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BLOG
— **POST**

SERIES:
IN THE FACE OF WAR (4/4)

A new world order?



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It is beyond doubt that the Russian attack on Ukraine marks a turning point in the history and stability of European order: more than 250,000 fatalities on both sides, the barbaric destruction of entire cities, war crimes, Europeans bewildered but united in their support for Ukraine, the spectacular rearmament of Germany and the EU, Russia's ostracism, the extension of NATO and the United States' massive commitment to supporting Kyiv. All this amounts to a genuine strategic revolution for the EU and its Member States. Can the same be said for the world order? Is the war in Ukraine such a radical break for the rest of the planet? Or on the contrary, is it an event that, while dramatic, will have repercussions limited solely to the European continent?

For relativists, who minimise the strategic implications of this war and view it as a predominantly European event, several arguments are worthy of consideration. Firstly, **the war in Ukraine did not create the rivalry between the US and China**: this has been growing for more than a decade, to become a defining element of the world order. While the war in Ukraine heightens this polarisation, under no circumstances is it the cause. Similarly, the division of the Global South into supporters of either camp - the West or Russia - is as old as the Cold War: at the time, each superpower was waging war in the Third World, be it in Africa, Asia or Latin America, through interposed satellites, while many other countries were attempting to stick to the more peaceful path of non-align-

ment. The UN and multilateralism have been paralysed for years, particularly when it comes to security, with Americans, Russians and Chinese regularly using their vetoes every time they do not like a resolution. Lastly, as regards economic globalisation, the world goes on, with an intensive integration of financial markets, an upsurge in communications and the breakthrough of tremendous technological revolutions. **Western sanctions imposed on Russia do not herald the end of globalisation.** At most, they result in a redistribution of global trade, with a Russian-Chinese axis that is greater than before and heightened vulnerability in some countries of the Global South, particularly in terms of food and energy.

For the *revolutionaries*, i.e. those who see the war in Ukraine as the emergence of a new strategic world order, other arguments are also valid. The most fundamental concerns China. In many ways, the war in Ukraine is turning this country into a European power: rumours of possible Chinese mediation are rife, Beijing even proposed a peace plan in February and its intercession to calm Vladimir Putin's nuclear posturing have been accepted with relief in the West. **Even though the vaunted "eternal friendship" between Beijing and Moscow makes China's position perfectly clear, the country won its status as a key power for its role in resolving a conflict in Europe, and this is a first.**

Another major change is that **ideology is once again at the forefront of the world's strategic structure.** US rhetoric has brought up the risk of a third world war between democracies and authoritarian states, a new cold war between "the West and the rest", remarks that Russia and China also love to make, without anyone knowing for sure whether the chicken or the egg came first in this matter. Rarely since the end of the Cold War - during which the fight between democracy and totalitarianism was the bedrock of the world's nuclear bipolarity - have we seen such radical ideology on either side. This could even impact trade relations between the US and China.

Lastly, the third new feature is in the South. **These countries of the South, or in other words half of the global population, are liberating themselves from any world order** and following their own path: neither subservient, nor allies, neither neutral nor hostile, they can be all this at once or separately, with or against the West. Their pragmatism, or cynicism, further heightens the radical shift of ideologies in both camps. Against this backdrop, is the desire to win the fight for influence in the Global South, as the West is attempting to, not more indicative of our disarray than our strategic relevance?

Where does the truth lie between these two opposing visions? Let us give Blaise Pascal the last word: "A strange justice that is bounded by a river! Orthodoxy on one side of the Pyrenees may be heresy on the other."

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