

The role of International Relations theories for understanding Current International Society. Special emphasis on Realism and the Ukrainian War

Sagrario MORÁN BLANCO*

Abstract: This article entitled “the role of international theories for understanding current international society. Special emphasis on Realism”, which analyses the plurality and the diversity of the discipline of International Relations, is divided into two parts. The first part explains the two main theoretical poles of the science of International Relations (Rationalism and Reflectivism), their central objectives for the study of international reality, their vision-contribution to the knowledge of international society, as well as the theories arising from each of them. The second focuses on the most relevant theory of the discipline, Realism, to address its main characteristics and the role it plays in the conflictive international scene of the present time. In this sense, the theoretical realist postulates applied to the complex and dramatic war between Ukraine and Russia are analyzed, as well as the responses of the different international actors, among which the European Unión (EU) stands out¹.

Keywords: International Relations, Russo-Ukrainian war, Realism, theoretical principles, Reflectivism, Rationalism.

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(A) INTRODUCTION

Since its origin as a scientific discipline, International Relations (IR) have fallen² under the broader scope of Social Sciences, endowed with certain fundamentals and theories, some of them known as *paradigms*³, which seek, among others, to provide a “scientific” explanation of the phenomena and relationships that develop within the so-called *International Society*, the material object under consideration. The new discipline

* Professor International Relations, Rey Juan Carlos University

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² The origin of this new discipline, in its university academic dimension, was first established in 1919 at the University of Aberyswith (Wales). That year the first chair of International Relations was created “under the auspices of Alfred Zimmern and the cohort of idealist international lawists”, GARCÍA PICAZO, P. *Teoría breve de Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2004, p. 15.

³ The concept of paradigm has become very popular in the social sciences since the publication of Thomas Khun’s famous essay. As Kuhn says, “A paradigm is an accepted model or pattern, and that aspect of its meaning has enabled me, lacking a better word, to appropriate paradigm here”. KUHN, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, p. 23.

and its different theories aim “to improve our understanding of global politics”, as the internationalist Kal Holsti rightly pointed out⁴. In short, explores then uncertainty and inability to foresee that has accompanied human beings regarding events that endanger peace, progress and international security.

This paper will discuss first the two prevailing IR theories, their key objectives, and their vision and contribution to the understanding of international society, as well as the emerging theories in each of them. And second, it will analyse realism as the key theory of the discipline, its main characteristics, the role it plays in the current global and how it applies to the Ukrainian war and in the changes observed in the international order that emerged after the end of the Cold War and the Era of globalization in which we find ourselves immersed. With this, this work provides an original and current perspective in which in line with the study of current practice, the most striking effects of realism are detailed, basically characterized by the unpredictability and the reordering of power in the international scene, without forgetting the premises of other theories of international relations. All of this is analysed in detail in a contradictory situation of “permanent crisis” or, at least, in what happens in the scope of an international society yet to be defined in the long term.

It has been highlighted that the transformations that new events have produced on the international scene and currently two opposing perceptions of international reality coexist although full of nuances and precisions. On the one hand, there is an unwavering determination to defend the values and principles that the United Nations embodies and that are reflected in the substantive norms of international law, particularly those related to the maintenance of international peace and security; in the words of the European Council, it demonstrates “unprecedented determination to defend the principles of the United Nations Charter and restore peace (...)”⁵. On the other hand, the position of countries that could be shamelessly described as authoritarian regimes that advocate a return to an international policy based on power relations and in which the most essential international norms, particularly those related to the maintenance of human rights international peace and security. In such a framework, realist positions in international reemerge strongly and the different qualities that outline this theory become visible.

(B) THE HOSTILE, GLOBAL, TURBULENT AND IN TRANSITION SOCIETAL FRAMEWORK THAT DEFINES THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Today, as throughout history, the *social environment* in which IR operates is hostile, conflict weakens progress made in cooperation and integration among the actors involved. They have yet to take significant and sustained action towards *solidarity*. In fact, the accompanying *principles* deal more with conflict prevention and sharing of

⁴ HOLSTI, K. *The dividing discipline. Hegemony and diversity in International Theory*, Boston, Allen and Unwin, 1985, p. 14. In BARBÉ, E. *Teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2007, p. 56.

⁵ A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union that protects its citizens defends its values and interest and contributes to international peace and security, Council of the European Union, March 21, 2022, Doc. 7371/22, p. 5.

competences than with cooperative and solidarity-based motives. Rather than being complete, the challenge of *building an international community* is precarious, fragmented, and subject to both the changing interests of the states, which are the main protagonists of the international system on the one hand, and of certain structures (international organizations) set up by the states themselves to settle disagreements and conflicts between them, as well as to protect themselves from future enemies, make progress and gain influence and power in the international arena, on the other. An international society with permanent features that are in question and that, at the same time, are reaffirmed by those who want to substantially change the rules that would constitute a true international community.

International Relations operate within this global societal framework, and changes in ties between international actors are taking place, albeit very slowly. At present, these transformations do not alter elements of continuity, such as heterogeneity, inequality, or conflict, which have been present since the beginning of history in all its dimensions. Meanwhile, the scope for action of the different actors has been widened, as proved by the *2030 Agenda*, in which states have pledged to move towards sustainable development by addressing the main issues that explain the instability of the international order. Moreover, through advances and retreats, the international reality is acquiring some stability and permanence that are constantly altered by states' behavior, other international actors, different factors, and the relationships between them. Likewise, the international context remains deeply divided, very turbulent and disruptive, requiring international actors to continuously adapt to new circumstances.

