognition that the pandemic requires (and it uses that term literally) " ". An ode to the need to confront a global threat together.

A few days later, on 20 April, another resolution, 74/274[21], was issued, focusing on international cooperation to ensure global access to drugs, vaccines and medical equipment to address COVID-19, reiterating the importance of international cooperation and effective multilateralism, and that in the face of the pandemic the response must be based on "unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation".
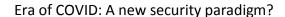
The reality is that most of the nations of the world, whose production has been delocalised, do not have sufficient reserves of facemasks to attend an emergency... or a simple increase in the usual demand; and while, the number of sick people grows and the number of deaths increase, the nations fight it out with the producers of facemasks or certain medicines, breaking agreements and previous negotiations with the simple argument of paying more; there is no criterion of need, of health emergency, or of attending first to the emerging outbreaks and trying to extinguish them, of trying to control the pandemic in its initial outbreaks and there concentrate the efforts of that world based on "unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation"... each country is out for its own interests in a zero-sum game where the losses in lives are counted in thousands... but better if they are figures "of the others", leading the health material market to become a forest without rules[22]. Only a few nations, such as Finland, do not have that initial need, as it has taken time since the cold war to gather[23] essential materials –from food to health resources– to deal with potential crises.

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[21] UNITED NATIONS, General Assembly Resolution, document A/RES/74/274, 20 April 2020. Available at https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/74/274

[22] VANGUARDIA, Facemasks, the wild market, 3 May 2020. Available at https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20200503/48913793461/covid19-mascarillas-china-espana-estafa-salud-importacion-salvador-illa-contratos-admnistracion.html

[23] BBC.com, Coronavirus: the secret stores from the Cold War meaning that Finland has no shortage of facemasks, 16 April 2020 Available at https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-52283271

There is no cooperation and sharing, it is the law of the strongest; and since most of the production of facemasks and health resources is located in China, the term "facemask diplomacy" has been coined, which is one more way to reinforce the narrative and the story[24] regarding the proper management of the pandemic by Beijing, and how badly other nations have done it, showing "the excellence of its political system" and its "good intentions" with respect to other countries.

At the beginning of the summer, at the apparent end of the "first wave" of the pandemic and when it seemed that the disease could begin to be controlled to some extent, the harsh reality prevailed over the wishes expressed by the General Assembly; and the situation was so complex that under the generic heading "Maintenance of International Peace and Security", the United Nations Security Council, a body whose resolutions are binding, issued resolution 2532 (2020) on 1 July[25]. And in it, it is possible to read the harshness of the situation that is being experienced on the planet due to the pandemic and the impact that this has on international peace and security; it points out the devastating effect of the pandemic worldwide, that the pandemic exacerbates armed conflict and that armed conflict, in turn, makes it more complex to fight the virus, that progress in peacebuilding and development could be negated by COVID-19, and that the fight against it requires greater cooperation and solidarity at the national, regional and international levels, as well as an inclusive, comprehensive and global response in which the United Nations plays a key coordinating role, among other issues. The pandemic is already a multidimensional crisis, with serious security implications, among others.

But ceasefires requested on several occasions –the first by the UN Secretary-General on 23 March[26]– for ongoing conflicts are not observed, and the impact of the pandemic on conflicts, in all types of conflicts and battlefields, is high; we start talking about that besides the pandemic there is an infodemic, a battle in which the warriors have

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[24] GERMAN MARSHALL FUND, Mask off Chinese coronavirus assistance in Europe, Policy Paper number 9, July 2020 https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/ASD-ASIA%20-%20EU%20China%20Coronavirus%20-%20final.pdf

[25] UNITED NATIONS, Security Council Resolution, document S/RES/2532 (2020), 1 July 2020. Available at https://undocs.org/es/S/RES/2532(2020)

[26] To which the one made by the Security Council on 1 July must be added, again by the Secretary General on 22 September... UNITED NATIONS, Global Ceasefire. Available at https://www.un.org/es/globalceasefire

keyboards instead of swords[27], in an environment full of false news, hoaxes and disinformation, in the development of a real war of information –in which there are always those who obtain benefits from it–; it is pointed out that a cyberwar also exists[28], given the exponential increase of attacks and intrusions in cyberspace, and that the economic crisis generated by the global economic disruption is so serious that, by qualified voices, it is affirmed that "there is not one pandemic, but two"[29].

