



## La nueva pugna de las potencias: ¿Guerra Mundial 3.0 o Guerra Fría 2.0?

### Resumen:

Si bien se era ya plenamente consciente de que el planeta, el orden mundial, se encontraba en plena reconfiguración desde el ascenso de China a segunda potencia económica global, la guerra en Ucrania ha puesto de manifiesto que la geopolítica en su máximo esplendor ha regresado.

Y esa reconfiguración de las relaciones internacionales se está produciendo desde una óptica realista, donde las naciones y, especialmente las potencias, pugnan por sus intereses en un entorno internacional sumido en un cierto caos y desorden.

En ese proceso de reconfiguración, en el cual la herramienta militar ha vuelto a hacer su aparición sin ningún tipo de complejo, se puede generar una nueva guerra mundial, una nueva guerra fría... en definitiva y en cualquier caso, un nuevo equilibrio de poder.

Un repaso de esos potenciales ordenes globales, con el telón de fondo de la guerra en Ucrania, y una reflexión final, articulan el presente Documento.

### Palabras clave:

Potencias, Ucrania, orden mundial, guerra fría, sur global, China.

### Cómo citar este documento:

SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. *La nueva pugna de las potencias: ¿Guerra Mundial 3.0 o Guerra Fría 2.0?* Documento de Análisis IEEE 28/2023.

[https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2023/DIEEEA28\\_2023\\_PEDSAN\\_Potencias\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA28_2023_PEDSAN_Potencias_ENG.pdf) y/o [enlace bie<sup>3</sup>](#) (consultado día/mes/año)

## **The turning point: the war in Ukraine**

A conflict of a magnitude and intensity not seen in Europe since the Second World War, not only in terms of the number of casualties and the destruction caused<sup>1</sup> but also the number of nations directly and indirectly involved in it, has been raging in the east of the continent for more than a year now. The Russian invasion of Ukraine shows that not only is conventional warfare still a fact of life - despite all the advocates of the end of "classic" conflicts and "kinetic" weapons systems (tanks, guns, planes, etc.) - but that at least the powerful players in world affairs did not renounce their own interests despite the globalist and globalised world, and they are still prepared to use all the means at their disposal, including military means, when necessary.

Statements about the future of the conflict and its medium-term effects are diverse in content and the forecasts are mostly, and despite the arguments that underpin them, more conjecture than reality, especially considering that the magnitude of the conflict and its active and dynamic nature make its consequence entirely unpredictable. Given the forces and interests at play, we may - and let us hope this is not the case - be in the first stage of a future third world war or, given the blocs that are emerging, perhaps the outcome will be a new cold war.

Whatever the case and whether the outcome is any of the above or not, the fact remains that the powers are once again reshaping the world "order".

## **Powers and world "order"?**

Depending on one's way of being and approach to life, there are a wide range of options as to the desirable model of society and the paradigm to be followed in international relations, options that can be framed between idealism and realism. It is therefore possible to find both individual and collective approaches to life, centred on abstract principles, which in some cases are universally accepted, and we can consider that on that basis it is feasible to find just societies and international relations based on fairness and reason. However, on the reverse side of this wide spectrum, an approach that stems from the conception of human beings as imperfect points out that societies and

---

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, RELIEFWEB, Ukrainian crisis - Situational Analysis, 24 February 2023. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukrainian-crisis-situational-analysis-24-feb-2023>. NOTE: All web links in this paper were active as of the closing date, 12 April 2023).

international relations replicate and amplify these imperfections and that, as a result, interest - and not values - is the essential driver of individuals, societies and, therefore, international relations.

Between these two extreme positions there is obviously room for many intermediate ones, but condensed and presented in a very general and simplified way, these lines of thought can, both roughly speaking and with all the nuances one may wish to make, be identified as idealist and realist.

