

The United States and Eurasia: Some geopolitical reflections at a time of global crisis

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From Ukraine to Taiwan, Eurasia has once again become the epicentre of a major confrontation between great powers (the United States, China and Russia). To analyse this, we must free ourselves from the mental software inherited from the Cold War, think anew, and take full account of the planetary context - that of a global, multidimensional crisis. This contribution does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather an invitation to discussion.

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The international political situation is dominated by the conflict between a new rising power, China, and the established power, the United States. This face-off is analysed here as an inter-imperialist conflict. The social structure of China is certainly very specific (this is not a detail), but the extent of the break in continuity between the Maoist regime and that of Xi Jinping is well documented. [1] There is obviously controversy in this area and the very concept of imperialism has several legitimate interpretations (as when we talk about the imperialism of Tsarist Russia). It is perfectly possible to study the ongoing geopolitical conflicts while retaining reservations about the stage of development of Chinese (or Russian) society, without this upsetting the analysis - unless you think that the regimes of Xi Jinping and Putin, resulting from counterrevolutions, remain “progressive”.

The conflict between a rising power and the established power is a classic scenario. But it must imperatively be analysed in its historical context. The present context is that of the global crisis into which capitalist globalization has plunged us, thus a context unprecedented in its implications. We will come back to this, but before that, let us emphasize the singular place that Eurasia occupies in global geopolitics.

Eurasia and great power conflicts

The great game between the rising power and the established power is played out all over the world, but for historical and geostrategic reasons it is particularly acute in Eurasia. An economic zone of the utmost importance (with China at its heart), the continent borders the North Atlantic to the west and, to the east, the Indo-Pacific zone from where China, again! can project itself as far as the South Pacific. It was the epicentre of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary upheavals of the twentieth century involving Europe, Russia, China, Vietnam, and many other countries in the region. It experienced, more profoundly than elsewhere, Nazism, Stalinism, division into blocs, wars.

The continent bears the scars of that time. The nuclear threat is global, but Eurasia has a monopoly on “hot spots”, where holders of nuclear weapons share the same border – Russia and NATO members in the west, India and Pakistan in the centre, Taiwan in the south (China-USA), the Korean peninsula in the east.

That past is over, however. The international defeat of my activist generation in the 1980s paved the way for the expansion of the neoliberal counter-revolution and capitalist globalization. The vocabulary and reflexes of the so-called Cold War (burning in Asia) have reappeared in reaction to the invasion of Ukraine, and this framework of analysis is no less obsolete. Russia and China are integrated into the same global market as the United States and Europe. One of the major issues currently concerns the contradictions caused by conflicts between states in an interdependent world governed by the free movement of goods and capital.

We must free ourselves from the more or less unconscious analytical software of the Cold War to think anew at a time when Eurasia has once again become the scene of an acute confrontation of the great powers, whether in the East around Taiwan since Xi Jinping came to power or in the West since the invasion of Ukraine.

The United States remains, by far, the world’s leading military power, but that does not mean that it is always in a position of superiority everywhere. This superiority depends on the nature of the theatre of operations, the reliability of the allies, the internal political situation, logistics and so on. Indeed, we can say that on all Eurasian “fronts”, they have been in a situation of weakness.

President Obama would have liked to tip the “pivot” of the US political-military apparatus towards Asia. He could not, mired in the Middle East crisis. Beijing took the opportunity to establish its grip on the entire South China Sea over which it proclaimed its sovereignty without taking into account the maritime rights of other riparian countries. It exploits its economic wealth and has built a set of artificial islands housing a dense network of military bases on reefs. Donald Trump was unable to pursue a coherent Chinese policy. Joe Biden has managed to refocus the US on the Asia-Pacific front, but he is facing a fait accompli situation.

War is not just a military affair, far from it, but the outcome of battles is not without significance. However, a conflict in the South China Sea would on first impression be likely to turn to the advantage of Beijing, which could use its most modern weapons, the combined firepower of a militarized maritime zone and a militarized coastal line, the proximity of continental bases (missiles, aviation and so on), as well as the logistical facilities provided by a modern road and rail network (speed of transport and movement on the front of troops, ammunition and so on). The war in Ukraine is long-lasting and we see how much it is consuming shells! The constant rearmament of the fronts is a major constraint, much simpler for Beijing to resolve than Washington. The Pentagon is faced with a complicated equation to solve.