The third decade of the twenty-first century has seen everything in "crisis", both IR and its companion discipline, International Law (IL). Andreas Zimmermann, Professor of International and European Law at the University of Potsdam, described IL as an "endangered species", due to the turbulent times we are currently living in with unpredictable and challenging events for this legal system⁶. The international order based on rules and established after the Second World War is experiencing turbulent times due to the little respect shown towards it by the great powers of international relations. For its part, the discipline of International Relations remains in a permanent identity crisis in scientific terms, at present with "new" phenomena and actors that modify the transcendental and classic dimensions of international reality, particularly the political, social, economic, environmental and, above all, security dimensions. Among the latest events that reflect the situation described above, we can highlight the trade and technological war that began in 2018 between the Asian giant and the American power and which is currently taking on an ideological and military character; the Covid-19 pandemic, which generated a health crisis with consequences in all areas of international relations; and, finally, the "global" crisis caused by the political-military clashes between Russia and Ukraine, Israel, and Hamas, among others. Two conflicts that, beyond the multidimensional consequences they have at a regional and global level, have fostered the rapprochement that had been brewing since the 1990s between the two great rival powers: Russia and China, and which is being essential to

⁶ ZIMMERMANN, A. "Times are changing: And What about the International Rule of Law then?" *EJIL*: Talk, 9 March 2018.

avoid isolation that the EU is pursuing as punishment for the war in Ukraine and that is “causing global realignments that are unflattering to Western democracies”⁷. It would be naïve not to value these events in their true dimension, beyond their consideration as mere international conflicts and to accord them the category of situations that reveal the current state of international relations and the changes that are coming.

Nevertheless, it is often remarked that turbulent times have been a constant in international relations. Roberto Mesa, professor in international relations, also expressed this idea in the 1980s in these words: “on few occasions will it be more appropriate than at present to highlight the effects of the permanent crisis in contemporary international society (...) Crisis, moreover, which is shown as a polyhedron of multiple faces and facets. Growth crisis motivated by the increase in the number of international protagonists, not only regarding the number of states (...) Identity crisis (...) antagonistic crisis of poverty and plenty. Ideological crisis and profound crisis of civilization...”⁸. In other words, for contemporary international society, permanent crisis in its various dimensions and instability are the norm. This society is always caught between the unforeseen and perplexity, and in which war between states or between states and non-state actors, as terrorism, drug-trafficking and the case of Hamas, threatens “order” and international peace due to its capacity to spread and involve the actors with higher military power (*hard power*) on the international chessboard.

This paper does not attempt to provide a pessimistic vision of contemporary international relations because they also contain, as stated, elements of stability and permanence that allow us to assess the current events with other criteria and perspectives. In fact, contemporary international society moves along very similar lines to those of the past, albeit with the incorporation of new meanings and values. It is worth recalling that at the *San Francisco Conference* in 1945, the participating countries focused on the need to create an international organization, the United Nations, aimed at putting an end to war and promoting peace, justice, and security for all humanity. Therefore, peace and understanding among states and other international actors lead to the permanence of substantial values that enable us to look at international society with a less tragic view. The international scene is currently being debated in the context of the struggle between the affirmation of the values proclaimed and projected particularly since the nineties of the 20th century and the determined will of a significant group of countries to modify their contents and, above all, distance the principles that derive from them. Democracy is being attacked from various positions, the defense of human rights faces the existence of particularisms; sustainable development does not end up crystallizing in the international order; and above all, it is worrying that peace as the supreme value of the international community is threatened by postulates that claim the legitimacy and legality of the use of armed force. From there, it is necessary to review the theories of international relations, something that has yet to be done, and accept, where appropriate, the preeminence of postulates from the past, even if they come coated with new attributes, we refer to characteristics of realism.

⁷ DACOBA CERVIÑO, F.J. “En un mundo multipolar no sobrevivirán los más fuertes, sino lo que mejor sepan adaptarse”, *Documento de Análisis, IEEE*, 84/2022, p. 4.

⁸ MESA, R. “Factores de paz y elementos de crisis en la Sociedad Internacional contemporánea”, *Revista de Estudios Internacionales*, Vol. 7, 4, 1986, pp. 1059-1060.

(C) THE PATH TOWARDS THEORETICAL PLURALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE DISCIPLINE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE TRADITIONAL STRUGGLE BETWEEN RATIONALIST-REFLECTIVIST AXES

The year 2019 marked the first centenary of the establishment of the discipline of International Relations. Despite its youth – compared to others such as Philosophy –, this science has evolved and has its own theories and scientific debates. In this sense, the French political scientist Stanley Hoffmann pointed out that “theory is the principle of order in a discipline”⁹ and through it a discipline acquires order of scientific nature and generates knowledge. For this purpose, our discipline has not hesitated in providing itself with a philosophical basis, which is always necessary for the resolution of ontological and epistemological issue. Although it would be a mistake to place the theoretical framework in the field of philosophy, ignoring that it has specific features that derive from the profiles of international society.

In addition to ordering and systematizing discipline, according to Robert W. Cox “theory is always for someone and for some purpose. All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time, and space”¹⁰. In the matter at hand, international theory seeks to study, analyse, and investigate the so-called international society and thus offer a scientific explanation of what happens in it. Theories in the discipline of IR are important since “they are the ones that somehow enable us to give meaning to international reality. It is always from a concrete theoretical proposal that we define what to study, how to approach it, how to represent it in the mind and to master it to make it intelligible”¹¹. Therefore, theories are a kind of *map or mental imagery*; guides for action that define reality, interpret, and represent it, as well as encourage international actors to behave accordingly.

To other scholars, such as Steans and Pettiford, “a theory is an attempt to explain something – an event or an activity –”. Thus, they point out that a theory “might attempt to explain the cause of a war, or why and under what conditions states engage in cooperative trade strategies. Thus, if a perspective is a particular representation of reality, a theoretical perspective is an attempt to construct a coherent explanation for a certain phenomenon, which in turn rests upon a wider belief system, or upon certain basic assumptions, about the nature of the world”¹². Together with the ability to explain logically or objectively what happens, any theory, especially in the case of the discipline of International Relations, should have the ability to predict events, considering that this was one of the *raison d'être* of this new science. Therefore, in addition to trying to explain the why of international actors' behavior and the evolution of international

⁹ HOFFMANN, S. *Teorías contemporáneas de las relaciones internacionales*, Tecnos, Madrid, 1963, p. 26.

¹⁰ COX, R.W. “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 10, 1981, 2, p. 128; y COX, R. “A perspective on Globalization”, en J.H. MITTELMAN (comp.), *Globalization: Critical Reflections*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1996, p. 87.

¹¹ SARQUIS, D. J. “¿Para qué sirve el estudio de las relaciones internacionales?”, *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales de la UNAM*, III, 2011, p. 44. See GARCÍA SEGURA C. y VILARIÑO PINTOS, E. (Coords.): *Comunidad Internacional y Sociedad Internacional*. Gernika Gogoratuz, Guernica, 2005.