On a planet that is being reshaped, interest is the essential driver of the changes under way - particularly if "universal values" are permanently challenged in increasingly "liquid" societies<sup>2</sup>- and realism gains ground to explain these dynamics. And while there are nuances and certain differences among the realist schools, they all in essence drawn from the same principles, which in a very schematic way<sup>3</sup> can be stated as follows: the essential element in international relations is the concept of interest understood in terms of power, and the essential pieces of these relations are the states. Further, it is the pursuit of this interest - which may undergo mutations over time - that will, in most cases, guide the international policy of nations, which in turn will foster a certain component of predictability, so much so that it has been said<sup>4</sup> that realism is unpopular because it tends to be right in its predictions.

And if, from the realist perspective, the behaviour of many nations is to a certain degree predictable, and to this we add that so-called "neorealism"<sup>5</sup> indicates that of the three levels of analysis to be considered (individuals, states and the international system) the preponderant one is precisely the last, we have a system made up of a series of parts - states - that interact with each other driven by interest, generating a component that is anarchic because, despite the established attempts at global governance such as the UN, there is no kind of world "government" or "police" to put an end to this chaos.

Each part of this international system will have a greater or lesser influence on it according to its capabilities, its power... which is why the powers, especially the great powers, are

---

<sup>2</sup> BAUMAN, Zygmunt, *Modernidad líquida*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004, Argentina.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive development of the principles of "classical" realism, Hans Morgenthau's "Politics among the Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace", published in 1948.

<sup>4</sup> WALT, Stephen M., Why do people hate realism so much? Foreign Policy, 13 June 2022. Available at [https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/13/why-do-people-hate-realism-so-much/?utm\\_source=PostUp&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Editors](https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/13/why-do-people-hate-realism-so-much/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Editors)

<sup>5</sup> Its starting point is considered to be 1979 with the publication of Kenneth N. Waltz's "Theory of International Politics".

the key elements and reference points of this system, of this international "order". This is so much so that the concept of world "order" is often referred to and defined by the terms unipolar, bipolar, multipolar... depending on the number of major powers that are preponderant in the system.

If the international system is interest-driven, chaotic, dynamic and contested, and essentially driven by the great powers, the question is how many of these can coexist while maintaining a certain degree of "order"?

### **Is there only room for one?**

In this chaotic system without a higher order, it is conceivable that the system will tend towards leaving just one great power, a superpower, a hegemon, as its leader and victor. This is known as the unipolar world.

In a unipolar world, where one great power is the absolute hegemon, it can take planetary-scale decisions and implement actions on a fully individual and autonomous basis, with no other nation or coalition able to confront that superpower with any guarantee of success. This occurred - considering that the known world ended at Finisterre - at certain stages of the Roman Empire and, on a truly planetary scale, during the era of imperial Spain at its greatest splendour.

It is generally considered that after the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union as a superpower in 1991, the world order could be defined as "unipolar"<sup>6</sup>, with only one superpower, the United States (US). This conceptualisation, however, was revised by various analysts, who coined the term "unimultipolar"<sup>7</sup>, a closer correspondence to the existing order after the end of the Cold War. It goes like this: Maintaining the status of the world's only superpower, the US has a capacity for action superior to that of any nation on the planet, including if several of the second and third order powers united; however, and despite this enormous asymmetry of power, Washington is not capable of pursuing each and every one of its issues and interests and bringing them to a successful conclusion on its own without the assistance, or at least the inaction, of other lesser

---

<sup>6</sup> TASS, Unipolar world order is gone: US-Russia back to Cold War, 6 December 2022. Available at [https://tass.com/politics/1546541?utm\\_source=google.es&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=google.es&utm\\_referrer=google.es](https://tass.com/politics/1546541?utm_source=google.es&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.es&utm_referrer=google.es)

<sup>7</sup> HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., The lonely superpower, Foreign Affairs, volume 78 number 2, March-April 1999.

powers, in the same way as the major planetary issues cannot be tackled by the other nations and/or powers of the world without the support of the US, or at least the inhibition of action against it. The Iraq war, which began in 2003, and what happened in Afghanistan<sup>8</sup> during the first two decades of this century are examples of this reality.