However, this analysis can be questioned. [2] China has no experience of modern warfare. The

Maoist strategy was defensive, with the army and popular mobilization as its pillar. Xi Jinping is forcibly building the attributes of a great power with the Navy as its pillar. However, its troops, its equipment, the reliability and precision of its weapons, its chain of command, its logistical organization, its information system (mastery of space) and artificial intelligence have never been tested in real situations - while its fleet of strategic submarines always represents an Achilles heel

At the time of the invasion of Ukraine, Washington was also in a weak position in Europe. Russia had been preparing for at least two years for an offensive on the European front, both economically and militarily. Even though Putin hoped for a lightning victory in Ukraine (a mistake that cost him dearly) and the consequent paralysis of NATO (he was aware of its state of crisis), he had other goals in mind and knew that the tension at his borders would be lasting. On the other hand, Washington's lack of preparedness was obvious.

After the Afghan failure, NATO was in a state of crisis and its forces in Europe were not massed in large numbers on Russia's borders. Donald Trump had dynamited the multilateral cooperation frameworks of the Western camp. The impotence of the European Union was obvious, incapable of any coherent diplomacy in relation to China and Russia.

With Brexit, cooperation between the two countries with armies of intervention, France and Britain, was at a standstill and their means remain very limited. Morale is not high (the succession of failures suffered by Paris in Africa is not for nothing). French forces have no strategic autonomy, dependent on Washington for intelligence and... Russians and Ukrainians for deployment. Ironically, Paris has for a long time long leased wide-body aircraft belonging to Russian and Ukrainian companies to transport its troops. I imagine that is no longer the case (although, capitalism and trade being what they are, it is possible).

Ukraine in context

NATO was neither the sole nor the main reason for the invasion. In Putin's own words, it aimed to wipe Ukraine off the map - a state that in his eyes should never have existed. [3] It is impossible to know what would have happened if a blitzkrieg had allowed Russia to conquer the country, balkanize it and establish a puppet government in Kyiv. This was not the case, as the Russian offensive was thwarted by massive national resistance involving the army, territorial forces and the people. It is under these conditions that the war in Ukraine has become a major geopolitical fact that causes geostrategic realignments which are much more complex than might be imagined.

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Beijing and the scenario that did not take place

To what extent was the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership warned of the Russian plans? On the eve of the invasion, Xi Jinping and Putin announced with fanfare an agreement on unlimited strategic cooperation. However, Beijing did not attack Taiwan, opening a second front, although the opportunity may have seemed favourable and Xi had made the “reconquest” of this territory a marker of his reign. In fact, China began by taking a cautious stance at the UN, not explicitly dissociating itself from Moscow, but not vetoing the first condemnation of the invasion and even claiming that international borders must be respected. Remember that for the leadership of the CCP (and the UN), Taiwan is a Chinese province and not a foreign state.

Why this restraint? Let’s consider several reasons. The first is military. Taiwan is a huge abscess of fixation in the heart of the South China Sea that Beijing would like to break, but crossing the strait, 120 kilometres wide, makes an invasion very perilous. The Taiwanese probably have the means to resist for the time that US forces would arrive to cover. Whatever progress is made, China’s naval air force is not in a position to cope. Xi Jinping has certainly not forgotten the past failures, when Mao, at the end of the civil war, tried three times to attack Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang (Guomindang) forces on the island. The reciprocal is also true: a US invasion of China seems unthinkable.

Secondly, Russian and Chinese interests do not always coincide, far from it. Their alliance makes sense in a defensive context and Russia has experience that China has sought to take advantage of, for example by participating in joint military exercises in Siberia. However, the historical dispute between Moscow and Beijing in the background of the Sino-Soviet rupture of 1969 is very heavy (it led at the time to fighting for control of the Amur River border). With Xi Jinping’s major initiative of the New Silk Roads, Chinese influence has significantly strengthened in Central Asia in a region that Putin considers his own. The invasion of Ukraine called into question Chinese interests in Eastern Europe (including Ukraine) and Western Europe. Abandoning its own European ambitions in the name of Moscow’s imperial ambitions is not obvious. However, the worst possible scenario for Beijing would be to find itself alone against Washington.

Third, Xi Jinping’s position in the CCP is not consolidated. His management of the Covid-19 pandemic is criticized. The Army General Staff has not digested the purges to which it has been subjected. The factions of the organs of power that have been unceremoniously eliminated are waiting for their time of revenge. Xi has imposed a constitutional reform that allows him to preside for as long as he wants - but can he? A party of 90 million members in a country-continent cannot be led by the nose and his situation is probably more fragile than it seemed.

