



## Today's world in macro-historical perspective

military-Earth thinking notebook

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**The reflections in progress in the framework of the new White Paper are visibly influenced by the so-called post-modern philosophy of rejection of systems of thought. The result is a vision of things that is not based on the deep and short-term past. The purpose of this fact sheet is therefore, very modestly, to place the current debates in the long term and to call on major historical and economic theories (Toynbee, Kennedy, Kondratiev) to shed original light on the subject.**

### **Chinese universal state and Western hegemonic powers**

In the 14th century, the Old World was dominated by two models: the Chinese Empire of the Song Dynasty and the Christian West. Between these two poles, neither of which had sufficient critical power to impose itself on the other, there were secondary powers (Persia, Indian kingdoms, Moscovia, the Turkish Empire) and outside this international system entire areas were more or less "outside history" (sub-Saharan Africa, America)[1]. These two great centres of power are of very different natures that make it possible to illustrate two theories of political evolution.

The Chinese empire is a "universal state" in the sense of the British historian Arnold Toynbee, i.e. it has succeeded in go beyond the stage of competition between the "Fighting Kingdoms" to unify its cultural space under the aegis of a central political power [2]. Imperial China thus achieved stability, but at the price of losing a certain dynamism through lack of competition. The corpus of strategic, philosophical or political thought is thus fixed before the unification of the 3rd century BC<sup>and</sup> only then evolves through refinement. The war continues but not according to a "horizontal" pattern between competing states but "vertical" between a dominant centre and peripheral provinces that must be kept in "order" [3]. In 1700, Chinese GDP accounted for 22% of world GDP.

Meanwhile, Europe remained at the stage of "warring kingdoms" in permanent competition for local hegemony. This competition, which regularly brings the continent to

the brink of complete ruin, is also a powerful engine that pushes nations to seek new resources outside Europe, in Africa, India and especially in the Americas. These great discoveries first bring fortune and primacy to Portugal and Spain, until, according to the process described by Paul Kennedy, strategic necessities and the burden of military spending slow them down. A more dynamic Western challenger then comes to the fore until it in turn reaches "strategic overexpansion" and declines (Netherlands, France, United Kingdom) [4].

4] More generally, the wealth capital acquired in the Americas allows the major European nations to "take off" industrially and, while continuing to compete, to surpass in power all the other states of the world, including the Chinese Empire. 5] This process of competition among increasingly powerful nations ended with the "European apocalypse of 1914-1945[6]" and the widening of the competition between the major European nations. Western-style" competition to the whole world, with the United States as the dominant power and the USSR and then, more modestly, Japan as competitors. In the mid-1980s, this new great power in turn presented the symptoms of breathlessness described by Kennedy, since the US military budget reached 6.5% of GDP[7]. 7] The United States, which accounted for 50% of world GDP in 1945, now represents only 25% and the trade and budget deficits are enormous. The American decline seems inevitable.

## **From American decline to "hyperpower"...**

The United States was finally saved internally by reforming the production apparatus, massive investment in high technology and then the beginning of financial trade liberalization, and externally by two "divine surprises": the breakdown of the Japanese economy and above all the implosion of the USSR. At the same time, China is in the midst of a post-Maoist transition and the European Union lacks political coherence. The EU has no political coherence, so they are suddenly and abruptly moving to the status of a "hyper-power", i.e. a Toynsian "universal state" whose hegemony can be extended to the whole world.

By playing hard power (Gulf 1991, Bosnia 1995) and above all soft power (economic control by the IMF, WTO or World Bank, strategic control by NATO, media control, means of surveillance, etc.), they are able to take advantage of their own power and to make their own decisions., the United States is shaping a "new world order" according to its principles, values and interests. It occupies the "middle", in the manner of classical China, surrounded by second allied powers and "new barbarians" on the periphery.