And although they may appear to be very similar international orders, they are most certainly not. In a unipolar order the hegemon is undisputed, and changing this order and this imbalance of power is a very, very complex, costly and lengthy task. Based again on the historical examples of Rome and Spain, and despite the time factor and the slower pace of events in the past, it is feasible to reach this conclusion. However, while the identification of the superpower is also clear and the difference in capabilities is certainly in its favour, in a multipolar world the other powers or coalitions of nations can more easily and at less cost put the hegemon in check, and even consider changing the international order towards one that is more beneficial to their interests, be it alone or in coalition. The examples of Iraq and Afghanistan presented above also testify to this reality.

Aware of this reality, the superpower of this unimultipolar world order will try by all means at its disposal to ensure that the system becomes unipolar, which inevitably stimulates "(...) the efforts of the (other) great powers to create a multipolar system"<sup>9</sup>.

Under certain premises, conjecture-based as this is, could the Ukrainian conflict in mode and form, and on the part of some the powers, not fit into the search for this global reconfiguration in all orders and instances of power? And/or, continuing with conjecture and the endlessly fascinating realm of politics-fiction, could the Ukrainian conflict not fit in with the attempt to preserve the situation of unimultipolarity? As a simple example, it has even been suggested that this war could save the world economic order<sup>10</sup> (in the sense of recovering and maintaining the norms and rules developed after the Second World War under US leadership), even though in the short term the effects of the war will be devastating for it.

---

<sup>8</sup> Regardless of other kinds of considerations, when the US marched into Afghanistan in 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, other nations marched with and behind it; but when it unilaterally decided to withdraw - an action that ended on 30 August 2021 - the military operation was over, regardless of the decisions that the other participating nations might take.

<sup>9</sup> HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., The lonely superpower, Foreign Affairs, volume 78 number 2, March-April 1999, page 37.

<sup>10</sup> ALDEN, Edward, Putin's war could save the global economic order, Foreign Policy, 10 March 2022. Available at [https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/10/putin-war-russia-ukraine-economy-trade-effects-sanctions/?utm\\_source=PostUp&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_%E2%80%A6](https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/10/putin-war-russia-ukraine-economy-trade-effects-sanctions/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_%E2%80%A6)



It would therefore seem that there being just one great hegemonic (super)power, be it in a unipolar or a unimultipolar order, does not in fact mean the end of power struggles... so what if there were a symmetry of power?

### **What if there are only two?**

Bipolarity requires two great superpowers to rule the destinies of large parts of the planet, tensions between which are capable of causing a global conflagration. Moreover, as planetary standard-bearers - in whatever sense and in whatever sphere - they have constellations of allied or satellite nations and, using all the tools at their disposal - and especially by means of proxies, destabilisation, insurgencies, influence, etc. - and like a chess player, try to achieve a substantial advantage on the "world chessboard", manoeuvring especially in the countries which, a priori, do not clearly belong to either of the two blocs.

But despite this constant simmering tension, which often erupts in the form of conflicts in third countries, the possibility of direct confrontation between the two superpowers - the outcome of which is always uncertain but certainly devastating - exhausting and degrading them in such a way that allows a third party to occupy their space and status on a planetary scale, has meant that outright war between the superpowers, in these circumstances in a bipolar world, has not normally occurred throughout history: Imperial Spain did not declare all-out war on the Ottoman Empire; nor did Constantinople against Madrid; and nor was there ever massive direct confrontation between the Soviet Union and the US during the Cold War - suffice it to recall how in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962<sup>11</sup>, where a confrontation between Washington and Moscow seemed inevitable, an agreement was finally reached that avoided nuclear war.

