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Abrazar el mundo
Geopolítica: hacia dónde vamos

Jorge Dezcallar
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"Because in a very short time there will be no European country among the ten largest economies in the world, and if we do not see it, it is because we are very blind". This is one of the statements made by Jorge Dezcallar in the essay dedicated to understanding geopolitics, in the sense of trying to see how a new scenario is taking shape in the field of international relations. Entitled *Embracing the world*, it has just been published and has been a work elaborated in the years 2019-2022 during the period of forced confinement, taking advantage of the notes and jottings he had. Not surprisingly, the author has devoted his life to diplomacy and foreign policy, which makes this work of interest. An experience that, in the last few turbulent years, has allowed him to reflect and reflect with a pleasant intention, in which he shares concerns, suggestions and some ideas on what the course of geopolitics might be from now on.

The approach is global and includes topics ranging from the changes brought about by the revolutions in technology, information, and genetics; to international relations dominated by the United States, China and Russia, and the role of the European Union; to local conflicts in South America, Africa, Islamic countries, and the wars that have begun or are about to begin. If one could point to a common denominator, it would be the set of consequences that have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, of which much, perhaps too much, has been said.

Dezcallar, a former head of the National Intelligence Centre (CNI), does not limit himself to describing situations or approaching issues from an academic perspective, but rather provides possible solutions and encourages the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. One of the ideas he wants to convey is that we develop a sense of belonging and that, across borders

and worldviews, we as humans share the same community. Hence the title of the essay, stating that "only by embracing the world that sustains us will we be able to embrace ourselves again without fear of the future. In other words, let us draw lessons from the pandemic to create a world of greater solidarity, with clear rules and strong international institutions where we can resolve our differences through dialogue and negotiation".

The book attempts to analyse the vectors influencing geopolitics in the second decade of the 21st century from the point of view of those who know that in these matters it is impossible to guess and complicated to predict, despite the fact that there are numerous experts. At this stage in history, numerous revolutions are converging in our lives: technological, information and genetic revolutions, in other words, those of the atom, the bit and the gene, as well as the demographic revolution, in a context of globalisation and all kinds of conflicts, both global and local. It is a world whose centre of gravity is shifting towards the Indo-Pacific, where China is emerging as a global power, while the United States is looking for itself -already since Obama's time and now with Biden-, Europe is resisting the crises but has not quite taken off although it is trying to reinvent itself, and other countries are emerging with leading ambitions that seek a different distribution of the power pie. It is no coincidence that the cover image is the Pacific, an ocean that unites the main powers.

The author's thesis is that today we are on the threshold of a new geopolitical era, almost coinciding with the turn of the century. The order erected in 1945 now seems to be crumbling before our eyes as if it were a tower made of cards from a deck of cards: "It is the end of an era and the first steps of the next one". In strict geopolitical terms, for the diplomat there are three main vectors that explain this change of cycle: the hesitations of the United States and the oscillations of its policy; the difficulty that Europe is experiencing in reinventing itself; and the appearance on the world stage of new actors with a vocation to play a leading role, such as China. Already in the opening pages, he makes his intention clear: "There are many who think that there are at least two positions on every issue, theirs and the wrong one. I am not one of them, never have been, because I have the good fortune to doubt, and that implies giving the other side the possibility that they are right or that they are at least partly right... even if it is not much, which should not be exaggerated. And in these pages I have tried to be consistent with this way of thinking".

The book is divided into fourteen chapters, and I would highlight three of them. Firstly, chapter 11 because it is devoted to global problems, which for the author are climate change, poverty, inequality and hunger, nuclear proliferation, international terrorism and major migrations. The content does not contribute anything new and is limited to setting out issues that he considers relevant. To state that "climate change is the most important problem facing humanity today" seems to me, to say the least, debatable, considering that for the most populated region of the planet (China, India, Pakistan) it is not, and taking as a datum the

temperature record of a few decades, an aspect that with the geological perspective of time is derisory. If January 2020 was the warmest month on the planet, the following year the storm Philomena proved the opposite. I believe that the theme dedicated to nuclear proliferation, given its topicality, is the one that can make the greatest contribution, as well as that of large-scale migration, where he describes what Morocco is doing to resolve a political crisis. Throwing people against borders, as has been the case in Ceuta and Melilla, is the novel resource for disguising political problems with the narrative of poverty and necessary migration. As he explains, the intention is to demand a change in Spain's stance on Western Sahara, an objective that, as we have seen recently, Rabat has achieved.

Secondly, I would highlight the part dedicated to local conflicts (chapter 12). Those that are not detailed are described by the geographical areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and he comments that it is possible that a conflict may break out in a place that at the moment we do not imagine is there, and which is possibly surprising both because of the place and the timing. It is an interesting chapter because it analyses what is happening in Taiwan, Ukraine, Belarus, Iran, North Korea, the Middle East, the Israel-Palestine problem, the war in Syria, the war in Yemen, Afghanistan, the war in Libya, Algeria and Venezuela. He refers to those that seem to him to be the most serious because of their potential international impact or because they affect us most directly at the moment, knowing full well that they are not the only ones.

The approach to all these scenarios is well explained and attempts to review the most relevant aspects, not so much from a historical point of view, but rather in terms of what is happening now and how they affect their respective regions. The arguments are orderly and offer reasons and approaches to show what is happening, with an understanding suitable for the general public. If one had to recommend a book for those wishing to take their first steps in geopolitics, this would be a good one.

