

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Teodor FRUNZETI,

Today's world is very close to the new millennium's beginning of a new age. Stimulated by the end of the Cold War, the number and the importance of the changes to which we have been witnesses or participants in the last 10 years were overwhelming. The conflict between U.S.A and U.R.S.S., which practically gave colour to each dimension of the political, economical and social aspects of the international politics for half a century got to an end. Berlin's wall crashed, Soviet Union came to nought, the comunism collapsed, Germany reunified and the European Union and NATO are in course of widening. Even more, democracy spread itself in many parts of the world, and international economic changes increased and intensified, reaching an unreachable level yet.

In spite of all these, the hope that the world after the end of the Cold War will be a more peaceful one shattered, many conflicts bursting out or becomming active again in various areas of the war, especially

in the developing countries. How can we better understand the political convulsions of the international system with which we come across almost every day? How can we possibly anticipate their future meaning? It would be better to begin with an estimation of the interaction between older ideas and theories and recent events, or in course of development. As the philosopher George Santayana, said "Those who can not remember the past are compelled to repeat its mistakes". In the same way, the British ex-prime-minister Winston Churchil remarked "The more you look back the more you will see ahead".

That is why, to understand the dramatic changes which occur nowadays in world politics and how these will model the future, we have to analyse them in a broader context, examining the way in which the international political system has changed, and the way in which its characteristic features resisted to the changes.

Continuity, Change and Cyclicity in International Politics

Every historical period is marked by a certain degree of change. Now the rythm of the changes seems much quicker and the consequences are deeper than ever. To many analysts, the real cascade of events on the

verge of the third millennium, suggests that a reorganization having a revolutionary character is on the brink of occuring in the international system. The many integrative tendencies suggest this possibility. The

countries of the world became closer because of some fields like communications the change of ideas, economic changes, international security and peace problems. Even the integrative tendencies suggest the reorganization.

The end of the stability period imposed by the bipolar distribution of the power between U.S.A. and U.R.S.S. and their allies (an international system which has two prevailing centers of power), the proliferation of the conventional armament, of the mass-destructive and of the unconventional one, the total deterioration of the natural environment, the reappearance and intensification of the nationalism and ethnical conflicts all lead us towards the image of the reorganization based on disorder.

The simultaneous occurrence of two opposing tendencies, integrative and desintegrative suggest a transformation in the world politics equally important to those that followed the first and the second World War, radically changing the previous political systems.

How can we determine if a characteristic tendency that occurred in the international relations will lead to a new international system? The politician Stanley Hoffman affirms that in order to have a new international system we should get a new answer for each of the following three questions¹:

1) which are the basic units of the system? (for example the national states, or transnational religious movements);

2) which are the predominant political objectives which these units intend to have taking each other into account? (for example territorial conquests, or welfare getting through economical changes);

3) what these units can do to each other, using their military and economic ability?

These criteria would lead us to the conclusion that today a new international system is already in course of making up. First of all, new economical partnership relations were constituted and consolidated in Western Europe, North America, South East Asia and in Pacific area, and these economic unions behave today as unitary entities, independent actors on the world arena, competing with each other. Even more the international organizations as for example the European Union, try their strengths competing with individual states. Transnational religious movements as for example Islamic fundamentalism, are in competition, defy the state system in itself (a system based on national states, independent and sovereign political units, whose citizens perceive themselves unified by language identity, culture, ethnic entities have been desintegrated in smaller units.

Secondly the territorial conquests are no more the primordial objective of the external politics of most of the states. Besides the stress has changed from traditional - military methods of exercising the influence to economical means and instruments. At the same time, the ideological competition between capitalism and communism is no longer a touchstone in international politics.

Thirdly the proliferation of military technology fundamentally modified the way in which the states may act one over the other. The great powers no more exercise an exclusive control over the most destructive armament systems.

Image and Reality in the International Politics

Each of us already has a moulded image of the world politics explicit or implicit conscious or subconscious.

This is but a simplified image of reality, exaggerating certain aspects of the real world, and ignoring the others.

That is why, we may say that we live in a world defined by our own expectances and images.

