

## CAN THE U.S. STOP HISTORY?

### 1. The "end of history" -a premature thesis

When Paul Kennedy published his book "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers-Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000" in 1988, it caused quite a stir <sup>1</sup>. He describes how the leading role in the world of states passed from the Habsburgs to the French; and after the Napoleonic Wars to Britain. His conclusion: the state system is subject to constant change. Especially after wars, the balance of power changes decisively. In order to win them, great powers need a strong economic base, productive forces must be able to finance "unproductive armament expenditures". One thing is essential: no state can control this development alone, since several states are always in competition with each other.

The thesis of the "relative decline of the United States" in particular caused a great stir. Paul Kennedy stated that the then second superpower, the Soviet Union, was also facing great difficulties, but that the "imperial overstretch", the discrepancy between Washington's global commitment and the given possibilities, was greatest in the USA. He compared its situation with that of Spain in the 1600s and that of Great Britain in the 1900s, when the peak of power was followed in each case by decline.

As is well known, things turned out differently. A few years after the book's publication, the Soviet Union broke apart and the United States became the sole superpower. In this "unipolar moment", neoconservative theorists and foreign policy practitioners in Washington believed that "American values" had finally prevailed worldwide.

This was precisely the idea put forward by Francis Fukuyama in his 1989 article "The End of History" <sup>2</sup>: history had reached its end. This idea was not new, but it corresponded in a decisive way to the spirit of the times. Alexandre Kojève had already published similar theses in the 1930s, again drawing inspiration from Hegel's philosophy of history. The fulminant echo that Fukuyama found was due to the fact that the mighty Soviet Union was in the process of dissolving and many believed that after the collapse of communism democracy and the market economy would finally prevail

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kennedy; The Rise and Fall of Great Powers; Unwin Hyman Limited, 1988

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama; The End of History, in The National Interest; Summer 1989.

everywhere. In the spirit of "neoliberalism," government circles in Washington were convinced that American capitalism had prevailed worldwide and could now determine politics; states would play only a subordinate role.

This turned out to be a misconception. The "end of history" did not happen. China took advantage of the globalization of the world economy to achieve an unimagined economic boom and thus also a new position of power. Russia has recovered from the threat of disintegration in the 1990s. And with Islamic terror, a new danger has emerged worldwide.

The crucial thing now is this: Practically, the U.S. acts as if the "end of history" had occurred, as if history had been fulfilled. Where the final goal has not yet been achieved, American policy is nevertheless geared to enforcing "the laws of history". The whole world is to adopt the rules of the game of capitalism and the basic tenets of America's political system. At the "end of history," non-Western cultures are to be integrated into Western culture. Other cultures should abandon their own principles in favor of Western notions of freedom and human rights.

This policy is not new either, but it has been given a new boost by the fact that Washington now wants to mobilise the world's democracies against Russia and China. The aim is to preserve the US's dominant claim to power in a world that is becoming increasingly multipolar, i.e. in which several centres of power are emerging. The course of history is to be halted in such a way that US domination of the world remains. In a "new world order", too, the "Pax americana" is to be the determining essential element.

## **2. Already Metternich and Karl Marx wanted to determine history**

After the ideas of freedom, equality and popular sovereignty had prevailed with the French Revolution, Klemens Wenzel Prince von Metternich founded the "Holy Alliance" at the Congress of Vienna in order to push back history if possible, or at any rate to stop it. Henry A. Kissinger already expresses this in the title of his habilitation treatise "A World restored-Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Age" <sup>3</sup>. The dynastic idea, the divine nobility as a principle of rule, was to be restored. At the same time, the power-political supremacy of the House of Austria in Central Europe was to be secured. The "Holy Alliance" between the Russian Tsar Alexander I, the Prussian King Frederick William III and the Austrian Emperor Francis I was to defend the restored order against the new currents of democracy and liberalism.