Nonetheless, this does not mean the absence of strife - to which the more than 100 wars and the more than 20 million deaths in third countries during this "cold war" testify <sup>12</sup>- or the presence of peace... or even the inevitability of confrontation between two global

---

<sup>11</sup> A succinct explanation can be found in BBC, Cuban Missile Crisis: how the event that almost led to nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union unfolded, 17 October 2022. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-62982023>

<sup>12</sup> PAINTER, David S., The Cold War: An International History, Routledge, London, 1999, page 1.

powers. Using the same example as before, the Cuban missile crisis really did take the world to the brink of disaster - nuclear war - on several occasions.

Now in the 21st century, in 2011 China became the world's second economic power, a new power that had emerged to challenge the international "order" and the hegemonic power, the US. Beijing, as a new emerging superpower, seeks a new global order in which its presence, capacity for action and influence is much greater. In this regard, not only has a power never before emerged so rapidly, but it is also a country where a recurring narrative is heard about the need to overcome what they call the "century of shame" or "century of humiliation"<sup>13</sup> (stretching from the opium wars against the British<sup>14</sup> in the mid-19th century to the birth of Mao's People's Republic of China in 1949) by entering a "New Chinese Era", pinpointed for 2049 (centenary of the birth of the People's Republic of China), when Beijing will become<sup>15</sup> the "new" global hegemonic power. And this strong will is backed up by an action plan that is gradually being implemented.

China's ambition is what prompted Washington's so-called "shift towards the Asia-Pacific"<sup>16</sup>, modifying its areas of preferred attention and its action to safeguard its interests in the region and to confront the new emerging superpower, replicating once again what is known as the "Thucydides Trap"<sup>17</sup>, referring to a flourishing Athens that challenged the established power of Sparta centuries ago in a classical Greece full of lessons usually unlearned.

<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>And this rise as a superpower is taking place not only in the economic sphere but progressively in all areas of power and capabilities. The country of the dragon is attempting to shield its infrastructure and cyber architecture by means of the so-called

---

<sup>13</sup> KAUFMAN, Alison A., The "Century of Humiliation" and China's national narratives, 10 March 2011. Available at <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> A summary can be found in Opium Wars, Encyclopaedia of History. Available at <https://enciclopediadehistoria.com/guerras-del-opio/>

<sup>15</sup> European student think tank, Will China rule the world by 2049? 18 April 2018. Available at <https://esthinktank.com/2018/04/18/will-china-rule-the-world-by-2049/>

<sup>16</sup> LIEBERTHAL, Kenneth G., The American "Pivot to Asia", Brookings, 21 December 2011. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>

<sup>17</sup> BBC, What is the "Thucydides Trap" for which war is feared to break out between the US and China, 20 August 2017. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-40974871>

<sup>18</sup> TANGREDI, Sam J., Bigger fleets win, US Naval Institute, Proceedings. Volume 149, Issue 1, January 2023. Available at <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/january/bigger-fleets-win>

<sup>19</sup> ABC, US General warns of war with China in two years, 28 January 2023. Available at <https://www.abc.es/internacional/general-eeuu-alerta-guerra-china-anos-20230128100144-nt.html#:~:text=has%20adverted%20in%20a%20circle,Ej%C3%A9rcito%20del%20Aire%20de%20EE>



"Great Digital Wall of China"<sup>20</sup>; it is occupying, modifying and fortifying islets in the South China Sea - without full respect for international law - to create a powerful line of defence against the US Navy, building "a wall over the sea"<sup>21</sup>; it has decreed that its armed forces must grow rapidly to reach world-class standards<sup>22</sup>; the advance of Chinese investments and credits in many countries around the world is beginning to be seen as a potential threat<sup>23</sup>; and in certain circles it is even beginning to be surmised that, in the event of a hypothetical naval war between the US and China - a China that for millennia has been a country with its back to the sea - Washington could be defeated<sup>24</sup> given the growing size of Beijing's fleet. The potential conflagration is even given a date and timeframe - two years<sup>25</sup>. While all information (and misinformation), be it domestic or international, must be read in various ways, the fact is that China is here and is here to stay as a global superpower.

The US fully acknowledges this situation and reality, noting<sup>26</sup> that China is the "only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to achieve that goal".

