The United States
And the Security Council

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> "In a long-term conflict, both sides end up ruined."
> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The Security Council was created when the United Nations was established after World War II. The four victorious powers were given permanent seats, with another place allotted to China (before the triumph of its rev-

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olution) because of its huge population; the non-permanent seats were left to the rest of the world.

A security council was necessary not only because of the need to maintain hegemonies, but also to find mechanisms for containing any conflict that might arise putting humanity at risk because of the emergence of atomic power. The organizational principle it was based on was that the General Assembly, representing the governments of the world, should be an important forum for presenting and discussing prob-

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lems, but it would not be an ideal place for making decisions, containment, and resolutions, in accordance with the principle that the possibility of reaching agreements is inversely proportional to the number of participants.

After the war, the United States became the first great nation. However, even though at the end of hostilities, it held a monopoly on nuclear power, this did not last long, since by 1948, it shared that distinction with the Soviet Union (USSR), and since then, new nuclear powers have emerged. Under these circumstances, the possibility of building a consensus among the great powers has meant the need to use a combination of Hobbesian realism and Machiavellianism, together with pragmatism. It is the same kind of consensus that Eisenhower would allude to when describing the U.S.'s bi-partisan political model: he said that the Democrats were conservative liberals and the Republicans were dynamic conservatives, allowing them to overcome Byzantine differences and agree on the priority of putting the interests of the United States above anything else.

We can add to this the view of Nikita Khrushchev, USSR prime minister from 1958 to 1964, when he said, "U.S. pol-

itics is very simple: Roosevelt proved that a president could stay in office for life; Truman proved that anyone could be president; and Eisenhower, that the United States could live without a president." Along these same lines, we would say that John F. Kennedy showed that the presidency could cost you your life; Lyndon B. Johnson, what a cowboy could do in the presidency; Richard Nixon, the tricks a president could pull; Gerald Ford, that it is not necessary to be elected to be president; James Carter, that an unknown could sit in the White House; Ronald Reagan, that all politicians are first and foremost actors; George Bush, that the presidency could be left to one's children; William Clinton, that when you govern with your wife, infidelity and power are incompatible; and George W. Bush, that alcoholism and ignorance, even without a majority of the vote, are no impediment for gaining the presidency. Finally, with Barack Obama, we have to remember that there is a big distance between campaign promises and deeds.

It could be said that these statements can be heard from a broad sector of the U.S. public. However, the problem becomes severe when confronted with what people of the rest of the world's powers think and what the positions are of the different regimes around the globe. The differences can be huge, which means that every intention has to be weighed, negotiated to the nth degree, and agreed upon according to the circumstances. So, while domestic politics may seem simple, U.S. foreign policy operates in an enormously complex context, since it means projecting a decision on a world scale, and unilateralism is not valid there.

Since Barack Obama has been in office (2009 and 2010), the consequences of Security Council resolutions can be summarized in the creation of international tribunals on Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, conflicts that have been going on for more than a decade without conclusion; working groups, outstanding among which are one on children in conflict zones and another on the fight against international terrorism; and the commission on reparations. These problems are structur-

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al and will not be definitively solved in the short term since they are beyond the scope of the council members.

A second series of problems the SC intervenes in can be classified as "critical zones," in this case those that have become permanent focuses of world tension. Among these are the case of the Middle East and East Asia, particularly the old conflict between the two Koreas, in addition to North Korea's policy of atomic-energy blackmail, which recently led to South Korea's shoring up its presence with joint military maneuvers with the United States.

Thirdly, we find the so-called "failed states," which Noam Chomsky classifies as those without the capacity or determination to protect their citizens against violence or even total destruction and are considered beyond national and international law, and at the same time suffer from extremely deficient democracies, robbing their institutions of legality and legitimacy.[1] In short, these are states of national insecurity. This is the plight of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Burundi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, the Sudan, the Ivory Coast, Chad, the Western Sahara, Cyprus, and Haiti, and has been the topic of important SC resolutions in this period.

A fourth general line of action encompasses the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan. In the first case, as everyone knows, President George W. Bush started the war with Security Council backing in 2001, which, in its first phase, brought down the Taliban regime. However, the initial success has been followed by setback after setback, as the war has turned into a long-term conflict, muddying the lines of territorial domination of Karzai's government, considered pro-Western. At the same time, there is no certainty today about the U.S. stance: at the First NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, George W. Bush agreed with France and Great Britain to reinforce the alliance to plan long-term actions, a very different position from Barack Obama's promise of almost immediate withdrawal, now slated for March 2011. In the face of this, the conservative grassroots and the

army, in the voice of General David Petraeus, point out the agreements with the allies and the risks of losing the war, which will undoubtedly have weight in the minds of voters in November 2010.

Last August 31, President Obama addressed the nation from the Oval Office saying there was nothing to celebrate about Iraq and that the U. S. combat mission and Operation Iraqi Freedom had come to an end and that the Iraqi people were now assuming responsibility for their country. He went on to say that, with this conflict over, the task was now to put right the U.S. economy and get millions of unemployed Americans back to work.[2] The announcement, coming before the November elections, has all the hallmarks of concerns that the president and his party are not sure of winning.

