

The Security of China în the Context of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: *The general crisis provoked by the Coronavirus pandemic has produced a worldwide multitude of transformations, having different effects including on the scene of international relations, being used by big powers in order to consolidate the position from the geo-political point of view. Regarding the relations between the two most international actors, China and the USA, we can say that tensions between those two countries have escalated considerably over the past 10 months. There were multiple situations in which the two countries had more or less visible confrontations, but which highlighted the instability that characterizes the relations between them.*

Keywords: *international relations, instability, pandemic, security, vulnerabilities.*

Introduction

Although the Cold War ended for almost 30 years, the vulnerabilities, threats and risks of a military nature continue to be on the contemporary security agenda. However, the present and future international trends do not announce generalized confrontations with weapons of mass destruction. The competition between major international actors – which has economic-political and sometimes cultural dominance – intersects with a multitude of cooperation forms, alliance and integration. The war is officially banned, through special regulations, as a mean of resolving crises and conflicts, with some notable exceptions. However, the world is witnessing the relaunch of the “arms race”, the development of the military power of states and groups of states, the slow and legal/illegal proliferation of mass destruction weapons, the amplification of terrorism, ethnic-territorial separatism, etc. In this context, security specialists

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give a special space to the definition and to the research of military power, crises and conflicts, situations in which the use of armed force is resorted to, etc. Although they are called the most important bilateral relations in the world, the relations between the USA and China are in a deep imbalance lately, marked by important events. Just as the famous strategist and historian Thucydides stated: “When a new power threatens to replace an old power, the war is inevitable.” It is clear that the great power, USA, does not feel comfortable in the presence of China, which is increasingly strong regarding the economy, political relations and all military aspects. However, Beijing and Washington will not apply, effectively, the military power in order to solve out the disputes between them.

As for the competition between the two great powers, the USA and China, it can be said that it is quite fierce. This is also mentioned in a 2018 report on the national security strategy, in which the US government recalls the return of competition between the great powers. The same document explains the fact that the theft of American intellectual property was the basis for the introduction of sanctions for China. But the problem is even deeper – on the second page of the mentioned document, you can read: “China and Russia are challenges to America's power, influence and interests. They are trying to undermine America's security and well-being” (M. von Hein, 2018). Moreover, China and Russia would like to create a world opposed to American values and interests.

The cooperation regarding the regional security

Adhering to the aims and principles of the UN Charter, China persists in developing friendly relations and strengthening cooperation with other countries on the basis of the 5 Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. At the same time, China is committed to promote the dialogues on international security matters, but also on the cooperation in very many domains.

In recent years, China has intensified bilateral and multilateral strategic consultations and dialogues with countries concerned with security and defense areas that contribute to improve the mutual trust and the mutual exchanges and cooperation.

With the strengthening of the China-Russia Strategic Cooperation Partnership, the two countries have established a high-level meeting method to exchange views on major issues. There were, also, consultations on major strategic problems within the adequate departments. In 2003, China and Russia conducted several consultations, at the sub-ministry of foreign affairs level, on the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula, in Iraq and in the Middle East, as well as on other international, regional and bilateral issues of common interest. In 2004, the two countries held a meeting of working groups on counterterrorism issues and strategic stability consultations at the same

departmental level in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The two armies established a consultation mechanism in 1997 and the Headquarters of the two armies held the seventh and eighth rounds of strategic consultations in 2003 and 2004.

China and the United States maintain the consultations on non-proliferation, anti-terrorism and cooperation on bilateral military security. In recent years, the two countries have had several rounds of consultations at the Foreign Minister level on strategic security issues, multilateral arms control and non-proliferation, defense consultative talks, counterterrorism consultations, and debates on financial counterterrorism. The working groups on military maritime and air security under the Military Maritime Advisory Agreement met in Hawaii and Shanghai.

China has conducted extensive strategic consultations and dialogues with other countries.

Thus, China and France established the relationship of a strategic dialogue in 1997 and have held several rounds of consultations since then. China and the United Kingdom held two dialogue rounds on strategic security that took place in October 2003 and March 2004 and they established the mechanism for the Sino-British strategic security dialogue.