This new world, like that of the apogee of Western competition at the beginning of the 20th century, is <sup>opened and unified</sup> by a series of commercial, media, human and financial flows that very quickly provoke three kinds of mutually nourishing tensions. The first are political, with a process of democratization that places many states in the intermediate stage where they have lost the stability of authoritarianism without yet having the stability of the established democracies' play of powers and counter-powers. In this fragile context, the new capitalism behaves like a single, gigantic financial institution (since all behaviours converge) imposing itself on a fragmented productive apparatus, with the sole objective of enriching 300 million shareholders (many of them American). The result is great volatility of capital in search of short-term profits, a source of violent crises[8], and strong pressure on wages, a source of social tensions. Geographically, the process favours the US financial system (which attracts capital) and the peripheral countries that provide the physical productive apparatus (and attract investment)[9]. 9] Socially, this new capitalism benefits much more the speculative class than the productive class. The Marxist vision of exploitation of labour by capital thus tends to become a reality in the 21st

century[10]. The last source of tension comes finally from the gap between the "Western-centric" (and even American-centric) vision omnipresent in the media around the world and the real life of the great majority of humanity.

All these tensions have eventually led to a resurgence of nationalism and the formation of a "front of refusal", particularly in South America and Russia. They have also created a multitude of "pockets of anger" [11], giant shantytowns, ghettos, poor suburbs, occupied territories, tribal areas, where those left behind by globalization and those rebelling against their state and/or dominant Western values come together. These pockets proliferate in peripheral regions as well as in rich countries, right up to the very centre (the "inner proletariat", often of immigrant origin, to which Toynbee refers), forming a network linked by the flows of globalization. These areas become cancer metastases when they are home to rebel NGOs, with various profiles from mafias to proto-states, which act as predators or in reaction to what they perceive as aggression.

### **American vertical wars**

In this context, the phase of seduction of the American "universal state" quickly gave way to a phase of coercion which, at the time, was not so easy. In this context, the phase of seduction of the American "universal state" quickly gave way to a phase of coercion which, like classic China, is much more akin to global "policing" than to "horizontal" inter-state confrontations. In fact, from 1999 onwards, the failing soft power is increasingly giving way to hard power, with, of course, an acceleration after the shock and the instrumentalization of the attacks of September 11, 2001[12]. The number of conflicts in the world, which tended to decrease in the early 1990s, is now on the rise again, as is military spending.

In this acceleration of the coercion-reaction cycle, the Americans are now in trouble. The desire to shape the Middle East has secreted adversaries who practice total war locally and have found the flaws of an American military tool directly inherited from the Cold War and more designed for Clausewitzian horizontal wars. The United States thus finds itself largely powerless against organisations such as the Taliban, the Mahdi Army, or the Consultative Council of the Mujahideen of Iraq, while one of its main allies, Israel, is defeated by Hezbollah in July 2006.

This stalemate comes at a time when the American military weight (50% of world spending) is now almost double its economic weight (27% of world GDP, a figure that is on the decline). These military expenses (€1,483 per American, including 400 for the war in Iraq, compared to 479 for a Frenchman), to which must be added the indirect costs of the war in Iraq (more than 2,000 billion dollars according to the economist Joseph Stiglitz), are beginning to approach the threshold of running out of steam.

### **The new "warring kingdoms".**

This beginning of "strategic overexpansion" comes at a time when the challengers to hegemony are beginning to emerge again. This beginning of "strategic overexpansion" comes at a time when the challengers to hegemony are beginning to appear again, as a result of the effects, both positive and negative, of American globalization and thanks to a reversal of the Kondratiev cycle[13] which favors them economically[14]. 14] As at the end of the 19th century, globalization, more a consequence than a cause of a weakening of States, has had the effect of awakening nationalisms. Thus we see the reappearance of the old empires, Russian and Chinese, but also forgotten powers like India and the new

rich like Brazil. Their very strong growth is accompanied by a parallel increase in the instruments of power. The Russian and Chinese military budgets are thus evolving at the rate of a doubling every five years.

We are also seeing the emergence of new blocs made up of a centre, a "near abroad" in the Russian sense, and peripheral interests. These will inevitably interfere and thus, especially in a context of scarce resources and acute ecological problems, lead to clashes. Since each of these blocs has a nuclear arsenal, the most likely scenario is a return to a system of "warring kingdoms" in the form of a "multipolar cold war". with the coexistence of non-violent horizontal confrontations (e.g. the oil race in the far north) and vertical wars for the maintenance of order and interests (e.g. Chechnya). As during the first Cold War, these two axes will often merge in a subtle play<sup>[15]</sup>.

15] The attitude of the United States will then be decisive. They still have a very favourable power gap<sup>[16]</sup> but this is tending to narrow. To maintain it, they have engaged in a double military effort to maintain a clear "horizontal" superiority over potential rivals (through the anti-missile shield, for example) and "vertical" superiority for the protection of their interests and values. As this effort risks tipping them definitively into a situation of "over-expansion", they will no doubt be led to reconsider the strategic sterilisation they have imposed on their allies in order to induce them to contribute more actively to a common defence of the West.