Many of the images of the political reality of the world may be built on illusion and wrong conceptions. Even images which now are accurate may easily become obsolete if our image about the world does not succeed in considering the changes that occur permanently.

Many of us, including the politicians, even those who take part in the decision aparata, look for the information which strengthen the preexisting beliefs about the

world, assimilating new data and information to a familiar preexisting image, equalizing what we think and what we know, and denying the information which deny former expectancies.

At the same time, there is the risk of generating conclusions which are legitimate only for some isolated individuals, and to apply them to some collectivities, even to entire nations. The images which political leaders have built about the historical circumstances, predispose them to adopt a certain partisan position in spite of the objective facts.

The Forces and Actors of the International System and the Levels of Analysis

In order to prognosticate what forces will dominate the future, we should think in multicausative terms. No tendency shows isolated, but simultaneously interact with other tendencies of the forces on the international arena.

The future is influenced by many dominant tendencies, each connected with the others in a net of connections.

Jointly, all these may produce stability by inhibiting the impact of the structures of a single force. But if the forces act convergently, their combined effect may speed the rythm and scope of the changes in world politics.

In approaching the international politics there is a macropolitic perspective which turns the attention to:

1) characteristics, the abilities and interests of the main "actors" in the world politics (nations, states and various non stal entities taking part in the international affairs);

2) the main problems concerning the international welfare and security which enters the total agenda;

3) the main directions of the cooperation which influences the interaction between actors and problems.

Gradually analysing these interactions, we find out why the politics -

the exercising of certain influences which affect the distribution of some particular values as for example the power, the prestige the welfare - is one of the most disputed aspects of the international affairs².

The macropolitic perspective does not turn our attention to the interaction between change and continuity at the beginning of a new millennium, but it avoids to billet every phenomena, country, individual or any transitive subject, the significance of which in a long time may diminish. On the other hand, is identified the behaviour which joins the total tendencies showing coherence, coresponding to the tendencies and forces which affect, in a quantifiable measure the life standard at global level.

Many analysis of international relations affirm that international politic state may be better understood by concentrating on one or many of the three levels. Known under the name of levels of analysis this clasification includes: *a.* the individuals; *b.* states, or other politic actors; *c.* the international system in itself.

The individual level of analysis concerns the individual characteristics of human beings, including the middle citizen whose behaviour has important political consequences and whose responsibilities are

important in making the decision - or at least influence - on behalf of the states or other actors. Here we may localize, for example the impact of the images which every individual forms as far as his political attitude, beliefs and behaviour are concerned.

The national level of analysis refers to the ability of authoritative decision which reigns the processes of external politics of the states and the attributes of these states (for example the type of the politic system and the level of economic and military power), which together models and limits the leader's power of decision. The processes through which the states make decisions concerning war and peace, the ability of the states to fulfil these decisions, for example, enter the national level of analysis.

The systemic level of analysis refers to the interaction of the total actors (states

and non states) whose behaviour, finally models the international political system and the levels of conflict and cooperation which characterize the international politics. The ability of the rich states to impose their will and to dictate to poor states the way of behaving, enter the systemic level of analysis. O.N.U.'s ability or inability to maintain the international peace enters the same level.

Differentiating the levels of analysis is important for emphasizing that there is not but a single source of the transformations that occur in the world politics. Because the system of relations and interconnections occur from one level to the other, the tendencies and transformations that occur in the political world are affected both by the forces that operate at each level and by the interactions that occur between them.

Important Questions at the end of the Second Millennium

A. Is the concept of state obsolete?

The state based on its own territory, had been the main actor in the international politics for more than three centuries.

The reappearance of nationalism as an important force in the international arena in many regions of the world, prove the tendency of the various movements of national liberation to reach statehood "while the main course of the action of the ethnonationalist movements is to protect the security of their own national existence within the area of existence of that particular nation.

Although in some respects the state is still thriving, in some others it is on the verge of dying as the French political scientist Pierre Hasner estimates, the state no more being able to fulfil some of the most habitual tasks³. In fact some political scientists proclaimed the end of the state and concluded that the sovereignty of the states rapidly ruined because of the internal and external defiances.