The Chinese Ministry of National Defense and his South-African counterpart signed an agreement on the establishment of a defense commission in April 2003. In October of the same year, the Seventh Sino-Australian Consultation on Strategic Defense was held. Also, the two armies, the Chinese and the German ones, had their second round of strategic consultations in July 2004. China has also had fruitful security consultations and dialogues with Canada, Mexico, Italy, Poland, New Zealand and other countries.

China gives a big importance to security consultations with neighboring countries. China and Pakistan had two consultations on defense and security issues in July 2003. China's and Thailand's defense ministers held two security and defense issues conferences in September of the same year. The Chinese Ministry of National Defense and Japan Defense Agency have had security consultations in January and October 2004. Also, China and Mongolia had consultations on defense and security issues. Also, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense had two strategic consultations, both with his counterpart from Kirghistan, and with that from Kazakhstan and security consultations with Australia and Thailand.

In its foreign policy, China seeks to build a good neighborhood and partnership relationship with neighboring countries, trying to create a better, safer and more prosperous neighborhood, accelerating the creation of a dialogue on security issues and a cooperation mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region.

Since its inception, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has developed into an important mechanism that promotes regional security, stability and development. It has formed a relatively complete organizational structure, with a strong legal basis, successfully initiating the cooperation in the fields of security, economy and others. The Shanghai Convention to Combat Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism and the Agreement of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Agency became operational in 2003. In fulfilling the convention and agreement, the SCO held meetings of chief prosecutors and defense ministers and conducted joint anti-terrorism military exercises. The SCO Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorism Agency were formally inaugurated in Beijing and Tashkent in January 2004. At the SCO Tashkent Summit meeting, in June 2004, it was signed the Tashkent Declaration and the Agreement on Cooperation in Combating the Illicit Trafficking in Psychotropic Narcotics Substances and Their Precursors. Also, the SCO laid the groundwork for the mechanism of regular meetings between the secretariats of the security committees of the Member States to strengthen the security and cooperation.

China pays a great importance to the role of the ASEAN Regional Forum (FRA) and is committed to its development in good conditions. At the Eleventh FRA Meeting of Foreign Ministers in 2004, China proposed the following initiatives for the future development of the FRA: maintaining its forum nature and adhering to the basic principles of consensus decision-making, with an incremental approach, moving at a comfortable pace for all members to encourage initiative and the active participation of all members; the continued strengthening and consolidation of confidence-building measures (MCI-s), while addressing the issue of preventive diplomacy in order to gradually find cooperative methods and approaches to preventive diplomacy specific to the region and that fit current needs; the increasing of the participation of defense officials, promoting exchanges and the cooperation between the armies of the countries involved, giving the deserved place to the important role of the armies in increasing mutual trust; the enhancing cooperation in non-traditional security areas, such as counter-terrorism and combating cross-border crime. As presidents, China and Myanmar hosted two intersections in Beijing and Rangoon at the 2003-2004 Forum, when there were approached MCI problems. China hosted the FRA Seminar on Alternative Drug Substitution Development in September 2004 in Kunming, Yunnan Province, and the FRA Security Policy Conference in November 2004. In October 2003, the leaders of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea held their fifth meeting, issuing the Joint Declaration on Promoting Tripartite Cooperation between the Peoples of the Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, which confirmed that the three countries work together to

intensify security dialogues and the expanding of the exchanges between military and defense officials in East Asia, strengthening the cooperation in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation and achieving a Korean Peninsula without nuclear weapons.

The international relations of China in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

The general crisis provoked by Coronavirus pandemic has produced, worldwide, a multitude of transformations, having different effects including on the scene of international relations, being used by big powers in order to consolidate the position from the geo-political point of view.

The competition between the big international actors, phrase used during the Cold War, is specified in the National Defense Strategy of the USA, becoming increasingly nuanced in the context of Coronavirus pandemic. The actual crisis has in the foreground: the USA, China, the EU and Russia.

Although at the beginning of the pandemic, US-China relations seemed relatively normal, the two even managed to sign a trade agreement, in the context of the pandemic, things have become increasingly unstable. The role of world leader in managing this crisis has been missed by the United States as they have failed to manage all the implications of massive coronavirus diseases. This inability of the US, to take the lead and provide a coordinated response to the pandemic crisis, was immediately speculated by China, which took great advantage of the opportunity.