¹² STEANS J. & LLOYD PETTIFORD, T. *An Introduction to International Relations Theory: Perspectives and Themes*, Pearson Longman, London, 2004, p. 9, in SARQUIS, David J. ¿Para qué sirve el estudio de las relaciones internacionales? ...cit., p. 60.

reality, a question arises as to whether the different theories of International Relations have been able to predict or glimpse the eruption of any event capable of modifying the international structure and putting at risk stability and world order, or we are dealing with theories with low predictive and prospective value. Paul Maxim of the Balsillie School of International Affairs puts it in the following terms: “Intuitively, theories are sets of verbal statements that synthesize the behavior of empirical systems. Depending on the approach followed, theories describe the behavior of empirical systems or provide sufficient explanation to understand why such systems behave as they do”¹³.

In this case, theories are known as paradigms in the discipline of International Relations. A paradigm, as defined by Thomas S. Kuhn, is an “approximation or global conception of the object studied”, so that, in the words of Kal Holsti, it “imposes some sort of order and coherence on an infinite universe of facts and data which, by themselves, have no meaning”¹⁴. Therefore, a paradigm should be understood as a theoretical approach that seeks to observe reality, analyze what happens in it, and theorize taking as a reference events and phenomena that are the protagonists of that reality.

In short, the different strands and paradigms that articulate the discipline form a whole that can be called: “International Relations Theory”, which explains dynamics and phenomena that coexist in international society and that lead international actors to behave in a certain way. In view of the above, it would be appropriate to embrace Robert W. Cox’s view, who distinguishes two kinds of theories: 1) First, *problem-solving theories*. These ones take the world as they find it and present themselves as explanatory theories of the *immutable and permanent* international reality. Thus, according to the Canadian professor, the first group would include theories that help “solve” problems (*solving theory*) arising in international society¹⁵ or positivist paradigms, which take the world as it is, including its power relationships, and aimed at providing solutions and answers to the problems posed by its functioning. This type of theory makes the world seem normal, just as it is, that is, it “legitimizes” the maintenance of the existing international order, based on inequality and the exclusion of part of humanity. In fact, apart from assuming that people are influenced or conditioned by objective forces that move the general dynamics of the universe, these theories seek, basically, to explain through arguments the phenomena and events taking place in the international society. 2) A second group would be comprised of those known as critical theories, which include strands that call into question the existing power and social relationships, precisely because one of their main tasks is to critique and question the established order in international society (*critical theory*)¹⁶; by the way, an international order established after the Second World War and based on rules according to the parameters and values of the West. This group includes post-positivist or reflectivist theories that promote critique from which they seek to build a new international reality-order.

From what we said, it seems that theory in any discipline is complex, and International Theory is no less so. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge among those who even bear

¹³ MAXIM, P. *Métodos cuantitativos aplicados a las ciencias sociales*, Oxford, México, 2002, p. 30.

¹⁴ HOLSTI, K. *The dividing discipline...* *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁵ René Descartes, French philosopher; is the father of Western Rationalism whose fundamental method is observation and experimentation. Author of the famous phrase, *Cogito ergo sum*, (I think, therefore I am), essential element of Rationalism.

¹⁶ COX, R.W., *Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 128.

the title of experts. As for the abstract world of theories and concepts, Winston Churchill once said: "I pass with relief from the tossing sea of Cause and Theory to the firm ground of Result and Fact"¹⁷. Also, the eminent French sociologist Marcel Merle pointed out that the world of theory in any discipline is complex, in such a way that "to venture into it requires a willingness to embrace abstract thinking that not everyone has and that few of those who possess it actually enjoy"¹⁸. Moreover, international relations are unpredictable, and this explains why none of its theories suffices to provide a reasoned argument. And this evident difficulty in analyzing what happens in society suggests why theories have not ceased to proliferate since the birth of the new science. In fact, despite the "warnings" made by outstanding scholars, IR, a discipline with scientific pretensions, addressed its theoretical foundation from the very first moment of its creation. Besides, as Raymond Aron pointed out, IR theory "can hardly be a hypothetical, deductive system as in the hard sciences with almost mathematical rigor and that supposedly reflects the objective conditions of reality. On the international scene, actors, factors, processes, structures, behaviors" are in constant change¹⁹.

Bearing these premises in mind and given that there is a direct link between the theoretical option and the methods employed in the study of international reality, the following lines will present the main narratives, paradigms or strands that have guided theory and research in this field over the years. Thus, this outcome of the complexity and plurality of IR theories might reflect the evolution that this discipline has undergone since its birth, from First World War to the present.

Therefore, it should be noted that each of the theories aims to explain certain phenomena, their implications, and complexities, as well as the way in which actors participate in and exert an influence in the international system. Indeed, each of them is reductive and focused on aspects or events on the international scene. For instance, realism centers its analysis on situations of power, leadership, interest that a constructivist, however, does not consider important. In essence, theories are explanatory constructions based on the analysis of what happens in a particular part of international society and, as Steve Smith rightly points out, "enough theories to choose between and they paint very different pictures of world politics"²⁰. Thus, a first characteristic of the discipline of IR is the existing plurality and theoretical diversity. And there are two broad approaches, axes, centers, or traditions from which strands with different theoretical levels emanate within this paradigmatic pluralism with theories analyzing and interpreting different worlds: *relevant and global* theories, as opposed to *partial or marginal* theories. Furthermore,

¹⁷ HAUSS, Ch. *International Conflict Resolution*. International Relations for the 21 st Century Continuum, London, 2011, p. 13.

¹⁸ MERLE, M. *Sociología de las Relaciones Internacionales*, Alianza, Universidad Madrid, 1978, pp. 14-15. See FRANKEL, J. *International Politics*, Penguin, London, 1973. The Argentine internationalist Myriam Colacrai pointed out in one of her works, in relation to the international situation at the end of the 20th century, that "if we intend to characterize our current world there is only one definition: the world of complexities. That real world that is so far from being able to be analyzed and expressed from a single theoretical current". In COLACRAI, M., "Coexistencia y diversidad de enfoques teóricos: apuntes para abordar la complejidad actual de las relaciones internacionales", *Agenda Internacional*, vol. 7, 14, 2000, p. 57.