In that complex scenario, where the basic needs of hundreds of millions of human beings are threatened, expecting conflict to diminish and the parties to the conflict, especially those who know no limits in the instrumentalisation of any means to achieve their ends, to cease violence may be a somewhat –or too– simplistic an approach.

Corroborating this reality are reports that terrorist and insurgent groups, as well as certain governments, are using the pandemic and its sequence of misery, as well as the restrictive measures employed to break the chains of contagion to achieve their political objectives[30]; social unrest and growing inequality in an environment of economic crisis and global attention to the evolution of the pandemic generate analyses of conflict with the disheartening title "from bad to worse"[31]; and even one of the direct tools for the maintenance of international peace and security, the missions abroad, are also affected in different ways[32], from the questioning of their deployment in a time of economic difficulty in the troop-donor countries to the complexity associated with carrying out the missions while ensuring self-protection, to the accusations of being "vectors of

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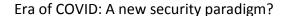[27] EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION, In rougher seas, the EU's own interests and values should be our compass, 14 June 2020. Available at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/80854/rougher-seas-eu%E2%80%99s-own-interests-and-values-should-be-our-compass_en

[28] IBM, COVID-19 cyberwar: how to protect your business, IBM Institute for Business Value, June 2022. Available at https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/report/covid-19-cyberwar

[29] BBC.com, Coronavirus economic crisis. Robert Shiller, Nobel Laureate in Economics "There is not one pandemic, but two", 25 May 2020. Available at https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-52748371

[30] MAIL&GUARDIAN, The pandemic has shifted patterns of conflict in Africa, 22 June 2020. Available at https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-06-22-the-pandemic-has-shifted-patterns-of-conflict-in-africa/

[31] MUSTASILTA, Katariina, From bad to worse. The impact(s) of COVID-19 on conflict dynamics, Institute for Security Studies, Brief number 13, 11 June 2020. Available at https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2013%20Covid%20and%20conflict.pdf

[32] DE CONING, Cedric, COVID-19 and peacebuilding: disruption, adaptation and transformation, Accord, 8 July 2020. Available at https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/covid-19-and-peacebuilding-disruption-adaptation-and-transformation/

contagion" launched by extremist groups... everything contributes to making things more difficult. Much more.

The perception in some domains that the worst of the pandemic had passed and that autumn would bring the start of a recovery phase –and of peace and stability– is soon truncated by a "second wave" of the pandemic. And the fears are already growing exponentially, as one glimpses that one was not at the beginning of the end, but that the end was quite far away. Against this backdrop, two new UN General Assembly resolutions –A/RES/74/306[33] and A/RES/74/307[34]– were issued on a comprehensive and coordinated response to the pandemic and on a unified response to COVID-19, which only served to highlight the seriousness of the situation, from the recognition that the pandemic is one of the greatest global challenges in the history of the United Nations to the concern about misinformation and propaganda that can incite violence, to the serious risk to all countries, particularly the least developed.

Despite the words of the UN –let us remember, it is only what the member nations want it to be– there continues to be a lack of global leadership and a lack of faith in international organisations and institutions, while inter- and intra-national tensions and social conflict grow, along with the feeling of not knowing where it is going. And that always creates insecurity.
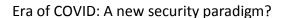
The force of the facts: More insecurity?

This multidimensional crisis, which is already apparent to almost everyone and which almost no one denies, has appeared and probably grown more than it should due to the erosion of the existing security paradigm. But it also contributes to breaking these pillars at full speed, in a kind of very dangerous vicious circle.