And if the planet is heading towards this new bipolarity, towards a Cold War 2... couldn't the war in Ukraine qualify as one of those "typical" conflicts taking place in a third country?

And if China is on course not only to be the world's leading economic power in 2049, but to be the hegemon par excellence... couldn't the war in Ukraine qualify as one of those conflicts that wear down superpowers, making way for a newcomer?

---

<sup>20</sup> CARNAP, Kay V., Fragmenting the Internet: beyond (and further beyond) China's Great Digital Wall, Foreign Policy, 14 March 2023. Available at <https://www.politicaexterior.com/fragmentando-internet-mas-alla-y-mas-aca-de-la-gran-muralla-digital-china/>

<sup>21</sup> SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, The Far Eastern Seas: A new paradigm in the reconfiguration of the world order? In Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, chapter 15, Madrid, 2017, pp. 369-402. Available at [https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama\\_Geopolitico\\_Conflictos\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_Geopolitico_Conflictos_2017.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Financial Times, A new Chinese era: security and control, 10 March 2023. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/9dca05fb-cfe5-4f48-86f7-fb08b321e719>

<sup>23</sup> ASIANORTHEAST, China's credit invasion in emerging countries puts the West on alert, 21 February 2023. Available at <https://asianortheast.com/invasion-credito-chino-paises-emergentes-pone-alerta-occidente/>

<sup>26</sup> THE WHITE HOUSE, National Security Strategy, October 2022, page 8. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

It seems, then, that in a bipolar world order, the existence of two great (super) powers is no guarantee that power struggles will cease to exist either... so what if there were a multiple balance of power?

### **Is the best option to have several of them?!**

There are many voices in favour of this vision of a multicentric world - polycentric to use Russian terminology - the central argument being that in terms of a balance of power between several actors, between several powers, it would be very difficult for any one of them to try to overcome the others, thereby forcing them to coexist on the basis of pacts and agreements, thus limiting conflicts... So could it be said that multipolarity is synonymous with or very close to peace?

This is largely the message repeatedly reiterated by Moscow for decades: The world must be neither unipolar (or unimultipolar) nor bipolar, it must be polycentric, multicentric, facilitating respect for the interests of the different powers and nations. In fact, as far back as 1997, at a conference at Harvard University attended by representatives of multiple nations, the Russian representative made it clear that they opposed "a world based on a dominant US leadership very close to hegemony"<sup>27</sup>, words - and a concept - very similar to those recently pronounced by Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, on a visit to Turkey in early April 2023, that any negotiations should address the principles on which the new world order should be established, that Russian interests should be considered and that Russia "rejects a unipolar world led by a hegemon"<sup>28</sup>.

It would not be the first time in history - almost nothing under the sun is actually new - that the world, or the world in isolated moments in the past, has been multipolar. During its long history, China itself has gone through different stages and moments when its vast spaces (its current borders cover an area almost 19 times the size of Spain) have not always been governed from a capital city, and at various times there has been a "multipolar space". Besides the perhaps most widely known stage of the five fighting

---

<sup>27</sup> Cited in HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., The lonely superpower, Foreign Affairs, volume 78 number 2, March-April 1999, page 43.

<sup>28</sup> The Moscow Times, Any Ukraine peace talks should be about "new world order" -Lavrov-, 7 April 2023. Available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/04/07/any-ukraine-peace-talks-should-be-about-new-world-order-lavrov-a80750>

kingdoms - because this is when Sun Tzu is supposed to have written the work "The Art of War" - we can find the Period of the 3 Augustans and 5 Emperors, the Period of the Three Kingdoms, and the Period of the Sixteen Kingdoms, the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, all of which are stages of struggle lasting decades or centuries between one kingdom and another, of attempts to achieve supremacy by fighting and defeating other kingdoms or dynasties.

