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The Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine

Jacques Fontanel

International Conference

Disaster Management: Global Pandemic and Its Impact

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Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has given a blow to the perception of the economic globalization as the most efficient system to improve world economic performance. Liberal globalization is now undergoing a crisis of confidence. The pandemic has clearly highlighted the dangers of an economic globalization concerned only with the short-term individual interests of the wealthiest. The rise of social and societal inequalities, the critical weakening of public services, the permanence of autocratic systems and the lack of consistent environmental standards and global warming policies are dangerous situation for a peaceful world.

La pandémie a clairement mis en évidence les dangers d'une mondialisation économique préoccupée uniquement par les intérêts individuels à court terme des plus riches. La montée des inégalités sociales et sociétales, l'affaiblissement critique des services publics et l'absence de normes environnementales cohérentes et de politiques de lutte contre le réchauffement climatique sont autant de situations dangereuses pour un monde en paix.

Globalization, war, pandemic, wars, Ukraine, Russia, Europe

Globalisation, guerre, pandémie, guerres, Ukraine, Russie, Europe

After the collapse of the USSR, Francis Fukuyama (1989; 1996) thought that the history of humanity will end when a universal consensus on democracy deletes ideological conflicts. Russia's opening to democracy and market economy, as well as China's accession to the World Trade Organization, the development of economic interdependence and the States application of the neo-classical "economic science" for a peaceful globalization system seemed to be precursor events confirming the end of History thesis. In the same vein, most economists remained uninterested in the economic analysis of war, as if it did not really fit into the economic order of globalization liberalism (Fontanel, 1984; Coulomb, Fontanel, 2013; Brunat, Fontanel, 2021).

However, today, international terrorism, wars, economic war, financial crisis, theocratic and autocratic states and the permanence of world poverty and misery show that the end of wars are not yet on the agenda of humanity.

In 2014, Ukraine's move towards NATO membership convinced the Kremlin that the USA wanted permanently weakened Russia's power and civilization. Under these conditions, Putin's skillful intervention allowed Russia to completely annex Crimea on questionable "democratic" and historical grounds. The result was the implementation of international economic sanctions, but not a strict blockade, because the Russian energy dependence of European Union (Fontanel, 2019). In 2018, Donald Trump had warned Germany and European Union about the risks of dependence on an imperialist and warrior Russia, but this warning was rejected on the altar of American interests in shale gas supply.

2) The Covid-19 pandemic has given a blow to the perception of the economic globalization as the most efficient system to improve world economic performance. Some factors explain this new perception:

- First, citizens and states have realized that unexpected factors, such as a pandemic, could suddenly fragilize the economic system.

International competition leads to a reduction of national public spending, infrastructures and therefore the resilience of all national security systems and then national hospital. Profit and financial speculation deal with short, even very short-term issues, and neglect the infrastructure necessary for community life.

- The pandemic has created an economic and public health crisis that has weakened all states, except the energy producing and exporting countries, creating new product scarcities. Because of the international fractioning of the value of goods and services, when a country must, for public health reason, confine its population and therefore its workers, the resulting lack of production leads to a cut in the chain of values and deteriorates the efficiency of the world globalized productive systems. In some situations, States do not hesitate to apply the beggar-thy-neighbor strategy, even with political partners. Solidarity is not in the genes of the market economy. Moreover, the “save yourself” policy (“sauve qui peut” in French) is then the State priority that favors the most developed and richest countries (Rodrick, 1997; Guilhaudis, Fontanel, 2019).

- Then, for public health, all governments want to ensure that their people are served as quickly as possible with medicines or vaccines. The economic potential of the states will be put into action and the first remedies will be provided to those who can afford them.

In this context, China and even Russia have been sufficiently skillful with their donations or availability of vaccines, even though they are not very effective, to highlight the interest of autocracies in responding rapidly to their requests for the fight against the pandemic. Certainly today, the war in Ukraine and the pandemic development in China call into question these achievements, but a lot of developing countries still believe more in solidarity with autocracies than with Western democracies.

The old imperialist and colonialist memories are coming back into the surface of the present time.

- Finally, there is an international increase in discontent, a loss of confidence and a wave of collective pessimism. This situation is conducive to national civil riots, or to diplomatic and armed conflicts between states.

In democratic countries, many safety nets exist to prevent the country from going to war. This is much less true for autocratic countries.

3) What are the connections between the pandemic and the war in Ukraine?

During the period of the epidemic and economic crises, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, aware of its military strength, but also of Europe's dependence on its gas and oil supply.

At the beginning of 2022, the geoeconomic situation offers a judicious window of opportunity to counteract the advance of the liberal democracies towards the former territories of the USSR, taking into account:

- First, the lack of political courage of the Kiev government in the face of the power of the Russian army in the annexation of Crimea,
- Then, the nuclear arms threats against a denuclearized Ukraine, in a time of a NATO crisis, which the French President considered in 2021 to be "brain dead",
- Third, the apparent weakness of solidarity between the States of the European Union, partly on the fight against the pandemic effects.
- Moreover, forth, in 2022, the Brexit crisis, the French presidential elections, the new German government, and the seemingly more moderate policies of Joe Biden's were important clues for a special action. Vladimir Putin thought that the time was right to act in his expansionist plans, that would lead to a sufficiently rapid military defeat of Ukraine, which would then sign an armistice before the Western camp could even agree to support a corrupted Ukrainian government. This strategy was similar to that of Crimea, the direct military intervention of Russia in addition.

In fact, the special operation turned out to be a military failure, as it was not quick enough to destroy the unexpected resistance of the

Ukrainian army and people. In this context, the Western and NATO diplomatic solidarity and the supply of increasingly sophisticated weapons thwarted Moscow's expansionist plans.

Liberal globalization is now undergoing a crisis of confidence. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has provoked a major energy crisis, of which the US shale gas is one of the winners, to the detriment of the European Union. Moreover, energy-intensive companies based in Europe could be tempted to relocate part of their activities to the USA. Moreover, in its fight for the reindustrialization of essential goods, Joe Biden decides to pursue a Keynesian and mercantilist policy, he partly abandons the rules of free trade, based on the argument of the country's national security in application of the so-called "Inflation Reduction Act" policy. In retaliation, Brussels has planned to conclude a similar "Buy European Act" for European companies. They are policies of reindustrialization and national production of essential goods such as medicines, semiconductors or the digital industry, with an expressed preference for a strong policy in favor of shore-friendship type.

Today, Xi Jing Ping, who prided itself on its good handling of the pandemic, is receiving the new China wave of pandemic like a boomerang, weakening its national and international notoriety. In order to enhance his image and power at the top of the state, he could engage China in a military operation, long claimed, against Taiwan. In this context, the Thucydides trap of global leadership between the USA and China cannot fail to worry the citizens of the world.

The pandemic has clearly highlighted the dangers of an economic globalization concerned only with the short-term individual interests of the wealthiest. The rise of social and societal inequalities, the critical weakening of public services and the lack of consistent environmental standards and global warming policies are dangerous situation for a peaceful world.

In conclusion, in 1611, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare warned humanity that, "Hell is empty, all the devils are here". Today, this sentence is still relevant.

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