¹⁹ SARQUIS, D. J. ¿Para qué sirve el estudio teórico de las Relaciones Internacionales?, cit., p. 46. ARON, R. "Qu'est ce que c'est qu'une théorie de relations internationales ?", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 17, 1967.

²⁰ SMITH, S. "Reflectivist and Constructivist Approaches to International Theory" in BAYLIS, J. y SMITH, S., *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford UP, Oxford, 2001, p. 248.

debates and scientific controversies have arisen around constant theoretical formulations²¹. Therefore, it is noted that each theory appears, in its origins, in a particular historical, political, social, and intellectual context, and has its own characteristics.

In any case, the first is the rationalist or positivist approach, which contains as some of its main theories: realism, liberalism/globalism, or complex interdependence; and structuralism/neo-Marxism²². At the other extreme is reflectivism or post-positivism with social-constructivism, critical theory, post-structuralism, and feminist theory, among others²³. Of course, there are significant disparities in the theoretical foundations of each approach. Indeed, the first block includes the so-called “classical theories” which, as has been said, aim to explain (rational *explanans*) facts or events occurring in international reality. Also, they “assume that the world has an ontological nature independently of the individual who studies it, that is, the so-called international reality is what it is according to the dictates of laws and forces that are beyond human will or creativity”²⁴. Classical theories are therefore characterized by a certain dogmatism and implicit determinism. The second block contains strands for which the “theory is part of that social, historical and contingent reality”²⁵. Therefore, while rationalists focus on knowledge and interests and consider facts to be immutable, the reflectivity approach encompasses diverse and fragmented theories that aim, in addition to *deconstructing* the theoretical postulates of the positivist approach, to present themselves as constitutive theories of international reality.

(D) THE NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO REALISM'S CAPACITY FOR RENEWAL. THE MAINSTREAM THEORY IN THE ANALYSIS OF TODAY'S INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Within the positivist approach are some of the schools and theories developed almost entirely in the United States and Western countries, clearly focused on promoting values and interests of this part of international society. That accounts for the strong ethnocentrism²⁶ that characterized IR theory until the 1980s. Having made this remark, the three theoretical approaches of rationalism, also called paradigms, are conceptual

²¹ HOFFMANN, S. “Theory and International Relations”, en ROSENAU, J. (comp.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy*; The Free Press, New York, 1969.

²² Some authors, such as Iñaki Aguirre Zabala, warns that it is surprising “to see dependency theory classified as a “classical theory”. For this internationalist, “Dependency theory occupies an important place in the history of internationalist thought for being the first academic expression of a critical theoretical perspective developed from the South and whose period of greatest incidence covers the decades from sixties to eighties of the last century”, in CASTRO RUANO, J. L. y ORUETA ESTIBARIZ, G. (Editors): *Escritos de internacionalistas en homenaje al profesor Iñaki Aguirre Zabala*, Servicio Editorial University of Basque Country, Bilbao, p. 30.

²³ Celestino del Arenal points out in his writings that in the discipline of International Relations several blocks or groups of theories coexist, and theories must be seen as dissimilar stages of the process of scientific knowledge or as different levels of analysis of International Relations. Each of these paradigms will contribute to the theoretical development of the discipline, although some more than others. In ARENAL, C. del: *Introducción a las relaciones Internacionales*, Tecnos, Madrid, 2003.

²⁴ SARQUIS, D. J. ¿Para qué sirve el estudio de las relaciones internacionales?, cit., p. 45.

²⁵ SANAHUJA, J.A. “Reflexividad, Emancipación y Universalismo: Cartografías de la Teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales”, *Revista Española de Derecho Internacional, REDI*, Vol. 70/2/2018, p. 109.

²⁶ Ethnocentrism is the tendency to think about the world based on your own culture.

frameworks or "mental imagery" developed, mainly, during the historical period known as the *Cold War* and marked by the consolidation of the new discipline. In addition, each paradigm, developed as political, economic, and social events and phenomena changed and altered the structure of international society, seeks to organize reality, help understand some of the events, offer different views of the world and focus attention on certain aspects and turn away from others.

All of them have been developed within the framework of the American centrism that "has affected the global discipline and has been present in its origins and theoretical foundations (...)"²⁷. Moreover, "the American centrism that characterizes IR theory has so far proved to be relatively immune to critiques and attacks"²⁸. Therefore, it is worth recognizing first, the U.S. predominance in the discipline; and second, the fact that its theoretical development has been linked to the interests and needs of the foreign policy designed in Washington and, in general, of the Western powers. Stanley Hoffman himself acknowledged this in one of his articles: "An American Social Science: International Relations"²⁹. Consequently, the strength of the U.S. and Western narrative is a fact in international theory that remains until today.

All rationalist strands are explanatory theories, aimed at the analysis and interpretation of the events taking place in international society, and the study of the causality of the facts. Some of the key themes of the discipline of International Relations are the concepts of anarchy, power, national interest and sovereignty, among others. Furthermore, these theories dominated the field until the 1980s, mainly those within the framework of realist thought. In this respect, it should be recalled that realists conceive international system as anarchic, full of dangers, in which states (particularly the two American and Soviet superpowers) always see their sovereignty and survival under threat, so guaranteeing their security becomes their obsession and explains their actions and interventions, which are sometimes more aggressive than defensive.

Each paradigm provides a view of different aspects of international politics, where realism deals with war and peace, and is concerned with security understood in military terms; liberalism focuses on the management of international regimes and other issues of international reality, as well as the plurality of actors, both state and non-state; and neo-Marxism addresses global poverty, development issues and places the blame for all problems on the capitalist economic system. Which type is correct is then an issue the theoretical discussion avoids, since each paradigm is correct regarding the aspect of international politics it deals with. As has been said, each theory or paradigm emphasizes certain aspects of international reality and this is why some scholars, such as Michael Banks, among other, advocate for the inter-paradigm debate, since the three

²⁷ C. del Arenal analyzes with a critical perspective ethnocentrism and in particular the American centrism that has characterized the theory of the international relations, in the chapter "Americanocentrismo y relaciones internacionales: La Seguridad Nacional como referente", in the book *Teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales*, Tecnos, Madrid, 2015, pp. 21-60.

²⁸ ARENAL, C., del y SANAHUJA, J. A. *Teorías de las Relaciones Internacionales.... cit.*, p. 56, TICKNER, A.B., "Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 32, 2, 2003, pp. 295-324.

