

## *Preface*

In what sense can we speak about a “Crisis of the Order” – understood as a crisis of the global balance among the powers and the institutions and alliances that represent it?

The heart of the matter is China. Since the end of the second imperialist world war there has never been a single rising power, or in any case one that has not been part of the system of dominant alliances, which has had an economic strength comparable to that of the leading power, the United States, and which has intended to accompany its own rise by building up a similar military strength.

The USSR pursued strategic- military parity with the United States, but its economic strength was a fraction of America’s, and indeed it crashed in 1991 also because of a rearmament race that had become unsustainable.

Germany and Japan, the main rising powers in the thirty years of the post-war “economic miracles”, did not have the United States’ dimensions, were and still are part of its system of alliances, and in any case for a long time were branded as defecate powers in the Second World War; this is why they accepted forced containment of their military potential, starting from renunciation of nuclear weapons.

The European Union has continental dimensions that are undoubtedly comparable to America’s: in the economic, commercial, regulatory and *monetary arms* field it fights on an equal footing. But its combination of federal, confederal and national powers has never reached an appreciable level of military centralisation. Its openly declared aim is a European defence identity that is organically tied to the United States as NATO’s “European pillar”, and this intention has also been pursued in the last 20 years with determination and fluctuating results.

In this sense, the contention looming ahead as a result of China’s imperialist rise has had no precedent for more than 70 years, i.e., since global relations took shape around the Atlantic coalition led by the United States and the Bretton Woods multilateral institutions. This is, then, the “Crisis of the Order”.

Can a precedent be sought at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Kaiser Wilhelm II’s Germany and, de facto, the United States challenged

the British Empire? Or in the 1930s, when Hitler's Germany and Japan led to the *breakdown of order* that was the imperialist Second World War? A concise answer can be sought in the field of economic strength.

Paul Kennedy is the author of a study on power relations that has become a classic of the realist school, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. One of the most accurate indicators of the relationship between economic strength and military power is the weight of manufacturing. If we look at the share of the world's manufacturing production, according to Paul Bairoch's estimates in 1913, the United States had 32%, Germany 14.8%, Britain 13.6%, France 6.1%, and Russia 8.2%. According to Hal Hillmann's figures, the 1937 ratios saw the United States at 35.1%, Britain at 9.4%, Germany at 11.4%, France at 4.5%, the USSR at 14.1%, and Japan at 3.5%.

In a comparison with today's proportions, according to the World Bank, in 2018 China had 28% of the world's manufacturing added value, the European Union 17%, the United States also 17%, Japan 7%, and Korea and India 3%.

Interviewed in *Die Welt*, Henry Kissinger argues that the Chinese challenge is unprecedented:

“For the first time in its history, America is facing a country that has potentially comparable economic capacities and a historical record of great ability in dealing with international affairs.”

We can add that, in the field of economic strength and its proportions, there is a precise precedent in the rise of America and its taking the place of the British Empire in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The succession passed through two world wars and Europe's self-destruction.

Almost 20 years ago, our evaluation of a *new strategic phase* in the world contention was based on our analysis of the fundamental lines of imperialist development, some facts that revealed it, and the foreseeable times for that process. *The facts* were China's membership of the WTO, the single currency in Europe, the launching of the Convention for the European Constitution and the “war by choice” waged in 2003 by America in the Persian Gulf with the aim of conditioning Beijing. *The tendencies* were embodied precisely in China and Europe. A new imperialist power, the Chinese giant, was emerging from what had once been a “backward area”, according to our *1957 Theses*. And since the world contention was becoming a confrontation between continental forces, Europe was pushed to make a leap forward in the centralisation of its powers.

The *times* were tied to the rhythms of Chinese development, driven by the 1% share of its population that left the countryside every year to crowd into the new urban concentrations: within the timespan of one generation, China would have established itself definitively as an imperialist power.