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[33] UNITED NATIONS, General Assembly Resolution, document A/RES/74/306, 11 September 2020 Available at https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/74/306

[34] UNITED NATIONS, General Assembly Resolution, document A/RES/74/307, 11 September 2020 Available at https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/74/307

Internal problems and disengagement of States

As a result of the effects of coronavirus, peace on a global scale has deteriorated, conflicts are emerging and new tensions are arising, inequalities have grown and social tensions are increasing[35]. And if in the rich countries there are serious internal problems in the face of the multidimensional crisis generated –and not yet finished– in the environments of lower income and areas already hit by disasters and calamities, the situation is painful and can become Dantesque[36]. The mix of mobility restrictions, insecurity, supply chain disruption and social tensions, fed by existing ills –from climate change to other endemic diseases, terrorism and organised crime– increases the already existing perfect storms to generate ever wider and more intense environments of insecurity, and with impact on a global scale –one need only recall the so-called "slum geopolitics"[37] and the spread of instability across the planet from an initial focus.

The emergence of the so-called "COVID dictatorships"[38], of governments instrumentalising the pandemic to curtail freedoms, also has significant consequences. The population, the people of the different countries, have in many cases made extraordinary efforts and sacrifices, although these cannot be made in a constant and recurrent manner; and the pandemic, combined with the massive loss of jobs, with a deep recession and with an increase in the debt of the nations could lead to powerful political reactions or revolts[39], although the meaning of these is not yet clear, or perhaps it depends on who is capable, once again, of adequately instrumentalising them.
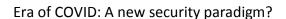
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[35] CREDIT SUISSE, Global Wealth Report, 2020, Research Institute, October 2020 Available at file:///C:/Users/Windows%207/Downloads/global-wealth-report-2020-en.pdf

[36] SÁNCHEZ HERRAÉZ, Pedro, The Sahel in times of pandemic: Even worse, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Analysis Paper 24/2020, 15 July 2020. Available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA24_2020PEDSAN_pandemiaSahel.pdf

[37] SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, substandard housing areas: Zones of insecurity! in "Cities: environments and spaces of security, third chapter of Cities: critical agents for a sustainable transformation of the world, Strategy Paper, number 206, Madrid, 2020, pages 164-172.

[38] MHAJNE, Anwar and WHETSTONE, Crystal, The rise of the COVID dictatorships, Foreign Policy, 16 October 2020. Available at https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/16/the-rise-of-the-covid-dictatorships/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=26316&utm_term=Editors%20 Picks%20OC&?tpcc=26316

[39] Fukuyama, Francis, The pandemic and political order. It takes a state, Foreign Affairs, July/August 2020, pages 26-32. Available at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-06-09/pandemic-and-political-order

And all this without forgetting the easy recourse to look for guilt abroad, in "the others" and thus channel anger and frustration towards other nations, towards other ethnic, political, social groups... And if even before the pandemic there were tensions in this sense, hostility is growing towards migrants[40]. And since the impoverishment generated by COVID makes many areas of the world exclaim: "We have not died of COVID but we are going to die of hunger"[41], and that in the face of this situation, and if there is no other option, human flows, whether legal or not, will move towards the areas where it is easier to survive –immigration from Africa to Europe has already increased– internal conflict and social disharmony are served up.

And the international and cooperation pillar...?