The "international community" of that time was used to suppress new ideas and new constellations of power. In this way, Metternich succeeded in creating a European order that ultimately lasted for a century, but his name is also associated with the system of oppression he created. So while today the US is concerned with establishing democracy and human rights worldwide through intervention, the goals of the "Holy Alliance" went in the opposite direction. After the revolutionary years of 1848/49; after the wars of liberation and after the terrible destruction in the two world wars, the European Convention on Human Rights was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1953, and the ideas of freedom and democracy had thus become established in Europe<sup>4</sup>.

Karl Marx and Vladimir I. Lenin also believed in the "end of history" through the establishment of a communist, classless society. "The historical mission of the working class is to eliminate the economic and political rule of the bourgeoisie in the class struggle and to achieve socialist and communist society," reads the Universallexikon <sup>5</sup>. published in 1986 by the Bibliografisches Institut Leipzig. After the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialist society was to be built. But as interesting as historical materialism is in analyzing history from tribal society to capitalist society, the "laws of history" have been different. Communism has not been able to realize the prophecies associated with it. The fundamental rights and freedoms adopted at the Conference on Security

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<sup>3</sup> Henry A. Kissinger; A World Restored- The Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Age; New York 1964

<sup>4</sup> Wendelin Ettmayer; Old States- New World; Stability and Change in International Relations; Linz 2008

<sup>5</sup> BI Universal Encyclopedia; Leipzig 1986

and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 with the consent of the Soviet Union probably played a not insignificant role in this.

### **3. The global regulatory power and its challengers**

The United States of America sees itself as a global regulatory power. In concrete terms, this means that they set the rules for how international relations, the economy and finance are to be shaped. Above all, it is also about when and where offences against humanity are to be punished. The general spread of "American values" is to ensure that American interests are also respected. Thus, wars of the USA have always been waged in the name of humanity in order to bring more freedom and democracy to the world; from the war against Spain in April 1898 to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. These "crusades" always have a strong domestic political component. Millions of Americans approved of Theodore Roosevelt when he set out with his Rough Riders to liberate Cuba from the Spanish. And when George W. Bush launched his invasion of Iraq, his popularity among the population reached a peak. Accordingly, leading American media outlets also repeatedly demand that "democracy promotion" form an integral part of American foreign policy <sup>6</sup>.

In the process, Washington is trying to mobilize the entire West against those who are not willing to follow American policy unconditionally. Today the opponents are Russia and China. Both states are classified as "revisionist powers" and a danger to their own country. The old Thucydides was dug up, who almost 2500 years ago in his "History of the Peloponnesian War" put forward the thesis that it must come to war - as just between Athens and Sparta - when an established power is challenged by a new, emerging one.

In order to achieve these goals, the American side not only uses the military strength of the country and the primacy of the dollar; in the propaganda wars and those of the secret services, human rights are also used as a weapon. A language of its own has also been developed: US military interventions are called "stability missions" and military bases in Poland "forward operating locations"<sup>7</sup>.

The accusations against Russian President Vladimir Putin can hardly be surpassed in sharpness. President Biden was not the first to call him a "killer". Bill O'Reilly already used the term in an interview with Donald Trump on Fox News. The foreign policy

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<sup>6</sup> New York Times; Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 "Promoting Democracy recedes from US Agenda

<sup>7</sup> New York Times; Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 "US seeks Eastern Europe Bases

establishment in Washington keeps calling him a "gangster." And since the annexation of Crimea, which belonged to Russia for centuries, to Russia and the accusation that Putin interfered in the 2016 presidential election, the atmosphere has been totally poisoned.

Russia is accused of cheating on disarmament treaties; of breaking international law; of not recognizing the principles of the rule of law; of curtailing human rights and freedom of the press. Last but not least, cyber attacks and accusations of the Kremlin spreading "fake news" are causing an uproar. Numerous Western media outlets feature Kremlin critics who call their own country a "mafia state." Dissidents are supported by the West; the secret services are in full operation.