A generalized crisis of governance

Joe Biden’s situation in the United States was already critical at the time of the invasion of Ukraine, without a functional majority in Congress, under the threat of a return with a vengeance of Trumpism. Since then, things have worsened, with the creeping judicial coup conducted by the six ultra-conservative members (against the three sane members) of the Supreme Court.

We now know how the far right (especially its evangelical component) has for decades prepared its stranglehold on the institutions by training and placing lawyers and judges in key positions. [4] We know the extent of the Trumpian plot that led to the assault on the Capitol. [5] And yet I cannot understand how in the United States six people (six!) can impose their dictatorship by breaking with the traditional functioning of the Supreme Court, by attacking reproductive rights, by blocking the

(yet so moderate) program in the fight against global warming and by announcing that this is only the beginning and that their obscurantist offensive will continue in other areas, including that of elections. [6]

There are significant checks and balances in the United States, such as the role of the states. This is not the case in France, a country of hyper-presidentialism where Macron is trying to impose an authoritarian “transcendence” of bourgeois democracy, a project fortunately thwarted (for the time being) by the recent parliamentary elections. The situation is no less disastrous across the Atlantic, as in Europe (Boris Johnson’s burlesque farce, for example). We are going through an agonising democratic crisis.

Globalization in critical crisis

Market globalization is now at a standstill, even if this is not necessarily the case with financial globalization. Geopolitics studies in principle the correlation between many factors, which can only be a collective work. [7] It is outside my subject here. However, Eurasia has provided a new geopolitical factor of primary importance: the Covid-19 pandemic. Born in China, it spread to Europe which served as a springboard to reach the whole world.

The speed with which the epidemic became a pandemic is explained by the negligence of governments that have been slow to act (in Europe too), the density of trade of globalized capitalism and the characteristics of the Sars-Cov-2 virus, including its ability to manufacture new lines of variants and to attack almost all pulmonary systems, blood, nervous, digestive and so on (so nothing to do with the flu). The only precedent could be the misnamed Spanish flu (it was originally from the United States), at the time of the First World War, but we did not know then how to analyse the variants and therefore we cannot compare.

We have entered the era of epidemics, in addition to the climate and ecological crisis. Covid-19 has exploded the contradictions of a global economy based on just-in-time production and unlimited trade growth. There will be no turning back.

The new tectonics of geopolitical plates

Nearly five months after the invasion of Ukraine, the world situation might seem simple to characterize: Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific remain the epicentre of geopolitical conflicts, US leadership has been restored in the Western camp, NATO has been refounded with new ambitions, Russia and China stand together despite their disputes which we have discussed, a “deglobalization of war” is underway on all fronts, the climate, ecological and health crisis is accelerating accordingly, the suffering of peoples is increasing in line with the disasters in progress.

The refoundation of NATO

The invasion of Ukraine has, as expected, enabled NATO to overcome its post-Afghanistan crisis by giving it a new *raison d’être* and legitimacy - a very hard blow to the fight against the Organisation and military alliances. The Madrid Summit, at the end of June 2022, was an opportunity to acquire an unlimited mandate, authorizing it to intervene worldwide against any “threat”, whatever it may be. [8] Russia is presented as “the most significant threat” for the moment and China, in the long term, as the main “strategic competitor” in all areas.

NATO's "new strategic concept" is in no way ambiguous. The question remains: does the Organization have the means for its policy? There is nothing obvious about that. While most countries at the United Nations condemned the invasion, only a small minority embarked on the path of sanctions. Today, Joe Biden and NATO are demanding that the countries of Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific stand together against both Russia and China. What have they got? The accession of new European countries to the Organization with, and this is what is important, popular support, the agreement of the vast majority of the members of the European Union to fall under the US military umbrella, the enthusiastic alignment of Japan.

Concerning Japan, the country's constitution contains a pacifist clause (Article 9) that prohibits the country from reconstituting an army ("the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation") and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. This clause was circumvented ("reinterpreted") from 1954 by the (right-wing nationalist) Liberal Democratic Party which developed the "self-defence forces" in contradiction with Article 9 which specifies that "in order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained".

