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# The lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic for National security

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The crisis of globalisation and the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic pose new threats to the national security of all countries. States have been increasingly challenged on their role, particularly in the economic order. Their actions concerning ecology, climate or air pollution have been strongly inspired by the decisions of specialised international organisations, too often advised by dominant commercial and financial interests. In this context, states have no longer been able to assume the full range of national security components. Mercantilists considered that dependence on a State's foreign trade led to an unacceptable reduction to the power of the Prince. Today, all countries are dependent on others. Moreover, the pandemic has highlighted the inability of states to find quick solutions to the economic dependencies of states, creating a sense of insecurity among citizens.

Keynotes : National security, globalization, pandemic, scarcity

In the usual dictionaries, peace is defined as "the absence of war", which is presented as "the use of armed force" to resolve a conflict situation. This definition highlights the endemic permanence of wars, but also the historical force of recourse to armed conflict. War has always been an instrument of predation and power. If Heraclitus affirmed that "war is the father of all things", for Thomas Hobbes, men are naturally in conflict with each other. Internally, states have the vocation to regulate the conflicts of their citizens through laws and, externally, to protect them by developing armed forces intended to dissuade their potential enemies, thus taking up the old principle "Si vis pacem para bellum".

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of economic globalization seemed inevitable, 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. In 1995, the international organizations set up by the West in 1944 were reinforced by the creation of the WTO, the World Trade Organization, intended to develop free trade. Peaceful trade in complete freedom became the basis of world society. Multinational companies, free from the demands of each state, could then impose their positive trade laws and increase the world's GDP for the benefit of the ecumene. In terms of defense, Washington became the world's main policeman, with military spending (including NATO) nearly twice as high as that of the rest of the world. The story was beautiful, a fairy tale. Yet wars, terrorism and economic warfare have never ceased to exist.

Civil, military or economic war violence has not disappeared (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iran, etc.) and the threats of "rogue states" and terrorism have not disappeared. States have been increasingly challenged in their role, especially in the economic order. Their actions concerning ecology, climate or air pollution have been strongly inspired by the decisions of specialized international organizations, too often advised by dominant commercial and financial interests. In this context, states have no longer been able to assume all the components of national security.

Military power still plays an important role, even if no state is currently threatening armed conflict. If you want peace, prepare for war.

## I. National and international security of states

Although the United States has a considerable military force, with a financial commitment greater than that of China, Russia, France, Germany or the United Kingdom combined, the nuclear weapons of the first two countries do not allow for strategic domination commensurate with the ambitions of an indisputable leadership. Donald Trump has decided to unilaterally withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty signed with the USSR in 1987. This was not a direct attack on Russia, but intermediate-range nuclear forces are necessary to contain China's attempts to expand into the waters of the China Sea. Under these conditions, the United States continues to arm Taiwan, because Washington feels that, in the face of China's arsenal, it is partially powerless to defend its regional allies against China's territorial claims. On the other hand, while China does not really have allies in the region, Beijing is now capable of acting quickly in a theater of operations, given the vulnerability of American bases in the Pacific and large American warships to long-range Chinese missiles.

Space is also a priority sector for the United States. By creating a military space command, Washington is implementing the "Space Control" and "Space Dominance" doctrines of power research to improve its national security conditions. However, China was the first to land on the dark side of the moon, and Russia still has the technology to conquer space.

Economic globalization implies the growing interconnection of economic actors through the opening of political borders to trade relations, foreign investment and international finance. The sovereign state cedes part of its functions and privileges to international economic organizations (IOs) whose objective is to set the rules of free trade in order to protect multinational firms from undue national state intervention. Globalization is supposed to offer a better worldwide allocation of resources. In 2020, international public organizations still recommend respecting the neoclassical triptych (deregulation, de-regulation, decompartmentalization) applied mainly to international finance but also to national economies, except during periods of pandemic crisis. The result is a growth in financial and economic variables, notably GDP, but at the same time this purely market optimum (Fontanel, Guilhaudis, 2019) leads to worrying results for the future of humanity. GDP or GDP per capita, presented as the alpha and omega of an economy's strength, are aggregates that highlight the capacity to produce, without any reference to global warming, pollution issues, tax evasion, non-market production, programmed obsolescence and territorial or intertemporal inequalities. They become concepts that do not lead to sustainable development (Fontanel, 2022).

In principle, the private sector of the market economy operates within the framework of rules set by national or international public authorities. 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 or even increase their advantages and they apply a policy of all-out lobbying, under cover of scientific analyses. The private sector of oligopolistic production is able to influence national governments and parliaments. It apparently defends the belief in a "trickle-down theory", according to which the enrichment of the "first in line" (the richest) would eventually benefit everyone. This is obviously not borne out by modern history. The groups and shareholders of large multinational companies and banks have appropriated most of the growth, thanks to their financial power and their political and ideological connections (Saez, Zucman, 2020, Fontanel, 2020).

International organizations are addicted to liberalism. For the UN, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), 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 has only a subsidiary role in the economic field, despite some exceptions. 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 debt, the application of weakly progressive tax reforms or the liberalization of national financial markets and foreign trade. These principles imposed the pre-eminence of the private sector in the economic field.

Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington sought to strengthen their power through the multilateralism of the WTO. For Bill Clinton (2000), "to realize the full opportunities of our economy, we must reach beyond our borders and shape the revolution that breaks down barriers and builds new networks... We must be at the center of any global network" (Clinton, 2000). We must be at the center of any global network" (Clinton, 2000). The idea was to extend international trade to all markets, on the basis of the health, environmental and technological codes of conduct defined by the United States.

In these times of pandemic Covid-19, the WHO could have become a major health center available to the whole world, but it is forced to respect

international norms concerning freedom of trade, industrial property and the values of the commercial world. Patents are protected under a claimed monopoly. In the context of the pandemic, the vaccine-related fortunes of large multinational firms explain at least part of the movement away from collective protection.

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. Before the crisis of 2008, private banking organizations in the United States were 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 application of the self-control 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 grouped their lobbying interests by defining the international accounting standards, applied worldwide (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 proposed to limit the exercise of the policy of impoverishing neighboring countries ("beggar thy neighbor"), but on the issue of tax havens, private interests have still managed to delay the control of such lucrative operations (Fontanel, 2016). The OECD has been working to find a solution acceptable to all states, but the timidity of the measures taken will not, in the long run, improve the gravity of the situation.

Globalization has not eliminated international economic sanctions against several countries, including Russia. Sanctions can be either unilateral when a single country applies them, or multilateral when two or more countries are involved. They do not necessarily imply future military action, they are a warning and sometimes a punishment that the citizens of the country will have to bear. Natural or organized scarcity is a factor in future conflicts. For example, rare earths have exceptional natural qualities for making clean electricity and for producing new information and communication technologies. However, they have three disadvantages: firstly, they are available or listed in limited quantities compared to the 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 control of technologies also poses a problem. In military terms, the production of most sophisticated

weapons depends on the purchase of rare earths from China. This dependence is undoubtedly an opportunity for military conflict, since all modern technology is based on these rare materials, which put security and economic equilibrium at great risk.

An international blockade against a state forces the victim country to live in autarky. It is the equivalent of an act of war, especially when the country does not have natural and energy resources. The freezing of assets and foreign investments directly affects national property and financial assets invested or saved in the country or countries that initiated the action. This policy is not always effective, as secret accounts in tax havens have multiplied in recent years, even in democratic countries (Fontanel, 2016). States can act by applying several coercive measures against rogue states, as is the case today with Iran, Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, North Korea or Syria, for example. Several economic weapons are then made available to the most powerful states, provided that other countries do not disrupt these actions by, for example, replacing the embargo or boycott. In this context, the United States engages in secondary sanctions. The extraterritoriality of economic and trade sanctions has been an American exception since the adoption of the Helms-Burton and Amato-Kennedy Acts of 1996. U.S. law often prevails in the expression of international law, particularly on issues relating to the application of international sanctions decided by Washington, cases of corruption of public officials abroad and taxation of non-resident American citizens (FATCA). All companies or banks, American or not, which do not respect the sanctions decided by the United States, are liable to heavy financial penalties if they want to continue to operate on American territory.

A cyber attack is triggered by a computer device whose purpose is to carry out a malicious act against the economic, political or military components of a country, in order to weaken its defense system, to intervene in the expression of its democratic choices or to disrupt the normal functioning of the country's businesses. It is mainly about harming a country by stealing data (military, industrial or political secrets, for example) or damaging or destroying the functioning of information systems. It is an effective weapon of the future.

The strategies of economic conflicts in military threat concern the implementation of retaliatory customs duties, the "monetary" conflicts leading to a policy of beggar thy neighbor or the refusal of membership or the recourse to the Office of Dispute Resolution (ORD) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The state can also protect certain strategic sectors from exacerbated competition that could jeopardize national independence or the strength of an alliance, such as Germany's choice of the North Stream project to supply gas from Russia to Germany, which could make Berlin dependent

on pressure from Moscow for all its political and strategic decisions. In Washington's view, companies, especially European ones, that would participate in this project would be sanctioned for participating in a project that undermines the security of NATO members. They will find themselves under threat from the United States because of the sanctions voted against Moscow last July, as part of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) of June 15, 2017, which aims to sanction Russia's activities in the energy field.

The just war of St. Thomas Aquinas has been evoked by Washington as a justification for its warlike interventions, especially against international terrorism, but also the UN Charter establishes that peace at all costs is not viable without justice and security. Peace is not only perceived as the absence of war, it depends on a political will to eliminate the fundamental causes of war, namely poverty, underdevelopment, respect for human rights, but also the effects of domination. Several strategies can be put in place, from impoverishment through the effort of preparation to a violent war, through the strategies of rupture or international punishment or those of external domination and internal control (Fontanel, 2019). In this framework, cyber attacks have a future. They can corrupt the normal functioning of national economies, but also obtain strategic military secrets of the utmost importance. The effects of malware are not always perceived as destructive, at least in the short term. States must protect critical infrastructures (energy installations, water supply, transport networks, telecommunications).

