

GEOPOLITICS IN THE 21st CENTURY

The analysis of the unfolding modern geopolitics encompasses three areas: space, sea, and mainland. In the first, the United States takes the lead. When in November 2014, during Obama's second term, Congress passed a law that recognized the right to property of US citizens and their companies of what they owned in outer space, legal security was being granted to private investments in the space race. Companies like Elon Musk's Space-X are the expression of this phenomenon that allowed the world's leading power to substantially increase the resources it allocates to space activity.

Today the United States plans to put a man on the moon again in 2024, then have a permanent human presence in the lunar orbit - this implies the launch in November of four astronauts who will be in space for 6 months - and the human presence on Mars in the 30s of the XXI century. China and Russia refuse to recognize private property in space, but they will come later and the United States is betting on that. These powers also demand the demilitarization of space, to which the United States, which is also ahead on this issue, does not give in. The space race is the struggle with the longest-term view between the United States and China.

This is a huge change for humankind in terms of the limits to expand and leave the Earth's orbit. For its part, China has raised its goal in the so-called "far side of the Moon." The last unmanned mission to it began in November and aims to extract soil samples from a depth of 2 meters. The space race thus arises fundamentally between national actors. The US created its fifth military force two years ago: the space force; France gave its air force space jurisdiction in 2019; the UK created the Aerospace Command in late 2020, while China and Russia already had the issue under the military orbit.

The second area of geopolitics in the 21st century relates to the earth's 80% that is made up of sea and over which there is still no sovereignty. Three events that have occurred so far in the 21st century speak for themselves. The first is the division of the Arctic Sea bed between the 5 countries that support it (United States, Russia, Canada, Denmark -for Greenland- and Norway), which agreed to distribute the subsoil of the Arctic Sea and its waters in 2009.

The hydrocarbon reserves accelerated this decision, facilitated by the fact that the two military powers of the moment decided it. The Arctic Council made up of dozens of countries questioned the decision, which was executed all the same. The second event was in 2019 when the five countries bordering the Caspian Sea (Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Iran) did the same with this sea and its subsoil. Added to this is the construction of artificial Chinese islands in the South Sea of this country, where sovereign dominance is in dispute with China's neighbors.

The United States does not recognize the Chinese right over the islands, which with an extension of 3 by 2 kilometers, span over an atoll from where sovereignty is claimed over the surrounding waters. The trend is clear: the advance of sovereignty over the sea where its bed has acquired an economic value that it did not have before. The South China Sea is the most critical geopolitical point of conflict between the United States and the Asian power. The conflict between Greece and Turkey over the exploitation of hydrocarbons on the eastern Mediterranean seabed evidences this trend.

In the ground realm, the most important geopolitical ideal of the 21st century is Eurasia. The geopolitics of both China and Russia share the vision of Eurasia as one continent. From this perspective, the Ural Mountains are not a real geographical divide but a cultural creation, since it is an insurmountable barrier between Europe and Asia. China's geopolitical project called "The New Silk Road" is a set of railways, ports, airports, and routes that connect from the easternmost tip of China to the Baltic in northern Europe and the Cantabrian Sea in the south.

Most of the Asian countries have joined the project and 13 of the 27 members of the European Union. It must be noted that according to some estimates in the next decade - the next 30 years – the Chinese per capita GDP will equal that of Europe, creating socio-economic equalities throughout Eurasia. Europe will thus be a region in dispute between China, Russia, and the US that will have the Atlantic in between. However, a new continent will emerge in this century: the Antarctic. In the Arctic, there is no emerging land, just ice.

Antarctica, on the contrary, is a vast continent that harbors great natural resources, minerals, and the largest water reservoir in the world. Meanwhile, eight of the signatory countries of the Antarctic Treaty maintain their claim to sovereignty, committing not to exercise it until the year 2048: Argentina, Chile, the United Kingdom, France, Norway, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. China and Russia are the two countries that, without formally claiming sovereignty, are about to complete the largest bases in Antarctica and are significantly increasing their activity on this continent. Russia commemorated the bicentennial of the discovery of Antarctica by the Russian Navy and created the Antarctic Inspection Office, charged with enforcing Russian law to citizens' activities in Antarctica.

The trend is clear in all three areas: state sovereignty advances over the three spaces (maritime, continental, and space) and some include a fourth: cyberspace. The latter does not seem to be a field of geopolitics, but rather a field where actions, operations, businesses, etc. unfold, but where the powers do not plan an action that may have a territorial sovereignty of some kind. It is an area where countries operate and large and medium powers already have military activity in cyberspace. However, a process of nationalization has begun as a result of the large technology companies, which do have a nationality. The United States is intensifying its fight with China over the activity of its companies with North American consumers and users.

Ali-Baba, Tik-Tok, and Huawei find restrictions on the part of the US government. The government provisions against Huawei's project in G5 technology –which are supported by US technology companies and those from allied countries in the intelligence area (Kingdom United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand)- confirm it. At the same time, France is taxing US tech businesses despite opposition from Washington, and the UK has just imposed a similar measure. Between Europe and the United States, the struggle is of a more economic and commercial nature than that of China with the United States, where the strategic vision dominates.

In conclusion: the broadest field of geopolitics in the 21st century is space, where the race between the powers to seize it strategically and exploit it economically accelerates; the trend towards the expansion of national sovereignty over the seas

and the seabed -which represent almost 80% of the globe- with strategic and economic interests is evidenced; in the continental area, the trend points to the disappearance of the land border represented by the Ural Mountains between Asia and Europe and the factual acceptance of Eurasia as a single continent. Finally, cyberspace is not the domain of geopolitics, but big technology companies are assuming a nationality and are immersed in economic and geopolitical conflicts between the US, China, and Europe.