²⁹ HOFFMANN, S. "An American Social Science: International Relations", *Daedalus*, vol. 106, 1977, pp. 41-60.

theoretical interpretations lead to a greater understanding of international relations and what happens in international society³⁰.

In this sense, the three paradigms help explain current world politics as the international stages in which each was created are still present, although sizeable differences remain. However, this paper focuses on the *mainstream* of the discipline of IR, namely, Realism and its variants such as Neorealism. Under this theory, international relations are “power relationships determined by the phenomenon of power and international reality is essentially conflictual in which anarchy and the dictates of the inexorable law of the strongest are its roots”³¹. This scene was particularly relevant after the Second World War, and it was at this time that the consolidation of the Realist School took place. In the post-war context, characterized by political-military tension and the insecurity of states, their difficulty to survive in a hostile environment; the war of ideologies; and the absolute power of two superpowers (the USA and the USSR), Realism prevailed and came about with the purpose of addressing national security with military implications and analyze international relations from the perspective of power and the safeguarding of the national interest of the poles that directed the international scene.

Currently, there is a return to realism, at least in the facts and behaviors of the countries, beyond theoretical and merely doctrinal proclamations. The keys to realist positions are imposed on the international scene and the main attributes of this theory are reborn in new environments and curiously strengthened by actors who question the consequences of the parameters on which it is based. Although the future of contemporary international relations remains to be defined, realist reasoning has gained considerable roots in the behavior of international actors.

(1) The unalterable nature of Realism: a solid basis for the distribution of power in today's international society

First, one of the main theoretical architects of realism was the American political scientist Hans Morgenthau, author of the famous “Six principles of Political Realism”³², a scientific approach in which he provided an empirical explanation of “power” in the international scene. Morgenthau developed his theory of international politics not only for academic purposes, but also as a practical tool for conducting foreign policy. This theory, which scrapped the proposals of Idealism³³, has the following outstanding aspects:

³⁰ SMITH, S. *The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory*; *loc. cit.*, pp. 18-19, en AGUIRRE, I. *Proyecto Docente Relaciones Internacionales*, Leioa, 1996, p. 43.

³¹ CALDUCH CERVERA, R. *Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid, Ediciones de las Ciencias Sociales, 1991, p. 20.

³² Hans Morgenthau's Six principles of Political Realism are presented as some of the fundamental characteristics of this paradigm, in <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/morgenthau-s-realist-theory-6-principles/48472>.

³³ Idealism is a theoretical current that emerged after the First World War and that took shape in the ideas of the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, compiled in his famous “Fourteen Points”. A speech in which he included a series of proposals to end the war and restore order and peace in Europe and the world. In this case, it should be noted that Idealism, which was characterized by its faith in progress, its optimistic vision of human nature and by advocating the peaceful solution of political conflict through

1) In the path of the Greek philosopher Thucydides, realism recognizes that human beings (states) are by nature self-interested and power-seeking, moved by the drive to dominate, compete and pursue wealth, power, and prestige. Hence, one of the main features of political realism "is the concept of *interest* defined in terms of power"³⁴. This theory focuses on the rational, the objective and the non-emotional, and assumes that human beings (state) permanently seek survival, the satisfaction of the desire to exert power which gives them an advantage over others. Morgenthau expressed this idea by pointing out that conflict is the result of the imperfect and devilish nature of the individual, and of the state of anarchy prevailing in international society. Such phenomena cause constant conflict and struggle between states which seek to increase their power and hegemony on the international scene. That is why, realist scholars, aware of the selfish nature of human beings, consider that it is possible to prevent any nation or political alliance from achieving international hegemony, through the *balance of power*, which is a key concept to a stable international order.

2) In view of the above, realism highlights the competitive and conflictual side of international politics and excludes other factors such as natural cooperation, or even the validity of IL. For realism, international reality is basically conflictive, and cooperation is only possible when it comes to pursuing the defense of one's own interests, survival or improving position and influence in the international framework. In this theoretical approach, the dimension of force and conflict prevails; the important role played by cooperation in international relations is accordingly overshadowed³⁵. As a result, it seems logical that realist scholars are more interested in military strategy, national power, or diplomacy than in peace, cooperation, and IL. As F. Pearson and M. Rochester point out, "realists claim to have learned their own lessons from World War II, namely, that the way to prevent future warlike confrontations lies in relying not only on formal and legal institutions or moral precepts, but fundamentally on a 'balance of power', capable of deterring potential aggressors, or also on a 'agreement of powers' capable of 'policing' the world"³⁶.

3) Realism emphasizes the anarchical nature and the tendency to chaos and disorder of international reality and marks that, the absence of a higher political authority to provide security forces states to take political-military measures to guarantee their own survival. In other words, classical realist scholars assume that international society is anarchic as there is no similar legal-political order over and above the state nor a supranational

diplomacy and negotiation, insisted on the need to "minimize conflict and maximize cooperation between nations". Furthermore, Idealism proposed a public diplomacy and multilateral diplomacy, regulated by International Law and certain organizations. In PEARSON, F. S. y ROCHESTER J. M.: *Relaciones Internacionales. Situación global en el siglo XXI*, Mc Graw Hill, 2003, p. 17.

³⁴ MORGENTHAU, J.H. *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1948.

³⁵ MEDINA, M. *La teoría de las relaciones internacionales cit.* Véase también TRUYOL y SERRA, A.: *La Teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales como Sociología* (Introduction of the International Relations Studies), Instituto de Estudios Políticos, Madrid, 1973 (1ª ed., 1957).

³⁶ PEARSON, F. y ROCHESTER, M. *Relaciones Internacionales, cit.*, p. 21. These and other aspects are reflected in the work of BARBÉ, E. "El papel del realismo en las relaciones internacionales (La teoría de la política internacional de Hans J. Morgenthau)", *Revista de Estudios Políticos (Nueva Época)*, 57, 1987, pp. 149-176.

government to settle disputes or protect the weak³⁷. For realists “the highest goal for all states is security in a hostile and anarchical world; so that their policies are determined by power calculations in the pursuit of national security”³⁸. In short, the main interest of states is national security, and it must be defended against other interests, suggesting that in international relations a state’s security is in contradiction with other actors’ interests. This thought inevitably gives rise to conflicts between actors with identical interests or interests close to their area of influence³⁹.