Using the hesitation and the confusion of the United States in the face of the delicate situation as a weapon against themselves, China has turned the crisis into an opportunity for political and economic advantage. For example, in the context of the pandemic, China provided humanitarian aid to Italy, sending in this state severely affected by the pandemic, medical equipment, but also doctors. This gesture came in a context in which all EU states were taken by surprise and could not take any action, with Beijing taking advantage of this. Moreover, the Chinese have supported Serbia, a situation in which the Serbian president praised China and disapproved of the EU.

Tensions between China and the United States have escalated considerably over the past 10 months. The spark that raised these tensions was the statement made by a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman who stated on a social network that the Covid-19 virus was brought to China by the US soldiers who participated in the fall of 2019, in Wuhan, at a military Olympics.

Obviously, the Americans responded according to the Chinese statements, so the American president and his supporters using the term "the Chinese virus". The propaganda confrontation between the two countries regarding the starting point of the killer virus is obvious. Also in May 2020, the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, stressed that the virus is of Chinese origin,

being spread from a laboratory in Wuhan, where several types of coronavirus are being researched. "We are not sure, but there is significant evidence that it came from a laboratory. The American people continue to be at risk because we do not know if the epidemic started in a laboratory or elsewhere. There is a simple way to have an answer (transparency, openness), the usual things that nations do when they want to help solve a global pandemic" (A.-M. Crenganiș, n. d.).

Beijing reacted harshly to this statement, rejecting all these accusations and stating that the Trump administration is using this to obtain electoral capital. The Beijing leaders denied all allegations, but the fact that proved that Beijing deliberately stopped the dissemination of information or destroyed the evidences about pandemic was a report of the Secret Services "Five Eyes". It is clear that these actions of the Chinese have been an attack on international transparency, which exacerbates the tensions between the two strong states.

Many analysts call the current US-China relations as being "a new kind of Cold War". Moreover, Wang Huiyao, the chairman of the Center for China and Globalization, said that "the trust between China and the United States is at its lowest level since diplomatic relations were established in 1979".

This picture of the strained relations between the two states is complemented by the position of other European powers, such as France or Germany, which in turn have accused China of failing to act transparently during the Covid 19 pandemic. Although they do not agree with Trump's policy, both Australia and the United Kingdom, agree with the Americans on their position on China.

The whole world is deeply affected by the tensions between the great international actors. The European Union's ambassador to Beijing points out that "growing tensions between China and the United States are undermining the broad multinational cooperation needed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic". He added that "we are witnessing high levels of strategic, economic, and political tensions, which are increasing day by day. Our opinion is that these tensions do not lead to the spirit of cooperation we need today" (A.-M. Crenganiș, n. d.).

At the same time, the EU Ambassador stressed the need for cooperation, as the EU is at the heart of the solutions that need to be taken to combat the health crisis and manage the economic recovery.

These instabilities due to the pandemic also have effects on international stock exchanges. There were decreases in both US and Asian stock markets. US stock markets fell sharply as the US president said he would impose economic sanctions on the Chinese.

Conclusions

The existence and the manifestation of military power were the basis for building the first powers with a global vocation, respectively empires; it was the instrument by which the political power succeeded in subjugating other peoples or civilizations. At present, there are two currents of opinion regarding the power of a state: the first, according to which the economic power has come to the fore, the military power losing its importance and the second, which claims that the military power is the only and true determinant of the power of a state.

Although the use of the military power is increasingly challenged in international politics, it continues to be used to unblock some strategic situations, playing a major role in shaping international relations and the global security environment.

The SARS COV-2 virus pandemic could have been a good opportunity for the two countries, China and the United States, to cooperate, given that diplomatic relations have existed for more than 40 years. However, this was not done because, ideologically speaking, the two great powers are totally different. It turned out that the new coronavirus pandemic had disastrous effects on many levels of international life, with many countries in the world being profoundly affected by all these effects. The two major players on the international stage, China and the United States, are dominated by growing tensions, with relations between the two states being unstable for a long time, according to many expert opinions. Equally, the propaganda that is created around the pandemic is as dangerous as the virus. All these aspects that outline the premises of a real information war are as harmful as the foreseeable financial crisis.

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