International problems and lack of supranational cohesion

While COVID was spreading across the globe, China has seized the moment and increased its activities in different areas: strengthening its control over Hong Kong, increasing tensions in the South China Sea, conducting a powerful diplomatic campaign against Australia and using lethal force in a border dispute with India[42], as well as the apparent overcoming of the pandemic on its part and the weakness of Western alliances leads China to think that the sorpasso may be near[43].
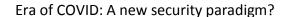
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[40] BURROWS, Mat and ENGELKE, Peter, What world post-COVID-19?, Atlantic Council, Strategy Papers, June 2020, page 11. Available at https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/What-World-Post-COVID-19.pdf

[41] LE MONDE, Kenya: à Kibera, "nous ne sommes pas morts du Covid-19 mais nous risquons de mourir de famine", 19 October 2020. Available at https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/10/19/kenya-a-kibera-nous-ne-sommes-pas-morts-du-covid-19-mais-nous-risquons-de-mourir-de-famine_6056609_3212.html

[42] CNAS/GMF, Charting a transatlantic course to address China, October 2020, page 10. Available at https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/CNAS-Report-Transatlantic-August-2020-final.pdf?mtime=20201019111640&focal=none

[43] G. MANRIQUE, Luis Esteban, History of pandemics, Foreign Policy, 1 October 2020. Available at https://www.politicaexterior.com/historia-de-dos-pandemias/

The struggle between the great powers[44], in a renewed struggle to avoid the emergence of hegemonic powers, is intensifying. And voices are raised saying that we should not only talk about this issue, but actually prepare to deal with it[45], in the face of words.

And in Europe, faced with the display of disunity at its most critical moments and with each nation looking out exclusively for its interests and its nationals, the position seems even more complex. In addition to the economic rescue plan, the fact is that when there have been casualties, when there have been deaths in front of the public, cohesion and solidarity, except in specific and minority cases, has been scarce. And common security, facing common challenges, means facing them together, as a bloc... not as a group of individuals.

Coalitions cease to be operative, causing each member country to face a global challenge on its own with disparate but always worse results than if they were to do it together, while others rejoice because the "divide and conquer" has generated itself

And can no one take the lead on this?
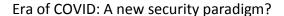
Lack of leadership at all levels

Decision-makers do not like situations in which they have to make quick decisions, in which they have to react quickly and without knowing in great detail the potential consequences of their actions. Therefore, international cooperation is often the main victim in these cases, since the views and actions are taken exclusively at the national level. Consequently, failures to anticipate and prepare for major international events and developments –such as this pandemic– contribute to weakening the principles and belief in the institutions of global governance[46], leading to a loss of confidence in those

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[44] UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, Renewed Great Power competition: implications for defense, issues for Congress, Congressional Research Service, Report R43838, 28 October 2020 Available at https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R43838.pdf

[45] GREENWOOD, Tom and DANIELS, Owen, The Pentagon should train for-and not just talk about-great power competition, War on the Rocks, 8 May 2020. Available at https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/the-pentagon-should-train-for-and-not-just-talk-about-great-power-competition/

[46] BROZUS, Lars, The difficulty of anticipating global challenges: the lessons from the COVID-19, Council of Foreign Relations, Available at https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/The%20Difficulty%20of%20Anticipating%20Global%20Challenges%2C%20The%20Lessons%20of%20COVID-19.pdf

institutions and even to doubts as to whether they would be able to "take charge" at the regional, if not global, level[47].

The lack of foresight, the "surprise", in the face of the pandemic and its consequences may be due to the fact that the policy has reduced the field of vision to the immediate, to instantaneous benefits, to the achievement of objectives during the mandate period, thus perhaps postponing strategic responses, long-term plans and the creation of reserves of adequate resources and means. In the face of uncertainty, it is necessary to have more reserves, more contingency plans, more options... and the necessary leadership capacity to do so, even though its potential use may be years later.

Everything is uncertain... a new security paradigm?

In what is beginning to be called the "post-COVID world", the scenarios that can appear, that is to say, the picture of how the world, its international organisations, its countries and its populations look are diverse[48], since there are many variables that can determine them, from facts to perceptions, from events to leaders, present and future – referred to not too distant futures– that could appear in the international sphere. But, most significantly, all the analyses, among their scenarios, contemplate one in which disunity, lack of cooperation and growing hostility increases greatly with respect to the initial situation, to the situation before COVID-19. And it's not usually the least likely.

