

An Unstable International System

When I was in high school, my father told me about the tense situation in October 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. It was 13 days of anguish and tension experienced by humankind until the Soviet Union decided to stop the construction of missile bases in Cuba and the United States promised not to invade the island to remove the socialist government of Fidel Castro.

60 years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, humanity is once again experiencing the risk of nuclear war, in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since the beginning of the Russian attack on Ukrainian soil, Putin and his close associates have been threatening the United States and Europe with the use of nuclear weapons under the argument of protecting Russia's territorial integrity, although the whole world knows that it was Putin, imbued with his tsarist domination mentality, who violated the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Unlike the short-time Cuban Missile Crisis, the tension caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been going on for eight months and has had a strong impact on energy and food prices due to sanctions imposed on Russia by the US, Europe and other countries. This conflict, coupled with the disastrous impact of the pandemic, has also caused instability in several G-7 countries, which play an important role in keeping the balance of the international system created after World War II.

In this regard, we observe a United States with a high level of polarization between the two traditional parties, Republicans and Democrats, exacerbated by the anti-system discourse of Donald Trump, who to date has not accepted his defeat in the 2020 elections. But most worrisome, Trump has managed to position Republican candidates for the congressional and senate midterm elections in November of this year, on the grounds that the 2020 election was fraudulent and denying the illegal storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, by mobs stirred up by him.

Although the countries' immediate concern is the war in Ukraine, there is also concern about potential political instability in the United States in the near future. Let's not forget that the United States already had a civil war over the issue of slavery, and the reality is that that war never ended, but remained latent in racist laws such as Jim Crow and other forms of racial discrimination for much of the twentieth century.

Moreover, other sensitive issues such as abortion and gender identity or ideology, advanced by progressive and left-wing sectors of the United States, have generated a deep division in American society, while a considerable group of the American radical right-wing defends strict immigration policies and promotes the theory of racial replacement, cultural cancellation and other baseless government conspiracy theories, but amplified on social media.

Undoubtedly, nations emerge based on common values and objectives, but when people stop believing in those values and irreconcilable issues arise within society, nations enter into anarchy and decadence, driven by the actions of extreme ideologies or fanatical religious groups that end up disintegrating the social fabric.

Looking at the deep divisions in America, I remember the words of my history professor in the master's course (at Tsukuba University, 1997), who argued that in 50 years the American nation would disintegrate into 3 or 4 countries along certain racial lines and common values shared in those new nations. At the time, I didn't give much credence to my professor's claim, as I lived and studied in the U.S. and was able to observe the strength of its institutions, built on a belief in the rule of law.

However, the emergence of Donald Trump on the U.S. political scene has brought me back to my professor's prediction, given Trump's authoritarian nature, his speech against truth and science, and the little or zero respect he has for the law. In the opinion of many analysts, a second Trump presidency could mean the end of the American democratic project established in 1776.

Let us not forget that the Constitution of the United States is the supreme symbol that gave rise to and has allowed the growth, development and maintenance of the economic, social and institutional order of the United States. Certainly, the midterm elections in November of this year, as well as the various lawsuits against Trump, will give us an idea of the sustainability of the American democratic system or whether we enter a new historical and uncertain cycle of authoritarianism. At the end of the day, it is the American people who will have the final say.

In Italy, another G-7 country and an important member of the European Union, we also observe a growing concern within the European scenario over the appointment of Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister, after her party Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia-FdI) won the general elections in October this year. Meloni belongs to an ultra-conservative current similar to the radical wing of the Republican Party led by Trump in the United States and is even associated with neo-fascist movements in Italy and Europe, although she has denied such a link.

Meloni's discourse and policies are very likely to empower other ultra-conservative movements within the European Union and generate tension with moderate governments in France and Germany. In fact, the European Union has already been on a collision course with Hungary's President Viktor Orbán, given his authoritarian character and who represents extreme right-wing nationalist populism.

The United Kingdom, another important member of the G-7, has been mired in an economic and governance crisis, distracting it from pressing issues in the international arena, and even affected by its exit from the European Union. And no doubt, the new government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will be focused on the titanic task of stabilizing the British economy, hit by double-digit inflation.

On the other hand, the potential conflict between China and Taiwan is also observed with concern, especially when Chinese President Xi Jinping, after assuming his third term at the recent Congress of the Communist Party, said that China "will never renounce the use of force to solve the Taiwan problem", warning that the country must be prepared to face "strong winds, high waves and even dangerous storms," making a subtle reference to the growing confrontation with the United States.

Indeed, Japan is closely following Xi Jinping's movements, since a conflict between China and Taiwan would create an emergency in waters close to the Japanese archipelago, activating the US-Japan defense alliance. In this regard, it should be noted that the Senkaku Islands, which are under Japanese control, are also claimed by China and are located 170 kilometers from Taiwan.

Since the government of Japan purchased the Senkaku Islands from one of its nationals in 2012, Chinese coast guard ships and military aircraft have been making regular incursions into the adjacent waters and airspace of the Senkaku Islands, asserting the Chinese government's territorial claims over the islands. However, the United States has indicated that the Senkaku Islands are part of Japan and protected under the U.S.-Japan defense alliance; therefore, any military action by China over the islands would provoke U.S. military intervention.

In my article "A New Cold War or an Emerging Digital War" published on my blog in 2020, I mentioned the possibility of a new cold war between the United States and China, at the digital plane, due to the penetration of the Fifth Generation Mobile Network (5G Network) of the Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE, which were considered a risk to the national security of the United States in view of the political control of the Chinese Communist Party over its private companies.

Two years after the publication of the article in reference, the confrontation between the United States and China has certainly been intensified at the geopolitical level, especially after the visit to Taiwan of the

Speaker of the US Congress, Nancy Pelosi, in August of this year. This visit prompted Chinese naval and air military maneuvers around Taiwan, simulating a potential maritime blockade of the island.

For his part, the President of the United States, Joe Biden, has publicly expressed that US military personnel will defend Taiwan if the Chinese military were to launch an invasion of the island. And, certainly, geopolitical tension will continue to escalate as China no longer accepts Taiwan's status quo, further increasing the possibility of the use of force to incorporate Taiwan into Chinese territory.

The confrontation between the US and China has also expanded to other high-tech sectors such as semiconductor production, quantum computing and artificial intelligence. The United States has imposed export controls on these technologies to Chinese companies, strongly encouraging allied countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Israel and other countries to also limit the export of these technologies to the Chinese market for national security reasons.

It is important to note that Taiwan plays a central role in the production of semiconductors, accounting for about 60% of the global output. Semiconductors are essential components in all kinds of devices and artifacts we use in our daily lives. Therefore, a conflict between China and Taiwan would have catastrophic consequences for the functioning of human societies. This has led the United States and Japan to build semiconductor plants in partnership with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), the leading semiconductor manufacturer, especially in the context of a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

In short, the internal polarizations in important G-7 countries, added to the power competition among powerful nations, are increasingly threatening life and stability in our planet.

Dr. Ritter Diaz,
International Consultant
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Notes

This opinion piece is food for thought to generate reflection and debate. And certainly, I don't own the truth, but I do own my opinions. Constructive criticism and honest opinions about this article are very welcome to improve my thinking.

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