A very large variety of forces made more and more difficult for the states to maintain the power exerted over their own citizens, and to send forth decisions which were considered exclusively their prerogatives. Among these forces mention should be made of the revolution in communications, the emergence of transnational companies, the increasing wave of emigration towards the economically developed states, the economic fitting in and the totalization of economic problems and those of the environment.

The increasing lack of control, the inability to solve the important problems and even the fact that for few states the boundaries traced out between the interests of various groups of citizens like the statal boundaries coincide with the boundaries between the ethnic groups living in those states, had increased the lack of trust in the political leaders and in the state institutions in many countries of the world. The governments in their turn, are perceived as

not representing the interests, not giving security and not providing the welfare of the ones they govern. As a result, citizens look somewhere else for spokesmen for their own opinions, solutions for solving their needs, ruining more the authority of the states⁴.

Can the states cope with the present defiances? The political scientist expresses the idea that societies produce institutions to face the problems and answer certain human needs.

When they are no longer able to solve these problems, these institutions must disappear. Today, when the management abilities of states, disregarding their way of governing, no longer inspire trust, the future of the states as institutions are placed under question.

B. Is Independence a Solution or a Trap?

The total independence is the base of external defiances which nowadays states have to cope with. The more independence increases the more their management capacity reduces and their exercise area gets narrower.

From a certain perspective, the states realization of having a common destiny, together with the progressive reduction of the ability to solve total problems, which they have to face using only internal, national means, can energize the effort of cessation, or at least of reducing the competition in the international arena. In this perspective the conflict will regress while fewer and fewer states would be able to free themselves of the interdependence connections, which unify and maintain them as a whole. Therefore, we should regard as a positive evolution, the continuous strengthening of connections between the states which maintain together the fragile consistency of the international relations.

From another perspective, a more pessimistic one than the first, the interdependency will not lead to a transnational cooperation.

Dependency and mutual contacts will furnish the enemy relations between states and not the friendly ones, no matter how beneficent the latter could be.

If the absence of a total community will perpetuate it will assure the perpetuity of international anarchy and that of nostalgia for a much more independent state.

In the conditions in which the economic relations will worsen the political relations more than we may think, the harsh competition, the decrease of natural resources and the renaissance of the nationalism, the estranging tendency from the foreign economies could become irresistible. This could materialize in the setting of some barriers against international economic changes, with negative consequences both in the stability of national systems and in the national one and the population's welfare.

At the same time, the tendency to obtain political or economical benefits by using military force or by protective economic measures will show down continuously. That is why, the consolidation of total interdependency is not exclusively a beneficial consequences generator, creating at the same time a tension which may degenerate into conflicts.

C. Technological Development a Blessing or a Burden?

The dynamic of totalization is determined by technology which is the catalyzer of the changes in international politics. The consequences are not estimated for sure. Technological development, just like interdependence may solve certain problems but may cause others. As the Nobel Prize laureat Vasile Leontief has warned ever since 1987: "Technology is now, be it good, or be it bad, the main moving force exceeding in rythm the changes in economy, politics and society in general as any force which can not be limited by artificial obstacles, the new technologies may turn us into the owners of some unhoped benefits, but at the

same time they may produce unredeemable damages”

Not only that technological development created new methods of preventing the diseases but it also assures the increasing of the armament's ability of destruction.

Discoveries in microelectronics, the processing of information transports, production of energy, agriculture, medicine and biotechnology profoundly affect the lives of the inhabitants of our planet and mould our future.

Will geopolitics be replaced by geoeconomy?

Along modern history the states have been the dominant political actors in the interactive politics and they were competing (from military point of view) each other for prevalence in the international hierarchy of power. For over three hundred years, international politics has generally been a series of war preparations, military operations and activities of rebuilding and reconstruction after the end of the wars.

Military power had been regarded as a source of prestige and influence, and military conquest became a means of winning a certain predominant position from an economical and political point of view.

According to some authors the next area of confrontation in the international politics will center upon economic problems. The nations' destinies will be determined by the commercial competitions and not by military conquests. If the problems of geoeconomy wealth and welfare became more important than geopolitics conventional problems (the distribution of political and military power) is the international politics promoted by various states expected to change?

If wealth is transformed into political power, national pride and even ultranationalism may generate competition.