The shortcoming of the edition is that it does not include maps, and I feel that this is a topic that can never be missing when discussing international politics. Although it insists too much on the impact of the pandemic as the epicentre of what the world of tomorrow will be - I do not think that geopolitically it will be so decisive -, the essay's success is that it reads like a reflection; perhaps that is why it does not include a table of contents or bibliography. It is also not devoid of assessments and on many issues it offers its own opinion, which implies ideological sympathy or animus; in other words, it is not all diplomatic narrative.

The case of the Middle East is a case in point. The part devoted to Algeria is interesting, not only because the author was ambassador to Morocco (1997-2001) and has a privileged knowledge of the region, but also because it is experiencing a situation of border instability with Rabat over the Western Sahara issue, both of which are dealt with both from a domestic political perspective and in their international context.

At the time this essay was published, the conflict in Ukraine¹ had not erupted with the invasion of Russian troops, so it is not mentioned, but it does offer the necessary elements to understand the scope and impact of Moscow's political objective in the region, as its zone of influence. In this sense, he comments that the disturbances that broke out in Kazakhstan have led to the dispatch of Russian and Belarusian soldiers under the terms of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and that this is the first time they have been used. "These two crises are at the centre of world attention, with no telling how they will be resolved and what effect they may have on each other". Ukraine and Belarus are singled out as the hottest spots on Europe's eastern border because they can spread beyond their strict territorial boundaries. Three arguments are given for this conclusion and an overall framework is offered that have to do with deep geopolitical motives: "Putin is not right, but he has his reasons".

In my view, what is missing is an exercise in realistic understanding of what Russia calls an "existential threat", given the fact that NATO looks favourably on an enlargement that directly affects an area of influence. It is a matter of showing as valid - or even legitimate, though not shared - the security perception of a regional power that has asked for its world empire (USSR, 1991) and has made it very clear that it will never allow it. What happened in Georgia and the Crimean Peninsula is a clear example of this political will.

Another chapter I would like to mention is "The World to Come" (chap. 13) because it focuses on predictions. From his point of view there are three that are worth bearing in mind. The first is that the geopolitical order that emerged from the ashes of World War II is collapsing like a house of cards before our eyes. A shift is underway towards a new distribution of power and influence in keeping with the times. The second is that the hegemony of the West has come to an end and that the centre of gravity is no longer in Gibraltar or the Suez Canal, but in the Strait of Malacca, i.e., the Asia-Pacific region.

¹ Taking advantage of the book's launch, the publisher has included in the promotional material a reflection by Jorge Dezcallar, barely a week after the war began. It reads: "The Russian invasion of Ukraine puts an end to the security architecture that has governed Europe since the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991. In one fell swoop Putin has revitalised an Atlantic Alliance that Macron had given up for dead a few months earlier, united us Europeans as never before, and healed the wounds that Trump had inflicted on the transatlantic relationship. It has also put an end to the pacifism maintained by Germany since 1945, cast doubt on Sweden and Finland's neutrality, and forced Europe to rethink its energy dependence on Moscow, while the whole world shudders at the brutality of the aggression and leaves Russia isolated as evidenced by the vote in the UN General Assembly. The cherry on top is the dead and the 1.5 million refugees who have fled Ukraine in just ten days. There is no one to give more. That is why, even if Putin can win militarily, in the end he will be the big loser in this invasion which, to paraphrase Talleyrand, is worse than a crime because it is a huge mistake. But just because Putin is not right does not mean that he does not have reasons to be listened to, because Russia is Europe and it is not in our interest to push it into China's arms, but neither can we accept its bully-boy attitude. Ideally, we should be able to discuss these matters calmly at a European Security Conference... something that is impossible while Russian tanks are in Ukraine, confirming the world's slide towards an unfriendly multipolarism in a trend that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic".

Europe will be relegated to one end of the great Eurasian landmass, away from trade routes, and will disappear as a major player in global geopolitics. And the third is that there is a shift from a multilateral to a multipolar world, which will generate uncertainty and instability. There is a comment here on the strength of nationalism and populism, and mention is made of the growing clash over the mastery of artificial intelligence and cutting-edge digital technology.

In any case, I would venture to add that even Covid-19 has not been as decisive as one might expect, from the perspective of geopolitical reality, and that globalisation will require rules, because it is an inevitable process that needs balances so that the parties involved benefit from it, which is what happens with any system of power.

The author makes it clear that we are living better than ever, but we do not seem to appreciate it: "We are restless, we are afraid of a future full of uncertainties and unease is spreading all around us, particularly among the middle classes whose standard of living is being threatened on several fronts while one after another the pillars that supported a world that was thought to be immutable are falling. Or that we thought that if it were to change one day it could only change for the better. And that is not true.

The conclusion is that objectively we are better off than ever, but we live in fear, we are worried about the future. This is due to the confluence in our lives of the four revolutions he mentions: technological, demographic, genetic and information. The challenge is to manage the crisis while building the future and to manage power intelligently, but without renouncing our values.

Jorge Dezcallar is a career diplomat. He was Director General for twelve years at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has also been ambassador to Morocco, the Holy See and the United States of America. In 2001 he was appointed the first civilian director of the National Intelligence Centre (CNI), with the rank of Secretary of State. He has published *Valió la pena. Una vida entre diplomáticos y espía* (2015), *El anticuario de Teherán* (2018) and *Espía accidental* (2021), which was his first novel.

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