### **What is France's place in the new Cold War?**

A good student of the globalization of the 1990s, the European Union combined Anglo-Saxon free trade with Nordic neutrality. It is now going against the tide of a history that, far from being over, sees the return of powers with national economic and strategic policies.

A former superpower and at one time the driving force behind the idea of "Europe as a power" (on condition that it takes the leadership), France has become a frustrated nation, mired in an apolitical Europe under a protectorate. It now represents only 1% of the population, 4.6% of GDP, 4.3% of research spending and 3.6% of the world's military spending<sup>[17]</sup>, figures that are declining because its demographic and economic growth rates are lower than the rest of the world. The "insolent nation", capable of building two colonial empires and repeatedly challenging the whole of Europe, is now a victim of the "Gulliver effect", too small in comparison with the American giant and too big and heavy in comparison with the rapidly growing Lilliputians.

However, this paralysing context is likely to change under pressure from extra-Western competitors. Everything seems to indicate that the world of 2030, which corresponds to the beginning of the Kondratiev cycle reversal, will be very tense. The power differential between the United States and the "challengers" will then be at its lowest, while ecological and resource distribution problems will be acute. If they want to act again on an outside world to which they are connected by multiple vital flows, European countries will have to stop being the only ones to disarm. They will no doubt be prompted to do so by the Americans themselves in the name of Western solidarity and as in the days when fear of the USSR was the EU's best cement.

France will have an eminent role to play in this European strategic turnaround if it is the first to propose a new model of military action that would impose itself as a norm. This is not incompatible with current budgetary conditions, as the Soviet and German examples of the 1920s show that new forms of warfare can be imagined before the corresponding means are available. However, this presupposes a considerable intellectual effort,

following the example of the "Military Enlightenment" of the mid-18th century or the turmoil at <sup>the</sup> end of the Second World War. This requires considerable intellectual effort, as in the case of the "Military Enlightenment" of the mid-eighteenth century or the turmoil at the end of the following century, which stemmed from a profound doubt and was at the origin of the last two great epics in which the French army was admired the world over: the Napoleonic Empire and the victory of 1918.

1| Christian Grataloup, Géohistoire de la mondialisation, Armand Colin, 2007.

2| Arnold Toynbee, L'Histoire, Payot, 1996.

3| Bernard Wicht, War and Hegemony, Georg, Geneva, 2002.

4| Paul Kennedy, Birth and Decline of the Great Powers: Economic Transformations and Military Conflicts between 1500 and 2000, Payot, 1991.

5| The gap between the average per capita income of the richest European country and that of the poorest country in the world thus went from 1 to 5 in 1700 to a ratio of 1 to 400 today.

6| By analogy with René Girard's thesis in Achever Clausewitz .

7| Even so, the United States was forced to ask Germany and Japan for financial aid to finance the first Gulf War.

8 | EMS crises, Latin American, Russian, Asian, e-economy breakdown, subprimes.

9| Between these two "pumps", the EU and Japan are struggling. French growth averages 1.88% per year, compared to 3.45% for the United States and much higher for China, India and, more recently, Russia.

10| The share of profits now accounts for 40% of French national income (compared to 60% for wages), compared to 29% in 1982, a shortfall of 130 billion euros for household consumption and thus the loss of 1% growth per year. Michel Rocard, interview in Le nouvel observateur, 13 December 2007.

11| Arjun Appaduri, Géographie de la colère, Payot, 2007.

12| Jacques Sapir, Le XXIème siècle fait peau neuve, Perspectives républicaines, June 2007.

13| Succession of "30 glorious" (cycle A) and "30 pitiful". (cycle B).

14| The Kondratiev cycles are periods of tension and crisis (wars 1865-1870; Great Depression 1893; First World War; Second World War; period 1968-1973; early 2000s).

15| With, for example, the delivery of arms to armed NGOs. We have seen, for example, what could result from Hezbollah's possession of modern Russian anti-tank weapons.

16| With in particular a research and development effort representing 43% of the world total.

17| At the height of its relative power, towards the end of the 17th century, France represented about 4.5% of the population, 10% of the GDP and 15% of the world's military expenditure.

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