Given the vehemence of this criticism, it's no wonder that an anti-Russia hysteria can be detected in parts of the American public. The myriad of sanctions imposed against Russia are therefore also aimed at taking account of the prevailing mood in order to win votes. At the expense of better relations, one is counting on gains in the constituency. It is hard to understand why US relations with Russia are much worse today than with the totalitarian Soviet Union, when even during the Cold War interests were mutually recognised.

The same strategy is being pursued against China as against Russia. The conflicts with Beijing have taken on a new dimension as a result of the corona pandemic. Articles have appeared such as "China wants to use the corona virus to take over the world". The discussion about the "China virus" already played a role in the last presidential election campaign in the USA and has thus become a central point in the dispute between the two countries. For Donald Trump, economic relations with China were at the forefront. For him, the huge trade deficit was an expression of Beijing using unfair means. Massive economic sanctions, above all in the form of import tariffs, were the answer.

The US repeatedly highlights the lack of freedoms in China; advocates for imprisoned lawyers and human rights activists; and also uses these arguments as a weapon against China. President Biden has adopted the Trump administration's argument that the crackdown on the Uighurs amounts to genocide. Freedom of navigation in the South China Sea became a flag issue.

Above all, however, China is accused of seeking leadership in a "new world order". The expansion of Chinese influence in Africa and Latin America; the billions invested in the "New Silk Road" are cited as examples of this. Anti-China propaganda is in full

swing. For example, an article in "Internationale Politik" states that Germany must become more involved "in order to contain China". And "the Chinese threats can ultimately only be countered with military alliances". This is because the "New Silk Road" aims to build a global system to implement the ideological ideas of the Chinese Communist Party. At any rate, this assertion is made, without further evidence <sup>8</sup>.

The economic war initiated by Washington was supposed to counteract this. Leading Chinese companies like Huawei are being excluded from the American market on the grounds that they pose a "threat to national security". Huawei's chief financial officer was even arrested in Canada under a flimsy legal pretext.

The paradoxical situation is that the accusations against Moscow and Beijing are not made to help the regimes there, but to discredit them, or at least to prepare for a Cold War. In fact, however, both governments could improve their legitimacy among their own populations if often pointless restrictions on personal freedom were dismantled and controls lifted. At a time when many young Russians and Chinese have the opportunity to travel worldwide and inform themselves through old and new media, it is very questionable how far censorship and criminal law can determine a zeitgeist. The same applies to criticism in the economic sphere: the reduction of state subsidies for the nationalised economy could well increase its efficiency.

Another fundamental question is how far values developed in the West must actually have worldwide validity. Samuel Huntington decisively denied this in his book on the "Clash of Civilizations".

#### **4. Will it come to a clash of civilizations?**

Quite in contrast to the "end of history", Samuel P. Huntington, in his book "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", also published shortly after the end of the Cold War, saw the future of the world quite differently<sup>9</sup>. Future international conflicts would no longer be shaped by ideologies, but by the clash of cultures and civilizations. The West's belief in the universality of its culture and values was fundamentally wrong, even immoral and dangerous. Therefore, because European powers dominated large parts of the world in the 19th century and the US dominated

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<sup>8</sup> International Politics- The Magazine for Global Thinking; July/August 2021; Mangesh Sawant "Get Out of the Observer Role."

<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington; The Clash of Civilizations; Simon & Schuster 1997

the second half of the 20th century, one cannot demand that the whole world adopt Western values.

In a separate chapter Huntington deals with the thesis of the "end of history" and totally condemns it. He doubts that the USA, as the largest world power, will be able to concentrate on "peacemaking" and "nation-building" in the future, because wars will break out especially at the "fault lines" between cultures. Huntington considered the attacks on the World Trade Center by Islamic terrorists to be just as much confirmation of his theses as the wars in the Balkans or between Armenia and Azerbaijan. For the year 1993 alone, he registered 48 ethnic wars.