4) The last characteristic or principle of realist theory concerns the cyclical nature of history or, in other words, the impossibility of historical progress and change towards qualitative different forms of the international order. Thus, through the adoption of a deterministic approach, realism suggests that, although we know what our destiny is, we have no ability to do otherwise. In fact, realist scholars do not expect that over time states will be less favorable to conflict and more inclined to cooperation, since they are convinced that wars between great powers are bound to recur systematically.

As stated, Realism was suggested from its origins as the main theory of IR until the 1960s. At that time, changes in international society with the emergence of new actors and energy, trade, or environmental issues, spurred the development of theories aimed at counteracting the prominent role of realism. However, the increasing tension between the two superpowers, from the following decade, would be the driving force to reformulating the hegemonic strand of IR. In fact, under the guidance of Kenneth N. Waltz, it renewed part of its theoretical foundations so as not to disappear or, worse still, be supplanted by transnationalist or structuralist paradigms.

The revival realism needed to reassert itself as a key theory of IR came with Waltz, founder of Neorealism or Structural Realism. In 1979 he published *Theory of International Politics*, which would “replace” Morgenthau’s work as the main reference for Realism⁴⁰. He suggested a theoretical reformulation with two main changes, as E. Barbé recalls: “first the foreign policy decisions of the state are no longer explained by domestic or personal conditioning factors (leadership) but by structural determinants of the anarchic international system; and second, the general reflection that characterized realism, based on history and philosophy, gives way to scientific formalism”⁴¹. In contrast to the

³⁷ The existing international political order, as well as the legal rules that arise under it, are the result of the sovereignty of the states and not the product of a superior political power or authority. VIOTTI, P. R. y KAUPPI, M. V., *International...op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

³⁸ PEARSON, F. S. y ROCHESTER, J. M. *Relaciones Internacionales*, cit., p. 20.

³⁹ This perspective is postulated as an heir to the Hobbesian tradition of thought, in which, as Martin Wight recalls, international relations are conceived as a “pitched war”, in which conflict is the most characteristic international activity, similar to the Thomas Hobbes concept of the state of nature. There is no doubt that the central aspects of Realism are ontologically inspired by the Machiavellism or Hobbesian philosophical tradition, WOLFERS, A. *Discord and Collaboration. Essays on International Relations*, The John Hopkins UP, Baltimore, 1962. In BARBÉ, E.: *Relaciones Internacionales...* 1995, p. 62. WIGHT, M. *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, Leicester UP, London, 1991.

⁴⁰ About the Neorealism, see WALTZ, K. *Theory of International Politics*, Wesley, Reading, 1979 (trad. 1988). BUZAN, B. y, JONES, C. y LITTLE, R., *The logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, Nueva York, Columbia University Press, 1993. KEOHANE, R. (comp.), *Neorealism and its critics*, Columbia UP, New York, 1986; and BALDWIN, D. (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993.

⁴¹ BARBÉ, E., *Relaciones Internacionales*, Tecnos, Madrid, 2007, p. 78.

traditional realism, in Waltz's theoretical proposal, the unit of analysis is the structure of the international system instead of the state, i.e., neorealism introduces the concept of «structure» as a determining element of political relations among its members. An international structure composed of a small number of protagonist states that take the role of great powers in international relations. Furthermore, another important proposal of contemporary realists incorporated elements of an economic and cooperative nature explaining "the basic structure of international relations and the underlying dynamics of conflicts between states"⁴².

Beyond the above, neorealism shows an international reality based on the interests and power of states, in the purest realist style, and argues that the anarchic international system and power relations among actors explain the constant conflicts in international society. Thus, when it comes to expressing its way of seeing the state and conflict relations as protagonists in the inter-state sphere, neorealism, as its very name indicates, implies renewal, but also the inclusion of the key elements of realism. In addition, it maintains the concepts of power and interest, as well as the anarchic, chaotic, and decentralized nature of the international system. However, neorealism takes a step forward by including cooperative and economic relations as significant features of the international system.

Major authors of this strand include Klaus Knorr, Kenneth N. Waltz⁴³, Robert Gilpin. While Waltz counters with the thesis that bipolarity is the best guarantee for international stability, and analyzes the role played by the political structure of the international system in determining states' behavior; Gilpin favors unipolarity, alleging that the hegemonic power must have the capacity to design economic and political relations that generate interdependence or dependence, of the rest of the actors. Currently internationally we see how bipolarism between USA and China is being imposed, and how two great powers: The EU and Russia, accompany and strengthen one of the poles. Furthermore, the so-called Global South, with its plurality and lack of internal cohesion, expresses a tendency towards the China/Russia binomial⁴⁴.

In any case, the process of evolution that realism went through⁴⁵, regardless of how it is called — *classical, offensive, defensive, neorealism*, or most recently, *neoclassical realism* —, demonstrates the resilience of the Realist School, not only to maintain itself as a theoretical strand but also to dominate the thinking of several generations of international relations analysts, from the Second World War to the present. Moreover, each version characteristically reviews its foundations and principles in accordance with changes in international society and aims at reinforcing the paradigm against attacks from emerging theories. Nevertheless, although realism presents different stages, all its strands agree on visualizing a disordered and dangerous international society in which

⁴² PEARSON, F. y ROCHESTER, M., *Relaciones Internacionales*, cit., p. 21.

⁴³ WALTZ, K.N. *Teoría...*, cit., p. 119.

⁴⁴ Let us remember that, in 1996, the two countries signed a strategic partnership with the objective of opposing the unipolar international order led by USA. The Asian giant is in the process of becoming a global power in the economic, political and strategic fields. "According to Dongwu Securities, in 2023, for the first time, China exported more to developing countries than to the United States, the EU and Japan combined", in BRICS+China creates its alternative G7", *Foreign Policy Week Report*, 1335, 2023.

⁴⁵ MOURE, L., "El Realismo en la teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales: Génesis, Evolución y Aportaciones Actuales", in ARENAL, C. del y SANAHUJA, J. A. *Teorías de las Relaciones Internacionales*, cit., pp. 61-96.

states see their sovereignty and, definitively, their own existence threatened, which leads them to conflict and constant competition to remain relevant powers on the international stage. In addition, it is also clear how all strands prioritize a static and deterministic image that hinders and even prevents any possibility of change in international relations or limits eventual modifications in the inter-state system of balances of power. Therefore, continuity and change explain the permanence of the dominant theoretical strand (*mainstream*), since in addition to maintaining some immutable principles, realism has been in constant evolution and transformation, just like the scene and relationships between actors, which it attempts to analyze.