Japan thus has the fifth largest army in the world, behind the United States, Russia, China and India. It has 1,450 aircraft (only the US has more) and a navy with 36 destroyers. Destroyers are the most powerful warships after aircraft carriers. Tokyo does not have nuclear weapons but could acquire them very quickly. The government believes that by participating in multilateral operations, it will be able to create a *fait accompli* and send its forces to external theatres of operations. Tokyo will play its own game and will not be a subordinate ally of Washington.

As for India, Joe Biden has promoted the concept of an Indo-Pacific zone to integrate New Delhi into a common front against China. He now has no chance of getting the Modi government's agreement to side with Washington against Russia. For obvious reasons of expediency, India ostensibly displays a principle of diplomatic neutrality. It has maintained continuous ties with Moscow since the 1960s and about 60% of its military needs are covered by Russia. It would even agree to consider trade in roubles (the Russian currency) and not in dollars. [9]

The new non-aligned

Non-alignment has become a recurring theme again. The term is a seductive one, reviving the memory of the Bandung Conference in 1955. This conference was held under the auspices of Indonesian leader Sukarno, featuring Zhou Enlai for China, Nehru for India, Nasser for Egypt, Sihanouk for Cambodia, Tito for Yugoslavia, as well as Japan (the only industrialized country) and Hocine Ait Ahmed for the Algerian FLN. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was part of a vast struggle for decolonization and a questioning of the dominant order.

Nothing to do with today's non-aligned countries, generally composed of regimes that have nothing progressive about them. Thus, Modi's India is considered by many left currents as fascist. [10] However, the reference to non-alignment means that business will continue as before and that Russia is not isolated internationally, especially since its denunciation of the West's perfidies resonates with the popular memory of colonization or the invasion of Iraq.

On Russia's European borders, everything being relative, NATO and the European Union certainly appear more democratic than the Putin regime, even if the program of reconstruction of Ukraine discussed in Lugano, in the perspective of the post-war period, seeks to impose on the population the canons of the neoliberal order. [11]

Solidarity

The future remains very uncertain. We do not know how crises of national democratic decomposition can affect the international situation, whether a paroxysmic crisis will open tomorrow in the Mediterranean around Turkey or in the Middle East, how “total war” (including sanctions and economic countermeasures) will continue, if the brutality of the effects of the climate crisis will cause waves of migration and a new hardening of Fortress Europe.

The Ukrainian crisis, however, was an opportunity for the Western European left to understand the importance of the Eastern European left’s own experience, to integrate their “point of view.” We cannot think about geopolitics without rising above our national horizons and learning to see the world from elsewhere. It is not enough to support our comrades who are fighting on both sides of the Russian border, especially Sotsialniy Rukh, the Ukrainian “Social Movement,” we must also listen to them and learn.

Similarly, Ukraine must not make us forget the terrible war ravaging Burma (Myanmar), or the dangerous nature of the continued struggle in the Philippines after the return to power of the Marcos clan. The radical left will be internationalist in action, or it will not be.

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Pierre Rousset

P.S.

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<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7746>

Footnotes

[1] See in particular Pierre Rousset, [“From whence did the new Chinese capitalism arise? ‘Bourgeoisification’ of the bureaucracy and globalization”](#).

[2] See in particular Pierre-Antoine Donnet, [“Taiwan: comment comprendre les déclarations de Joe Biden ?”](#).

[3] See quotes from his speeches in Yorgos Mitralias, “Putin: ‘Lenin is the author of today’s Ukraine’ or how all this is the fault of ... Lenin and the Bolsheviks!”
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article61979>

[4] Katherine Stewart, “United States: How the Christian right took over the judiciary and changed America”
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article63049>

[5] Neil Faulkner, [“Where is America going? - One year after the storming of the Capitol”](#).

[6] *Against the Current*, [“Abortion rights in USA: The Right wing’s Supreme Court Coup”](#).

[7] A work begun within the framework of the Fourth International. Discussion papers can be found on its website: <https://fourth.international/en/international-committee/756/431>

[8] See Jaime Pastor, [“Towards a new permanent global war? NATO’s ‘new strategic concept’](#) and Anuradha Chenoy, [“NATO’s New Security Architecture”](#).

[9] Anuradha Chenoy, [“War in Ukraine — Why India Won’t Take Sides”](#).

[10] Kunal Chattopadhyay, [“India after the BJP-NDA electoral victory: Understanding the Catastrophic Victory of the Fascists and the Long Term Consequences”](#).

[11] Vitaly Dudin, [“The reconstruction of Ukraine must benefit the population. But the West has other ideas”](#).