In the wars that will be fought in the future between cultures and civilizations, each civilization will have a leading power whose nature has been very much shaped by a religion. Since in the past the West conquered the world with weapons and not with values, it must allow other values to apply in the future multipolar and multicultural world. This statement is revolutionary and heretical. Heretical above all because the human rights proclaimed by the West now have a quasi-religious status. But to what extent may Russia, the core power of Orthodox civilization, or China, with its own cultural tradition, be punished if they do not follow the theory of the "end of history" and do not unconditionally accept US supremacy.

In fact, the political history of Russia has been different from that of Western Europe for 1000 years. In the Middle Ages, when essential legal institutions had already been formed in the West, the Russians lived under the yoke of the Mongols. Later, there was neither enlightenment nor democracy; there was never a separation of powers and a change of power was a problem in all systems. The Chinese Communist Party, on the other hand, has in recent decades increasingly referred to the teachings of Confucius, to respecting authority and working for the community.

As much as the emergence of a middle class in Russia and China can promote the critical consciousness of the people, it is probably an illusion to believe that with membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) a country would throw its entire history overboard.

## **5. Can Europe have its own interests?**

How should Europe behave now, when the USA is in the process of reorganising the world according to its interests alone? Huntington also states that Europe and America, shaped by Western Christianity, form a community of values. However, we can see

that even these basic values are interpreted very differently: for the US, war is still an integral part of its foreign policy; wars between members of the European Union, on the other hand, have become unthinkable. For Europeans, the welfare state has become the framework for their political action; many Americans reject the welfare state as "decadent" and "socialist".

Basically, foreign policy was realpolitik for centuries, oriented towards power and interests. The end justified the means. Calvinist thinking, however, very soon established a harmony between what the good Lord wanted and one's own interests. Thus the English fought again and again "for the Liberty of Europe"; the Americans for democracy and freedom in the world.

Today, China is artificially conjured up by the US as the "greatest threat" in order to find partners for its containment policy. China, in turn, sees the value discussion led by the US as an attempt to interfere in its internal affairs. There is no doubt that China is now very keen to export as many of its products as possible around the world. However, the Marxist-Maoist doctrine of the Chinese Communist Party serves to maintain power, not to export Chinese values or the Chinese political system. China today is a state capitalist country where the market prevails and where one party has a monopoly on power. China wants to do good business, not ideologically conquer the world. It wants to catch up with the US as an economic power, not proselytize the world.

In 2020, China overtook the US as the EU's most important trading partner for the first time. Thus, the EU's trade volume with China amounted to € 586 billion; that of the US € 555 billion. As long as the people of China keep getting better, I don't think there will be a major revolt by the population. At some point, people will probably demand a greater political say, but this development can be better promoted through cooperation than through constant confrontation.

The European Union obtains 26% of its imported oil and 40% of its imported gas from Russia. This is not a one-sided dependence, but the basis for a cooperation that also survived the Cold War well. If the US today is pushing with all its might to prevent Nord Stream 2 in order to increase imports of expensive American liquefied gas, it is not doing so to promote European security. Washington is doing so to increase discord within the EU and to drive a wedge between Russia and the rest of Europe. Russia is a member of the Council of Europe, has signed the organisation's conventions and should be judged by the guidelines of this institution.



The US will continue to orient its policy towards "pausing history". The crucial question is whether the US will accept allies with their own ideas or only vassals? Thucydides also developed a theory in this context: a great power must always assert its own interests and does not recognize equal partners. When the inhabitants of the island of Melos refused to support Athens in the fight against Sparta, the Athenians sent a punitive expedition and the island was devastated.

Today, European states have numerous and effective bodies within the Council of Europe and within the European Union that ensure that members' political decisions are taken on the basis of the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Because of its different legal position, the USA could not become a member of the Council of Europe. Even intensive economic relations with Russia or China cannot influence the functioning of European institutions. Europeans are therefore well advised to shape their own foreign policy as well.

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