In effect, a distinction should be made between the military-industrial complex that dominated wars until the end of the Cold War and modern warfare. In the former, employment was pegged to the scale-up of the military conflict, requiring huge inputs. The latter, since Operation Desert Storm in Iraq, characteristically uses sophisticated armaments produced by the technological military-industrial complex. This last feature is what differentiates it from the previous kind of warfare because it is not linked to increased employment: what it requires is experts, and it makes use of patents and different processes associated with multinational corporations, like in the case of modern missiles.

Though Barack Obama is fulfilling a campaign promise, the way and moment he is putting an end to the war in Iraq do not seem to be on the president's side. The ultra-right will want to know the terms of the accord with the Iraqis and the consensus of the populace about keeping troops on the ground with the pretext of advising the new Iraqi army. At the same time, this situation evokes 1963, when the crises around Cuba, Berlin, and the U.S. missiles in Turkey, and the assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngô Đình Diêm raged simultaneously, a political context which framed the assassination of John F. Kennedy. These crises, preceded by the first part of the civil rights movement, were followed by massive youth protests and the defeat in Vietnam. We should remember that after Richard M. Nixon took office in 1968, his presidency was marred by the Watergate scandal, followed by the 1973 Paris accords, marking the United States' first political-military defeat, which would give rise to the ambivalent phrase, "We wanted withdrawal, but not defeat."

This leads us to the power of the U.S. president and his capacity to influence the Security Council. The response to

an anti-war proposal can be used as a double-edged sword in a presidential campaign: domestically, it can create division, but *vis-à-vis* the great powers, it can cause huge confusion. We should remember what happened after the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, where the Viet Cong took over the enormous amount of weaponry that the U.S. left behind and used it to expand in Southeast Asia.[3] The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was only the prelude to the end of the USSR and its satellite governments, which coincided with the end of the so-called Soviet "gerontocracy," facilitating the rise of inexperienced officials and the final collapse of the entire bloc's political, economic, ideological model.

I am convinced that the world of today cannot be led by charisma and image, which are fleeting but not a reflection of reality. Max Weber used to say that charisma is something that soon dissolves into routine and can lead to ineffective, inexpert, servile bureaucracies, as happens to the world's authoritarian regimes.[4] History remembers the presidents who

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for different reasons did not serve a second term: Herbert Hoover (1929-1933), because after he offered prosperity came the Great Crash of 1929; John F. Kennedy (1961-1963), because he did not understand the play of domestic and external factors that gave rise to his assassination in 1963; Gerald Ford (1974-1977), because he did not realize he was only a man for the transition; James Carter (1977-1981), because he thought image abroad was more important than at home; and George Bush (1989-1993), because he underestimated his adversaries. Finally, Barack Obama won a Nobel Peace prize without having earned it. He has proceeded halfheartedly and extremely cautiously to fulfill his campaign promises and probably has not taken into account the fact that wars come to an end, but not because one of the sides decides it, since whoever withdraws risks losing everything.

The probable repercussions of this are the increase of Iran's influence in the region and the spread of fundamentalisms in Pakistan; the loss of allies in the vital Middle East region; and the disintegration of national states in the area. In addition, we should remember that these actors have nuclear capabilities and that the recovery of the U.S. economy is by no means guaranteed.

We should recall that the Security Council is a decision-making body where views are aired and resolutions are by consensus; it cannot be led by a single man, since every proposal affects very diverse and contradictory interests like a domino effect.

At the same time, in this scenario, we should consider the presence of non-state actors, like multinational corporations that concentrate the economic elite, controlled by business leaders; organized crime; political or religious terrorism; and the influence of different churches. All of this changes the agreements among states. In addition to taking them into account because of their resources, mobility, and decision-making capabilities, we have to add the crisis derived from the corruption of the bureaucratic government apparatus. All these actors are global, in contrast to the states, which maintain their power over specific areas. For this reason, bodies like the Security Council are not enough to deal with them, even if they cause an ecological disaster of a magnitude of the one British Petroleum created in the Gulf of Mexico. Under these circumstances, in this century, it will be necessary to consider creating global bodies that can regulate these actors. **VM**

NOTES

[1] See Noam Chomsky, *Failed Status: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2006). [Editor's Note.]

[2] See http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/08/31/remarks-president-address-nation-end-combat-operations-iraq. [Editor's Note.]

[3] The Viet Cong, or National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), was a political organization and army in South Vietnam and Cambodia that fought the U.S. military intervention and the South Vietnamese governments that supported the U.S. neo-colonialist project during the Vietnam War (1955-1975). [Editor's Note.]

[4] For more about this idea of charisma, see Maximilian Weber, "The Nature of Charismatic Authority and Its Routinization," in Max Weber et al., *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A. R. Anderson and Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). This work was originally published in 1922 in German. [Editor's Note.]