Even economic interdependence and tight commercial relationships may decay in economic disputes and political rivalry. No doubt, the apparent change of priorities towards the economic

All of these have unified the Earth, in a common market and a common culture, at the same time paradoxically reducing the citizen's and communities spirit as some political scientists assert⁵.

The catalyzers represented by the new technologies need a constructive and competent management but could this be achieved in a world in which the antagonistic tendencies (integrative and desintegrative) occur with equal force?

dimension of the international politics is able to mould the total power distribution in the XXIst century. This change will probably speed the degree of malleability of national boundaries and the homogeneity of commercial product offered to a market more and more submitted to an entire integration.

In what resides the human welfare on a planet whose ecological equilibrium is so fragile?

The utterance, once very popular in the west referring to the “limits of growing” - the belief that people can not endlessly intensify their productive ability - had been replaced by the utterance “the growth of limits which stresses upon the going on of development”. So, the development which may be sustained has also the significance of living on a planet whose health has to become a chapter to be continuously taken into account.

The national gross product - the entire value of the goods and services done by a nation in a specific period of time usually a year - is the common measure of the economic welfare all over the world.

The human welfare has other dimensions besides the economic ones, but it is still determined by the economic element. The more powerful an economy is, the more significant its contribution to the human welfare, is according to Daily and Cobb⁶. The increasing of economic activity

of a certain state has a remarkable significance for the poor states as compared to the rich ones. For the inhabitants of the third world, the increasing of the national gross product means more food, better living conditions, the improvement of education conditions and the growing of the living standard. At the same time most of the people living in the developed countries already enjoy these basic needs. As a conclusion, the supplementary incomes which they might have do not concern the satisfaction of certain basic needs but the non-essential (non vital) fields.

The total impact of the population's as well as the continuous struggle for economic increasing have an increased scope.

The population of poor countries has an almost insignificant contribution to the production of goods and services, but require less of the natural assets of the Earth, while the population of rich countries in order to be able to maintain and improve the living standard substantially contribute to the exhaustion of the natural resources and to the pollution of the environment. In both cases the continuous growth of population has a negative effect... For poor societies, because it inhibits the growing of the income, for rich societies because it consists in a real burden for the delicate ecological system of the Earth.

The exploitation and the unlimited consumption of the resources without taking into account the responsibility for the future is in fact a way of self destruction.

These ideas are a challenge addressed to the basis of the western civilization.

Although the continuous development is the most realistic prognosis for the next period of time, this, as well as the increasing of the wealth and welfare at a total and local level needs a real concern not only for the economic development but also for the exhaustion of natural resources, the spoiling of natural environment and for the value of freedom⁷.

Is there any alternative to this situation? Can the growth in a finite world be infinite? For how long can the finite resources of energy sustain an uncontrolled consumption before vehicles and industry stop and the lights of the great city turn off? How many pollutions can the atmosphere of the Earth absorb before the irremediable spoiling of the environment? How many people can feed an ecosystem in a delicate equilibrium if not even in a critical stage?

The understanding of nowadays world's problems needs the desire to face an extremely complex situation. The defiance is hard to accept and even disheartening but reward is equally worth the effort. The ability of human species to image an encouraging future is related to our ability to develop complex ideas, to liberate ourselves from the motionlessness of the anchoring in the past, to develop an investigative attitude about the perspectives of the realities of the international system.

NOTES

¹ Hoffman, Stanley, "International System and International Law", pp. 205-237, in Klaus Knorr and Sidney Verba (eds.), *The International System*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1961.

² Charles W. Kegley Jr., Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics*, Sixth Edition, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1997, p. 10.

³ Hasner, Pierre, "The Nations State in the Nuclear Age", *Survey* 67 (April), 1968, pp. 3-27.

⁴ Stanley Foundation, *The U.N. Role in Intervention*, Muscatine, Iowa, 1993.

⁵ Michael W. Blumenthal, "The World Economy and Technological Change", in *Foreign Affairs*, 1998, nr. 66, pp. 529-550.

⁶ Herman E. Doly, John B. Cobb, *For the Common Good*, Beacon Press Boston, 1989.

⁷ The United Nation Program for Development, 1993.