And while <sup>29</sup> whether or not China's fragmentation or unification is, or was, its "natural destiny" can be debated, the fact is that in today's world it is only feasible to compete if you have sufficient volume, economy of scale and size. A fragmented China would not only not aspire to superpower status, but it might not even exist as it is known today.

Within the framework of this multipolarity of powers, and closer in time and space, the continent of Europe itself, which for centuries ruled the world, experienced both the almost constant succession of dynastic wars in the 18th century aimed at maintaining a European and, increasingly, a global balance - suffice it to recall, among many others, the War of the Spanish Succession of 1700-1714 - and the successive "reorderings" of Europe and the planet carried out by the so-called "Directory of Powers". And that is not to mention the successive "rearrangements" in the Balkans - and much of the current discord in the region stems from these upheavals - or the division of Africa at the 1884 Berlin Conference<sup>30</sup>... all of which did not prevent the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) - a full-fledged European civil war - just a few decades later.

With these historical references in mind - among many others that could be pointed to - the joint declaration<sup>31</sup> made by Moscow and Russia on 4 February 2022, a few days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, must be assessed. Among other issues, it noted that the world is entering a new era, that phenomena such as multipolarity and the transformation of the architecture of world governance and global order are evident, and

---

<sup>29</sup> To this effect, TIN-BOR HUI, Victoria, War and historical China: problematizing unification and division in Chinese History, East Asia Institute, Working Paper Series number 7, March 2007. Available at <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/137321/20090521128690.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> JIMENEZ FRAILE, Ramón, Berlin: the conference that tore Africa apart, Spanish Geographical Society, Bulletin 69, May-August 2021. Available at <https://sge.org/publicaciones/numero-de-boletin/boletin-69/berlin-la-conferencia-que-despedazo-africa/>

<sup>31</sup> Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on international relations entering a new era and the Global Sustainable Development, 4 February 2022. Available at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2022-02-04%20China%20Russia%20joint%20statement%20International%20Relations%20Entering%20a%20New%20Era.pdf> PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA, 4 February 2022. Available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

that a trend towards the redistribution of power on the planet has emerged as the international community seeks greater leadership in the pursuit of peaceful and gradual development. It also noted that some actors representing a minority at international level continue to display unilateral approaches to international issues - including the use of force - interfering in the internal affairs of other states in violation of their legitimate rights and interests, and inciting confrontation, differences and contradictions in the face of opposition from the international community.

This was in fact an ode to a unipolar (or unimultipolar) world led by the US, and the proposal of a multipolar world as the best possible order. But...didn't China want to be the global hegemonic power...? Weren't we back to a bipolar world and Cold War with the Russia-China association? <sup>32</sup>.

What is more, Russia itself links peace in Ukraine to the construction of a new world order<sup>33</sup>...So could the Ukrainian war be one of those conflicts for constructing a (real or supposedly) multipolar planet?

But there are not only hegemons, superpowers and powers in the world... as chauvinistic one may be, and accepting that there can be other classifications of the concept of power with labels like "continental", "regional", etc., the truth is that only a few of the somewhat less than two hundred nations on the planet can be considered as such, even going as far as a third level.

What happens then, in this chaotic, dynamic and changing international order, to the nations that are not powers?

### **What about the rest?**

In the framework of the so-called "Cold War", not only were there the two superpowers - the US and the Soviet Union - leading groups of isolated and satellite countries, respectively, but there was also a plethora of nations that did not agree, for different reasons and interests, with either side in this bipolar world.

---

<sup>32</sup> TASS, Unipolar world order is gone: US-Russia back to Cold War, 6 December 2022. Available at [https://tass.com/politics/1546541?utm\\_source=google.es&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=google.es&utm\\_referrer=google.es](https://tass.com/politics/1546541?utm_source=google.es&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.es&utm_referrer=google.es)

<sup>33</sup> Euronews, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov links peace in Ukraine to "new world order", 8 April 2023. Available at <https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/07/russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-links-peace-in-ukraine-to-a-new-world-order>

In fact, at the Bandung conference in 1955, 29 African and Asian nations founded the so-called "Non-Aligned Movement", proposing and attempting a third way different from those marked out by the two major powers. These 29 nations were then joined by several more, showing that despite this bipolarity, it appeared to not be essential to "be part of the game".

