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Jacques Fontanel

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Human security, national security and globalization

Jacques Fontanel

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of economic globalization seemed inescapable, encouraged by most states and supported by liberal economists who insisted on deregulating, deregulating and decompartmentalizing national economies and international finance. An optimal economic growth was to result which would benefit all countries through the "trickle down" effect of income from the rich to the poor, thus reducing famine and hunger, at least in the long term. Wars would become increasingly unlikely as economic interdependence would reduce the opportunities for armed conflict. The fear of nuclear war would fade, and American power and capitalism could organize, if not impose, world peace. Peaceful trade in complete freedom became the basis of global societal life. In terms of defense, Washington became the world's principal policeman. The story was beautiful, a fairy tale. However, at the end of 2021, wars, terrorism and economic conflicts have not disappeared.

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted the dangers of an economic globalization that has little respect for environmental standards and is always threatened by the belligerent actions of the great powers in the never-ending race for economic, strategic and political power. It underlined the inability of States to find rapid solutions to the dependencies of Nations in the face of the sanitary constraints of a pandemic, thus developing a strong feeling of insecurity among citizens.

More generally, States are undergoing a growing challenge to their economic role and their policies concerning ecology, climate or air pollution are too often inspired by the decisions of specialized international organizations, too often advised by dominant commercial and financial interests. In this context, governments are no longer able to assume the full range of national security. Warlike violence, whether civil, military or economic (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Syria or Iran). Even if the principle "Si vis pacem para bellum" is still valid, military power has even lost its aura and its effectiveness, as the tragedies in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan show. Today, international free trade is less claimed by American democracy than by Chinese capitalist communism. In this context, the Thucydides trap of world leadership between the United States and China cannot fail to worry the citizens of the world. At the same time, the threats of "rogue states" and terrorism have not disappeared. What then are the new forms

of state power, but also what are the greatest threats shaking the world in the 21st century?

The forms of state power

In 2020, the combined military budget of NATO forces was estimated to be at least four times that of China and twenty times that of Russia. Yet despite this military hyperpower, the United States has abandoned Afghanistan to the Taliban. In order to defend its regional allies against Beijing's territorial claims on Taiwan and the waters of the China Sea, and to have effective deterrent weapons, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty signed with the USSR in 1987. Indeed, while China does not have allies in the region, it is now capable of acting quickly in this theater of operation. Space is also a priority sector for the United States. In August 2019, threatened by Russia and China, which have the appropriate technologies for the conquest of space, Washington created a Military Space Command, with the doctrines of "Space Control" and "Space Dominance". The military power of these great powers is capable of annihilating life on Earth, but at the same time, none of these great powers can hope to annihilate potentially enemy forces without vital danger for all of its own citizens.

Economic globalization implies the increasing interconnection of economic actors through the opening of political borders to trade relations, foreign investment and international finance. In 2021, international public organizations still recommend respecting the neoclassical triptych (deregulation, deregulation, decompartmentalization) applied mainly to international finance but also to national economies, except during periods of pandemic crisis. The result is a rapid growth of financial and economic variables. GDP or GDP per capita, presented as the alpha and omega of wealth production in a market economy, are aggregates that highlight the capacity to produce, without any reference to global warming, pollution issues, tax evasion, non-market production, programmed obsolescence and intertemporal and territorial inequalities. Thus, traffic jams increase GDP, while voluntary participation in a collective service is considered unproductive. GDP hides social inequalities. Used as a basis for reflection, it is both lazy and misleading information.

In principle, the private sector of the market economy operates within the rules set by national or international governments. However, the large production and financial firms exert considerable influence on the decisions of a state and of intergovernmental multilateralism. Having dominant information organs, they value the efficiency of liberalism, they propose technological or legal norms that are favourable to them, they take advantage of the oppositions between national and international public actors to maintain their advantages (notably in the fiscal domain) and they apply a policy of all-out lobbying, under the cover of scientific analyses. The private sector of oligopolistic production is able to influence

national governments and parliaments and intervenes directly with international organizations to maintain or develop systems of laws that ensure the continuity of their activity in an adequate legal space. It supports the "trickle-down theory", according to which the enrichment of the "first in line" (the richest) would eventually benefit everyone. This is not borne out by modern history, of course. The groups and shareholders of large multinational companies and banks have appropriated most of the growth since 1980, thanks to their financial power, the size of their assets and their political and ideological connections.

International organizations are addicted to liberalism. For the UN, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank or the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), the globalization of markets and the freedom of world finance are the objective foundations of a world economic development capable of eradicating poverty and wars. The state should only have a subsidiary role in the economic field, despite some exceptions, especially in times of crisis. The UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), once the advocate of a more egalitarian New International Economic Order, has lost its influence. The WTO of the powerful has prevailed over the UNCTAD of the developing countries.

The IMF and the World Bank have long defended the "Washington Consensus", which supported the privatization of public enterprises, the deregulation of markets, the respect of industrial property rules, the refusal of public indebtedness, the application of low-progressive tax reforms or the liberalization of national financial markets and foreign trade. These principles imposed on developing countries the pre-eminence of the private sector in the economic field. Today, this strategy has been called into question in view of the bad results of this policy applied by the "beneficiary" states.