However, in terms of health, the States have almost all failed in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **II. The security of citizens. The European lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic shock highlights the flaws of the globalized economic system, it further weakens the already creaking cogs of social consensus. Its violence throws a raw light on the inability of international markets to self-regulate, the permanence of inter-state conflicts, the degradation of essential public services and the societal inequalities of income, wealth and power of citizens. Confinement has revealed the other side of liberal globalization, with its share of unemployed, the rise of precariousness and misery. With the rise of telework, the world's dependence on GAFAM is becoming particularly worrying. The globalist doxa which advocates the perfect circulation of people and products in the world is clearly challenged.

- First, as soon as the first alerts were issued, countries sought to close their borders, despite international agreements. Globalization was no longer happy. The world as an entity no longer had citizens, each state sought not



only to free itself from tourism and exiles, but sometimes established barriers within a country itself, even according to the age pyramid. Each individual is attached to a country, to a region, perhaps later to his age, to assert his rights and his space of action in a pandemic situation.

- Secondly, international solidarity has not been clearly present, with each State engaging in its own strategies, without excessive coordination. Interstate aid has not been a priority, to say the least, even though the spread of the virus is international.

- For Graham Allison (2019), in their quest for global political and economic leadership, the risk of war between China and the United States is becoming significant. The dangerous dynamic that is triggered when an ascendant power seeks to overtake the leadership of another power leads to the famous "Thucydides trap". Neither protagonist in this duopoly wants the conflict between them to become a war, but unexpected events and third parties often lead to increased tensions. "It was the fear inspired in Sparta by the rise of Athens that made war inevitable. In this context, Europe is perceived as a buffer zone, one that can reduce or aggravate the risk of war, while being progressively vassalized economically, politically and strategically.

- Finally, it is time for Europe to reindustrialize for the essential products of its citizens' lives. Without a strategy to return to a true independence of choice for its citizens in a democratic space, Europe will be dependent on investments from Chinese firms, it will be monitored and controlled by Sino-American technologies and its political, social and medical choices will be limited by a form of autarky insufficient for essential products.

Under these conditions, it is necessary to question free trade as practiced by the World Trade Organization and to focus on the domestic market, the circular economy, the production of essential goods and services and the mastery of modern technologies and production. If a more balanced dialogue with Washington is to be resumed. European nations also do not sufficiently emphasize the own shortcomings of their democracy, which today gives voice to citizens solely on the basis of information provided by media owned by a few people. Such a system is more akin to a plutocracy than a true democracy.

National security cannot be limited to the military, it also includes health, education, industrial risks, protection of heritage, natural resources and the collective quality of life of citizens. The public authorities have forgotten that the products and services essential to human survival must always be available within the country, either in stock or in immediate production capacity. This is the case for food products, medicines, collective and individual protection instruments, sanitary equipment, and rules concerning air and water quality set "a minima" by international organizations. The same applies to the control of vital technologies

(especially digital). In the event of a threat of cyberattacks, how can the European Union protect itself from the power of the Gafam in the service of the United States or from malware coming from Russia or China? Friendship between peoples often vanishes in conflicts of economic interests and power relations. However, a pandemic requires disinterested collective action and solidarity that states, dominated by private interests, have difficulty promoting. When a pandemic occurs, the State finds itself accountable for a greed linked to a debt owed or increased by resources lost in tax optimization and evasion systems.

In the context of the Iranian nuclear affair, the White House has imposed its law on the rest of the world, with violence, despite appeals to a WTO that still does not dare to condemn the country that was its sponsor under the baptismal font of free trade. China deploys a capitalism at the orders of the State, without respect for human rights, within the framework of a national economy controlled from within by members of the Communist Party. Europe's weakness stems from its divisions, different political and commercial objectives, nationalist ideologies and narrow national conceptions. The governments of the member countries still do not have a common benevolent solidarity.

More seriously, democracy remains, but the power belongs to those who control the financial means, the information, and even the administrative and political cenacles. Multinational companies have a considerable influence on public institutions, because they have the power to finance electoral campaigns, to control information (television, newspapers, internet, government data) and to lobby effectively in all national and international bodies. They can afford the best intelligence to defend their interests, thanks to the transfer of their affiliates from the public to the private sector and vice versa. The new digital technologies create daily dependency and are able to actively participate in the decision and election processes all over the world, according to the interests of their producers and the Nation that hosts them.

Under these conditions, democracy is in crisis, and a plutocracy seems to be taking hold all over the world. In the 21st century, the wealthy are paying proportionally less and less tax. Inequality has increased over the last two decades. The "tax haven" states are commercializing their sovereignty. They offer multinational companies significant tax advantages. Moreover, these are sometimes the same States that, in the name of financial rigor, do not wish to support the countries that they have sometimes relieved of their biggest taxpayers.

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 prevention fails because the procedures that allow us to avoid the worst project us into a possible, but distant and unactualized world.

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. This is perhaps a decisive moment in which political, economic and societal cleavages must quickly find negotiated solutions, before the world is set ablaze by the power of the sun or by virulent attacks from firearms or against networks permanently suffering from uncontrollable malware.

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