

GEOPOLITICS IN THE XXI CENTURY

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The global geopolitical phenomenon at the turn of the 21st century is the end of the domination of the Western world. The West began its global expansion at the end of the fifteenth century, when Spaniards arrived in the Americas in 1492 and the Portuguese arrived in India in 1498. Since then, the expansion of European empires in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Oceania has been the axis of geopolitical development during the second half of the second millennium. Not only did Western dominance imply geographic and economic supremacy, but also practical scientific-technological capacity. Paper, gunpowder and printing originated in the East, but in the hands of the West they became instruments of its global expansion. The Spanish and Portuguese empires first; English and French later; and the German and Italian third, were different instruments of Western global dominance. The decolonization that takes place after the Second World War is probably the dominant political fact of the beginning of the global hegemony of the West, and perhaps the return of Hong Kong to China by Great Britain and that of Goa by Portugal to India symbolize, at the end of the 20th century, the meaning of this geopolitical change. The independence of India in the middle of the 20th century is also a fact in that direction.

In the geopolitical vision of the United States at the beginning of the 21st century, its dominant idea is to continue to be the power of the Pacific, and for China and Russia to expand their influence in the immediate environment. This was expressed verbatim by Biden, who as Obama's Vice President 10 years ago said in Beijing: "The United States is and will continue to be the power of the Pacific", taking the hegemony in the Atlantic for granted. Its intention to continue as the bi-oceanic power par excellence is reflected in its 11 aircraft carriers that travel the world's waters. Regarding China, its central geopolitical idea is the New Silk Road. Rooted in the passage from the first to the second millennium, it is a fundamentally terrestrial axis, which goes from the coasts of the Far East and the Pacific, to the Baltic in the Atlantic, passing through the Mediterranean. Just as Anglo-Saxon geopolitics has had a maritime vision, China's has been terrestrial. While the United States has borders with only two

countries, Canada to the north and Mexico to the south, the Asian power has borders with eighteen countries. The New Silk Road is a historical and geographical project that has three chapters arising from geopolitical ambitions: expansion to Southeast Asia, Africa and South America. Russia is the largest country in the world, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the dominant power in the Arctic. Its geopolitical project is very clear and begins to develop at the beginning of the 18th century by Czar Peter I, who defeats Sweden and reaches the Baltic. For this Tsar, Russia was the "Power of the Five Seas": Black, Azov, Caspian, Baltic and Arctic (Putin in July, when presenting the new naval strategy, adds a sixth: the Sea of Okhotsk, where it has islands in dispute with Japan). The Russian geopolitical project in the 21st century is the reconstitution of the Soviet Union, dismantled after the dissolution of communism. Europe has been the center of Western global dominance and perhaps for this reason it is the continent facing the greatest relative setback. Its central challenge is to maintain the cohesion achieved through the European Union and its key debate is whether to continue as a subordinate ally to the United States or try to play a balanced policy between this country and China, from which today it seems far away.

In the first decades of the 21st century, NATO's conflicts, which it develops simultaneously with Russia and China, are in reality the struggle between Washington and Beijing for global hegemony. In the long term, the cohesion of the European Union and NATO are a question mark, although not in the short or medium term, and the ideological division of the United States is possibly, together with the questioning of democracy in the West, its most important ideological threat. Thirty years ago, geopolitics was out of fashion. The idea dominated that the national state was disappearing due to economic globalization and political multilateralism. New technologies made the territory lose meaning and in which natural resources lose value compared to knowledge ownership. Nationalism was a value in decline. Today the vision is different. New technologies have not only been nationalized, but are a central battlefield between the United States and China for global hegemony. The multilateral approach has weakened and the regional powers have more gravitation. Social media, which were believed to impose a universal culture, today are instruments that reinforce identity conflicts. Wars, which thirty years ago were considered a fact of the past, today have once again become a dramatic present, in which

diplomats speak like warriors and military exercises are central instruments of foreign policy.

Geopolitics is closely linked to history and in May, at the Davos Forum, Henry Kissinger pointed out that it was a mistake to expel Russia from Europe, because that would make the continent more insecure. It should be remembered that Great Britain and Russia were military allies in the three world wars of modernity: the Napoleonic war, in addition to the First and Second World Wars. He also said it was a mistake to push Russia into a military alliance with China, something that has happened in recent weeks. He also added on that occasion that Ukraine would have to accept territorial concessions. It should be remembered that Khrushchev handed over Crimea to Ukraine on the 300th anniversary of the country's decision to join the Russian Empire. Crimea was, in the mid-nineteenth century, the reason for the war that Russia waged with Great Britain, France, Turkey and Sardinia. Linking the concepts of geopolitics and geo-economics, the UK's strategic vision for 2030 presented last year points to three overarching trends: the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific, a more assertive and threatening China, and a larger role for what it calls the "middle powers". The latter has been corroborated in the almost six months of war between Russia and Ukraine. It should be remembered that countries like Mexico, Brazil and Argentina in Latin America; Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria in Africa; and India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam in Asia, agreed, without prior coordination, in condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine because it affected the principle of sovereignty, and neither did they join at the same time the economic sanctions against Russia carried out by Europe and the United States for the same reason, because it affects the principle of sovereignty. In other words, they have maintained an independent position in the conflict. Going forward, a geopolitical axis is drawn between the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere. But the former will continue to be in the coming centuries, the one that concentrates population and resources. Historically, geopolitics has been linked to the military capacity of the powers to achieve their strategic interests.

In conclusion: the geopolitical phenomenon in the first decades of the 21st century is the transfer of global dominance from the West to the East. The United States tries to maintain its role as the leading global power, while China and Russia are still seeking to strengthen their influence in their regional

environment from the strategic-military point of view. The conflicts that NATO faces simultaneously with Russia and China -in the second case with the US alliances in the Indo-Pacific- are in reality a central chapter of the struggle between Washington and Beijing. Lastly, geopolitics is closely linked to history, and in this sense Kissinger is a perfect example of this approach.