In these new times of pandemic Covid-19, the WHO could have become a great health center available to the whole world, but it held first to enforce international norms concerning freedom of trade, industrial property and the values of the commercial world. Vaccine patents are thus protected under a monopoly claimed and protected by WIPO. In this framework, the fortune of a few is more important than the protection of billions of people in a precarious economic situation. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington sought to strengthen its power through the multilateralism of the WTO, in order to extend international trade to all markets, on the basis of health, environmental and technological codes of conduct defined by the United States.

Ideological domination and political lobbying manipulate the information provided to citizens, just like any advertising action. With the control of the media and social networks, the information oligopolies convey the idea that their particular interests are in line with the collective interest. However, the examples of such citizen and customer-friendly behavior are not very encouraging in this respect.

Before the crisis of 2008, private banking organizations in the United States had been given the opportunity to "self-monitor" on the basis of banking and financial statistics. After the crisis, it was found that the banks, in order to maximize their profits, had taken foolish risks by making decisions that the system should have prevented. Even today, in order to avoid any new financial regulation measures that the G20 would like to impose on them, the big international banks have bundled their lobbying interests by defining their own international accounting standards (International Financial Reporting Standards, IFRS). One of their main activities is to ensure the tax optimization and evasion of their clients. For several years, the OECD has been trying to limit the exercise of the policy of "beggar thy neighbour", but on the issue of tax havens, private interests have always managed to delay the control of such lucrative operations. The OECD has been working to find a solution acceptable to all states, but the scandals of Panama's papers, Pandora's papers or OpenLux show the importance of this theft of public finances. It is true that the largest multinational companies will have to contribute 15% of their profits to public resources, but most other companies are taxed much more at the national level. Intergovernmental multilateralism is not attentive to these situations, whereas it should be a priority to defend the "international commons", the great forgotten goods of globalization.

Economic and environmental conflicts

Nuclear weapons are particularly dissuasive to the enemies of states that have them. Traditional wars are costly and ineffective in the medium term; terrorism and economic weapons are a privileged potential means of weakening or coercing a potential enemy. However, the intensity and forms of political-economic conflict are different depending on their application. Globalization has not eliminated international economic sanctions against several countries, including Russia. Economic sanctions do not necessarily imply future military action, they are a warning and sometimes a punishment to be borne by the citizens of the country. The use of economic weapons is intended to exert coercive actions against one or more states. There are several dominant weapons or power relations, such as embargoes, boycotts, blockades, asset and investment freezes, secondary sanctions (in particular the extraterritoriality of sanctions imposed by the United States) and cyberattacks, which disrupt a country's economy all the more as it is involved in a broad process of globalization.

Oblique" weapons have become essential in the manifestation of the political, economic and humanitarian power of States. States declare that they are engaging in coercive economic procedures in order to force the target country to renounce a political or military action deemed unacceptable. Several strategies can be put in place, from impoverishment through preparation efforts to violent war, through strategies of international rupture or punishment, or those of external domination and internal control. In order to act on another country, one needs both

a public command unit, but also productions which, because of their technological importance and the relative scarcity of their components, are necessary for the proper functioning of downstream enterprises.

For example, "rare earths" enable the production of clean electricity and are necessary for new information and communication technologies. However, they have three disadvantages: firstly, they are available in limited quantities compared to potential demand; secondly, their extraction is both costly and highly polluting. Finally, most of these metals are poorly distributed in the world, to the great advantage of China, which is taking advantage of this monopoly to attract many high value-added activities dependent on rare metals. Economic, political and military conflicts can arise from this scarcity and from the balance of power between states. The idea, often evoked, of exporting polluting industries to poor countries, then materialized in China, under the direction of an authoritarian State, little concerned with immediate environmental constraints, and in search of international economic leadership. Militarily, the production of most sophisticated weapons depends on the purchase of rare earths. This dependence is potentially an opportunity for military conflict, in a new mercantilist conception of the power of the state over other states.

States can thus take retaliatory measures for security purposes, but also for economic reasons. The suspension of economic aid to a developing country is often an effective action, even in the form of a simple threat. Sanctions are not only applied to countries in difficult economic situations. The state is in the front line as it wants to protect certain strategic sectors from increased competition. The U.S. government has opposed the Nord Stream 2 project to supply gas from Russia first to Germany and then to Europe. For Washington, companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 project could be sanctioned because the project undermines the security of NATO members. Secondary sanctions" are a decisive issue of state sovereignty. Washington's soft power is particularly effective in the power relations of economic globalization.

States must protect critical infrastructures, but in terms of health, they have almost all failed in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ecological catastrophe is underway, close to the tipping point. The liberal economic system is incapable of taking the radical measures that are needed. "The terrible thing about catastrophe is that not only do we not believe it will happen [...], but once it has happened it appears to be part of the normal order of things" (Dupuy, 2014). Basically, in the face of climate change, ocean pollution and the hazards of nuclear power, genetic engineering or pandemics, humanity anticipates potential disasters, but any prevention fails in the face of present economic interests. The "enlightened catastrophism" assumes that man is in the worst case scenario as if it were certain. It is a question of anticipating the retroactivity of the judgment in order to find a resilient link between the present and the future and to escape the recurrent tendency of state policies to reproduce identically the choices guided by the dominant economic interests. All states and all humans are concerned.

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