Among these variables that must be taken into account, it seems that the aim is to reduce somewhat the excessive dependence of some economies on others, especially in essential products and materials; the long value chains –the case of facemasks is paradigmatic– may have sown the idea that production had been taken too far from

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[47] GARDINI, Gian Luca (Coordinator), Intellectual reflections on politics, diplomacy and international relations, European Institute of International Studies, May 2020, page 8. Available at https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_ESP2.0-UNIDO.pdf

[48] The following documents are interesting in this regard, among others: VVAA., Divided we stand? Towards post corona leadership, The Hague Center for Strategic Studies, 3 July 2020. Available at https://hcss.nl/report/divided-we-stand-towards-post-corona-leadershipor BURROWS, Mat and ENGELKE, Peter, What world post-COVID-19?, Atlantic Council, Strategy Papers, June 2020, page 11. Available at https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/What-World-Post-COVID-19.pdf

home[49], which, under certain conditions, may generate vulnerabilities. Or one can go to the extreme, towards protectionism and self-sufficiency to the greatest extent possible.

In any case, it is not feasible to create a bubble perfectly isolated from the rest of the world –unless a nation in extreme poverty is intended–, when digitalisation and information run through global channels, channels to which it is very complex to put limits, such as cyberspace; and security in the network and the fight against disinformation are increasingly important elements to guarantee an adequate degree of security in one's own country, in one's own nation, and therefore, in the planet. But the same tools designed to secure cyberspace and information can serve to undermine rights and freedoms.

If the States have always had a central role in all aspects, and especially in security, in the face of the failure of the multilateral system, it could be that they intend to assume and recover an ever greater degree of competences ceded to international bodies... but at the same time to confront a population that is tense, disaffected and, in many cases, disillusioned with its rulers, with its leaders; and all of this could lead to the growth of nationalism, populism and authoritarianism... it is even pointed out that 2021 will be a crucial year[50].

Even the very concept of security, which is broad and inclusive, and increasingly broad and inclusive –and therefore more complex to achieve– is under review, and a new debate on it[51] is in its infancy, at a time when many of the pillars of the existing security paradigm are seriously damaged.

Therefore, perhaps, there is an option for reflection.

FARRELL, Henry and NEWMAN, Abraham, Will the coronavirus end globalization as we know? https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-16/will-coronavirus-end-globalization-we-know-it

[50] BRADFORD, Colin, The crucial year for social order- global order transformational changes, Brookings, Global Working Paper number 143, October 2020. Available at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WP143_final.pdf

[51] STEWARD M., Patrick, COVID-19, and climate change, will change the definition of national security, World Politic Review, 18 May 2020. Available at https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28766/covid-19-and-climate-change-will-change-the-definition-of-national-security

Reflection?

An environment of more insecurity, more disunity, less leadership and more social unhappiness is aggravated by COVID-19 and its direct and indirect effects. It seems to be the perfect cocktail to address a new security paradigm, in the face of a scenario, of course, that does not move towards a reduction in conflict. Or to reflect on what has failed in this one, to gain lessons, conclusions.

Perhaps, in today's world, the important things have been lost sight of, replaced by the urgent; perhaps, in this current situation, the politics of deeds and actions have been replaced by the politics of images and tweets; perhaps, in the face of today's general realities, feelings of selfishness, of watching over one's self and not the common good, could prevail.

Perhaps it is time to recapitulate and, as always, look back at history and the classics. And perhaps a phrase pronounced by Sun Tzu almost 2,500 years ago, also coming from the same place where COVID-19 was born, can shed light on the path to follow: he who acts in isolation, lacks a strategy and takes his adversaries (and threats) lightly will inevitably end up being defeated.

Or perhaps, as at other crossroads in history, a new edition of the "Sinatra Doctrine" will be chosen, each to their own. Although... each to their own in the face of global threats? To combat COVID-19?

We've already tried that. Has it worked?

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