This duality of planetary powers left room for the non-aligned nations to be able to choose and, if they knew how to play their cards right, gain benefits from both sides, in a complex and very delicate balance where making risk assessments was essential. Tito's Yugoslavia (1945-1980) not only championed this third way, but also knew how to make the most of the situation of not-alignment with either of the two superpowers while allowing itself to be desired by both.

But it is certainly not easy to "stay on the sidelines" when the great powers enter into conflict, and given that the planet was immersed in this complex global chess game, being part of the Non-Aligned Movement did not make these nations "immune", and even less "shielded" them from the actions of attraction or destabilisation of the great powers<sup>34</sup>. Declaring oneself on the sidelines in no way guaranteed that one would not suffer to some degree or another from the licit or illicit actions of the great powers in their global struggle. Remember that many of the hundred or so wars during this period were fought in some of these non-aligned countries.

With the recent conflict in Ukraine, the apparent planetary division into "pro-Russian" and "pro-Ukrainian" and sanctions and punitive mechanisms put in place against Russia and all kinds of support for Ukraine by around fifty nations around the world, a similar situation has arisen (with whatever nuances one wishes to make): the existence of the so-called "Global South" made up mainly of African, Asian and Latin American countries.

As a song once said, "the south exists too", and the focus of international attention on and aid to Ukraine -the attacked party- added to the pressures exerted to support or not the sanctions imposed on Russia, are pushing other issues and problems of regional and global impact (and in many cases of genuine first instance for many nations of the global

---

<sup>34</sup> In this regard, and as a simple example, BILLINGTON, Michael O., The Cold Wars vs. the Non-Aligned Movement, Executive Intelligence Review, volume 25, number 30, 31 July 1998. Available at [https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/1998/eirv25n30-19980731/eirv25n30-19980731\\_060-the\\_cold\\_war\\_vs\\_the\\_non\\_aligned.pdf](https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/1998/eirv25n30-19980731/eirv25n30-19980731_060-the_cold_war_vs_the_non_aligned.pdf)

South) into the background, which is gradual increasing the detachment<sup>35</sup> from what is essentially considered a problem between nations in the West, far from Africa, Latin America or Asia.

And so, while the countries allied with the US in the struggle in Ukraine are making declarations of support for Kiev and formally condemning Moscow, the rest of the nations, especially those of the Global South, are inclining towards seeking an end to the conflict through negotiation, even showing a certain degree of dismay at the unreserved alignment of the "West" against Moscow<sup>36</sup>; suffice it to recall the words of the Rio de Janeiro leader, Lula da Silva, in early April 2023, to the effect that Kiev should cede Crimea to Moscow because "Zelenski cannot want everything"<sup>37</sup>, words that were immediately contested by the Ukrainian government.

There is even a shrewd awareness about particular types of statements. By way of example, when Ukrainian President Zelensky repeatedly states that Ukraine is a country with strong European values, and that Russia, by invading the country, has shown its "more Asian" side, or that Russia is a serious threat to the European way of life<sup>38</sup> - as he said in a speech in the European Parliament on 9 February 2023 - it must be considered that these statements do not sit well with many nations of the Global South, these countries claiming<sup>39</sup> that situations, facts and values are judged by different standards depending on which side said them and who is speaking. As a simple example, when the Canadian ambassador, in talks with the country's prime minister, pointed out the concern about civilian volunteers fighting alongside the Burkinabé military against jihadist terrorists not respecting human rights, the prime minister asked for weapons to be able to defend themselves against those terrorists, saying "If Canada gives weapons to

---

<sup>35</sup> RAZA, Werner, Winning in Ukraine, losing the Global South? Social Europe, 30 March 2023. Available at <https://www.socialeurope.eu/winning-in-ukraine-losing-the-global-south>