(2) A model based on the permanent crisis and conflict of International Society: Lessons from Realism in the Ukrainian War

In today's international society, conflict is still present in the form of wars between states, such as Russia and Ukraine, and between a state, Israel, and Hamas, a non-state actor, among others. The instability caused by the two conflicts — which are old, unresolved, and particularly devastating that have resumed in historical contexts different from those which gave rise to them — place Realism/Neorealism at the pinnacle of the analysis of international reality due to its capacity to impose itself as a key theory providing a rational explanation of what happens. Then, focusing on the first situation, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which started on February 24, 2022, has caused “a tectonic shift in European history”⁴⁶, as the EU Heads of State and Government stressed in the *Versailles Declaration* (section 6); some of the key points of realism/neorealism are fulfilled.

First, this war shows an important part of the conflict that international society suffers and explains to a large extent the political instability and international insecurity of the planet and how states actors take the path of indiscriminate violence to defend their interests. This would fulfill realism's central premise, which is of course the continued war, driven in part by the obsession of states to maximize their security and power within an anarchic and disorderly world. In the message delivered on the day the invasion of Ukraine began, Russian President Vladimir Putin justified the military aggression by pointing out that for Russia it was, “a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation”. He added: “And this is not an exaggeration, it is true. It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty”. So, on the one hand the president sought to convince his compatriots, and on the other hand the international community, alleging that the aggression was an act of self-defence to protect Russia from threats. Moreover, he went as far as to say that it was “necessary to stop the genocide against the millions of people living there, who

⁴⁶ See Versailles Declaration in <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/press/press-releases/2022/03/11/the-versailles-declaration-10-11-03-2022/>.

rely only on Russia..."⁴⁷, clearly referring to the ethnic Russian people living in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. Thus, Vladimir Putin tried to convince international community that the decision was made on security grounds and national survival, to protect and defend Russia's vital interests.

Second, realist thinking considers that there is danger when states voice their dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. They are more likely to start territorial expansion strategies which lead to wars, modify the international order, and undermine, in this case, the political-military unipolarism in force since 1991 and that the United States intends to preserve. Following the disintegration of the USSR, Russia has expressed and shown its need to be the direct heir to the former Soviet Union, in terms of world power and leadership, and to restore, if possible, the bipolarism it exercised with the United States during the *Cold War* or move towards an international order that once again places Russia at the pinnacle of global power and influence⁴⁸.

Precisely this objective explains two scenarios: first, that since the gos it has proposed to strengthen economic and political ties with China, and second, it felt the need to regain (in terms of political-military control) Ukraine, which was the second republic with the greatest weight in the USSR, or at least to avoid general exit out of Russia's sphere of influence. Therefore, it was necessary to prevent its entry into the Western sphere by joining the institutions of the leading pole, i.e. the USA together with the EU. For Russia, Ukraine was slipping out of its sphere of influence and increasingly falling into the Western orbit. This is one of the underlying reasons for Russia's decision to attack. It is undeniable that Ukraine's politics in the preceding years (*rapprochement* and request for NATO membership) was used by Russia to justify its decision, which was also motivated by its loss of power in the field of IR and, therefore, contrary to its national interest.

The result has been a scene like that which existed in the early years of the *Cold War*, albeit with marked differences. The strains in U.S. relations with Russia have been joined by a third actor, the European Union (EU), which has embraced the realist thesis and has recognized its determination to provide itself with *strategic autonomy*. The Russian aggression has generated an earthquake in the international system and has led the EU to look at itself and its defense capabilities to face the threats looming in its environment and beyond, in addition to responding with measures aimed at the aggressor and the aggrieved. The invasion has basically led to the strengthening of the EU on the international stage as a global security actor. This was expressed by the heads of state and government in paragraph 7 of the *Versailles Declaration* when they stated that, "confronted with growing instability, strategic competition and security threats, we have decided to take more responsibility for our security (...)"⁴⁹. With these words, Europe's leaders made it clear that the Russian aggression has a significant impact on the different dimensions of European security and that, therefore, a multiple response

⁴⁷ Full text of Putin State of Nation Speech, 24 February 2022, en <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/world/europe/putin-ukraine-speech.html>.

⁴⁸ KIMMAGE, M. y NOTTE, H. "How Russia Globalized the war in Ukraine. The Kremlin's Pressure-Point Strategy to Undermine the West", *Foreign Affairs*, 1, 2023.

⁴⁹ See Versailles Declaration, *op. cit.*

is required. This would consist of bolstering its defense capabilities, reducing its energy dependencies, and building a more robust economic base, which is why the signatories understand that the military, energy, and economic dimensions of European security are the most affected and compromised by the war in Ukraine⁵⁰. And so, they proclaim: “we must do so for our security and take further decisive steps towards building our European sovereignty, reducing our dependencies and designing a new growth and investment model for 2030”⁵¹. Therefore, the war of aggression against Ukraine, in addition to raising specters of past times, has sent out to the West, and to the EU, “a very, very clear message: *si vis pacem para bellum*”⁵². These words are reminiscent of those pronounced by General Marshall at Harvard University on June 5, 1947: “I need not tell you gentlemen that the world situation is very serious”⁵³. Consequently, following the outbreak of the war, the EU decided to implement a comprehensive security system, mainly focused on these three dimensions.

Thus, on the one hand, the EU approved the *Strategic Compass* (SC) which sets out the guidelines for the implementation of the measures agreed under the *Versailles Declaration*. The extensive 47-page document provides a common vision of the EU’s strategic environment, the threats, and challenges in international society, by making the organization a global security actor and strengthening its geopolitical position⁵⁴. Measures comprise, among others, the creation of a “rapid deployment capacity” of up to 5,000 troops for different types of crises, including land, air, and maritime components, etc., with full operational capability planned for 2025. On the other hand, it should be noted that nearly all EU countries have recently increased their defense spending to reduce the shortfalls in military and civilian capabilities and to strengthen the European defense technological and industrial base. Thus, France plans to allocate 400 billion euro in defense spending over the coming years, a considerable increase over the previous decade⁵⁵. In short, it is a simple fact that the Russian invasion has led most European countries and the EU itself to increase their military or defense spending as few times before and, to place *hard power* at the forefront of the international chessboard as a priority measure to guarantee their security⁵⁶.