<sup>36</sup> GOWAN, Richard, The Global South and the Ukraine war at the UN, International Crisis Group, 9 March 2023. Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global-ukraine/global-south-and-ukraine-war-un>

<sup>37</sup> El Mundo, Lula, held back by Ukraine over its proposal to cede Crimea: "Zelenski can't want it all", 7 April 2023. Available at <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2023/04/07/64303c9fe4d4d86c278b456f.html>

<sup>38</sup> European Parliament, President Zelensky says Russia is a grave threat to the European way of life, 9 February 2022. Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230208IPR72901/president-zelenskyy-says-russia-is-a-grave-threat-to-the-european-way-of-life>

<sup>39</sup> MINH NGUYEN, Chelsea N., The problems with Ukraine's wartime diplomacy in the Global South, Open Democracy, 3 April 2023. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-diplomacy-global-south-us-vietnam-indonesia/>



Ukraine, it can also give weapons for Burkina Faso. We want weapons. It's a matter of wanting to or not"<sup>40</sup>.

But whatever the case may be, what we are feeling, and powerfully, are the consequences of the war. The rise in energy and food prices, while having a major impact on the whole planet, is having a greater impact on the nations and populations with less purchasing power. Linked to this, and as a simple example, it is pointed out that the lack of wheat not only affects the possibility of feeding a population that in many cases is already impoverished, but it also has a direct impact on social peace<sup>41</sup>. And that always important social peace already rests on somewhat shaky foundations in many of these countries.

Could the war in Ukraine be helping to consolidate a third way, in a resurgence of non-alignment vis-à-vis the (super) powers?

### **So what then?**

The US, China, Russia, the Global South... but why has Europe as a "capable" actor of global weight only been mentioned in past examples?

While the future is yet to be written, and is being written every day on the basis of actions and omissions, since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine it has become clear, and very clearly so, that the planet and the world order are in the midst of a phase of reconfiguration. And the end result may be - though hopefully not - either a third world war, a second cold war (after the third world war or as a replacement or prologue to it?)... or neither of the above. But what is certain is that the struggles are present, and they will be constant and presumably growing until a new world "order" is at least outlined.

It may well be that the planet is in a "realistic era" - and that brings one advantage, which is knowing, with a certain approximation, the interests of others - and so to avoid the constant struggles, the interests of powers, coalitions and nations need to realign themselves, not only to escape a potentially endless series of "Thucydides Traps" but

---

<sup>40</sup> SWI, Burkina Faso asks Canada for arms to fight jihadism, 30 January 2023. Available at [https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/burkina-faso-canad%C3%A1\\_burkina-faso-pide-armas-a-canad%C3%A1-para-la-lucha-contra-el-yihadismo/48245010](https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/burkina-faso-canad%C3%A1_burkina-faso-pide-armas-a-canad%C3%A1-para-la-lucha-contra-el-yihadismo/48245010)

<sup>41</sup> Le Journal de l'Afrique, Wheat shortage: an African symptom, 7 April 2023. Available at <https://lejournaldelafrique.com/es/La-escasez-de-trigo-es-un-s%C3%ADntoma-africano/>

simply to achieve - or at least attempt - in this chaotic planetary environment a new equilibrium that allows for a certain global stability.

And perhaps then the planet can feasibly move closer to an "idealistic era", and to act once again giving significant weight to values - its own and those of others - to transcend and overcome in some measure the human imperfections replicated and amplified in its actions and policies.

In the meantime, without in any way renouncing values and idealism, one must at least be able to stay in the global arena, because if one disappears as a capable actor, as a "power" - even if not as a first order one and even if it is in a coalition of nations format - so too can the values in which one believes and for which one stands, creating a vacuum in an essential area, at least for human beings.

And that vacuum, like all vacuums in geopolitics, is always filled. By others. And then what?

*Pedro Sánchez Herráez\**  
COL. ET. INF. DEM  
PhD in Peace and International Security  
IEEE Analyst