Finally, another backbone of the SC focuses on the purpose of *working in partnership* to achieve common goals and address common threats and challenges which implies

⁵⁰ See MORÁN BLANCO, S. *Seguridad Energética y Medio Ambiente: Dos caras de una misma moneda. Especial referencia a la UE*, Navarra, Thomson Reuters Aranzadi, 2015, p. 25. The Copenhagen School (Copenhagen Peace Research Institute) distinguishes five sectors of security: political, economic, social, military and environmental. BUZÁN, B. “New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century”, *International Affairs*, vol. 67, 3, p. 433.

⁵¹ Versailles Declaration, 2022, *op. cit.*

⁵² GUTIÉRREZ ESPADA, C. “De la guerra en Ucrania”, *Anuario Español de Derecho Internacional*, vol. 39, 2023, p. 97.

⁵³ In Dialnet-DiscursosDeMrGeorgeMarshall-2495018.pdf.

⁵⁴ See “A Strategic Compass for security and defence. Foreword by HR/VP Josep Borrell, 64 pages. HAKANSSON, C., “Where does the Compass point? The European Commissions role in the development of EU security and defence policy. Sage Journals, European View, vol. 21, Issue 1, March 29, 2022. Available in: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17816858221086425>.

⁵⁵ *Noticia Cinco Días*, 23 march 2023.

⁵⁶ The consulting firm McKinsey anticipates that EU spending may rise by up to 65% between 2021 and 2026, amounting to 488.00 euros.

strengthening cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO, the UN, the OSCE, AU, ASEAN, and even "boosting cooperation with bilateral partners, i.e. with like-minded and strategic partners, such as United States, Canada, Norway, UK and Japan", among others; in addition to "developing tailored partnerships in the Western Balkans, the Eastern and Southern Neighborhood, Africa, Asia and Latin America"⁵⁷. At this point, one of the contributions of neorealism can be observed, namely the cooperative relations that, within the framework of structures (grouping of states), arise in the international reality as an instrument that favors the defense of national interests. Nevertheless, the EU's political will is to highly strengthen the security and defense sector as an essential condition for increasing its importance on the international scene as a global actor and, thus, bolstering its strategic autonomy in the region and the rest of the planet⁵⁸. The EU's role in security and defense matters is a key element for consolidating its leading role on the international scene and in deep crisis.

(E) CONCLUSIONS

It follows that when confrontation and political-military tension increase between the great powers of the international system, there is a reassessment of Realism/Neorealism which entails, among other things, reemerging with an important role as the hegemonic paradigm that explains international reality. At this time, when the tension between international powers immersed in a competition for global governance is becoming perceptible; Realism/Neorealism is rescued as an indisputable theory that help understand the international evolution, as well as the answers and initiatives provided by the different actors that play a leading role in international relations. Realism, with its different approaches, is probably the most genuine theoretical school with the longest intellectual tradition in the discipline of IR, which has steadily offered a global understanding of the behavior of the state in the international system. In fact, despite its limitations, it is essential to implement realist postulates to explain the dynamics and fundamental aspects affecting the international system.

The future of international relations is unpredictable because factors may arise that jeopardize peacekeeping and international security. Thus, as Henry Kissinger – one of the most relevant disciples of realist thought – pointed out in his work *World Order*; there is a need for "the reorganization of the chaotic international system through a kind of global regionalism in which the great powers reach agreements among themselves that generate order and stability"⁵⁹. His neorealist thinking suggests once again that the postulates of hegemonic theory continue to influence the future of international reality and consequently, states should be able to build new regulatory balances through concrete agreements between interlocutors and prevent the conflictive drift of international society. However, what has been noted since the late 1990s and most

⁵⁷ See document *Strategic Compass*, in https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf.

⁵⁸ SANAHUJA, J. A. "La Unión Europea y la guerra de Ucrania. Dilemas de la autonomía estratégica y la transición verde en un orden mundial en cambio", in MESA, M. (Coord.), *Policrisis y rupturas del orden global. Anuario 2022-2023*, Ceipaz, Fundación Cultura de Paz, Madrid, 2023, pp. 23-58.

⁵⁹ KISSINGER, H. *The World Order*, Houston, Penguin Publishing Group, 2016.

evidently since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the emergence of two disparate blocs, on the one hand, the West, led by Washington, and the other, China and Russia, which does not help generate confidence in international evolution, quite the opposite. The US NSS (National Security Strategic) of October 2022 recognized this: “We find ourselves in the midst of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order”⁶⁰.

One of the most notable expressions of reborn realism will be the positions defended by those who seek to lead the Global South and who seek in the direction of expanding the fields of cooperation and defending common values, without specifying the content and interpretation of those values. From that perspective, the speech of Chinese Presidente Xi Jinping at the 16th BRICS Summit in 2024 could be examined, when he indicated that “the world is going through accelerated transformations never seen in a century, characterized by new trends of multipolarity and the risks of a new Cold War” and when he opted for the BRICS countries to seek “common ground, putting aside differences, working together to further consolidate common values, safeguarding common interest”. It would be necessary to define the values that these countries proclaim and determine the content of the rules that should govern international relations in the 21st century, where realistic postulates will probably occupy a relevant place.

Amid the evident unpredictability of the international system, empirical evidence shows the dynamics of conflict, always present since unravel the postulates of realism. That is precisely why the defense of global dialogue and compliance with international law need to be restored, otherwise the future will be catastrophic. There are international institutions that promote cooperation between states and respect for rules governing the behavior of the actors. There is a need for a thorough review and reform of all the institutions operating within the international framework so that they have enhanced ability to minimize security competition, promote world peace and foster a balance that will force states to abandon their objectives of maximizing power. Of course, the United Nations and other similar regional organizations, despite their recognized virtues, have not been able to attenuate the features that define the international behaviour of the actor that lead international relations.

⁶⁰ Disponible en: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/esp/zxxx/202410/t20241025_11516089.html.