

UNBALANCES AND EUROPE'S AIMS¹

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CARLOS GASPAR
O Fim da Europa

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Carlos Gaspar is widely known in academia and beyond, and a prolific author, remarkably committed to an editorial discipline of publishing at least one book every year. Published since 2016: *O Pós-Guerra Fria* [The Post-Cold War] (2016), *A Balança da Europa* [The Balance of Europe] (2017), *Raymond Aron e Guerra Fria* [Raymond Aron and the Cold War] (2018), *O Regresso da Anarquia* [The Return of Anarchy] (2019), *O Mundo de Amanhã* [The World of Tomorrow] (2020), e *Teoria das Relações Internacionais* [Theory of International Relations] (2021).

His last work, *O Fim da Europa* [The End of Europe] (2022), is a book penned by someone who thinks and reflects on International Relations in a critical way because his analyses invariably stem from the articulation of three different outlooks: the perspective of the historical analyst, for whom the repetition of historical events is not inevitable but cyclical resurgence is a possibility; the perspective of the theoretical analyst, who resorts to the theories of International Relations to support his arguments; and the perspective of the empirical-contemporary analyst, who contextualizes events chronologically and causally. This quality renders discernible the complex issues dealt with by Carlos Gaspar in his books, setting forth his arguments with eloquence and clarity.



This book is essential for experts and for all those who are interested in contemporary European history and today's Europe. In the troubled times we are experiencing, deepening one's knowledge of the European past is crucial to understand how, in the war in Ukraine, not only the individual future of that country is being played but also the future of the European order. From the outset, like with any fine book, both the cover and the title challenge the reader even before the reading has begun. The cover – a sketch by Almada Negreiros, with an excerpt of Fernando Pessoa's 1928

poem that reads ‘Europe lies, reclining upon her elbows [...] The staring face is Portugal’ – suggests a thoughtful, dreamy and relaxed Europe moving towards its always uncertain future.

For its part, the title of the book, *The End of Europe*, suggests the decay and decline of Europe, a recurring theme during the last century, and ‘mandatory for European intellectuals since the Great War’ (p. 121): Spengler, Valéry, Coudenhove-Kalergi and Toynbee, followed by Burnham and Schumpeter, recognize this decline and – almost all of them – as something inexorable. Like Aron, however, Carlos Gaspar rejects this catastrophic reading. He believes that Europe is capable of re-erecting and reinventing itself after major conflicts and transformations. In those terms, and acknowledging that this Europe is no longer the epicentre of the international system, *The End of Europe* embodies a search for Europe’s new purpose.

To this purpose, Carlos Gaspar charts Europe’s trajectory in the past 100 years – the Europe of Versailles, the Europe of Yalta and the Europe of Berlin – according to its moments of fall and ascension, and the hopeful moments of its rebirth and return.

Thus, the Europe of Versailles corresponds, in part, to the

‘foundation of the League of Nations – the first permanent international organization with a vocation to represent all national States, the first system of collective security, the first multilateral form of the liberal order of Western democracies’.

However, the absence of the chief international power in the new organization doomed it to failure, and ‘the failure of the LoN is the failure of the European order’ (p. 29), since the United States does not see itself as a ‘European power’ and

‘without the United States, Great Britain and France are unable either to build the LoN as a representative institution of the international state system, to consolidate its legitimacy as the guarantor of democratic peace or to impose the Paris treaties and European peace’ (p. 27).

Yalta’s Europe, which emerges from World War II, represents ‘the first time a European war is decided by the peripheral powers: the United States is a Western power on the other side of the Atlantic, the Soviet Union is a Eurasian power’ (p. 46), whose bipolar configuration is crucially determined by the nuclear revolution. However, this Europe too is unstable, because ‘the Europe of Yalta ceases to exist with the institutionalisation of Europe’s division’ (p. 63). The prevailing Europe becomes ‘the priority in the international strategy of the United States’ (p. 66) during the Cold War, as ‘the stability of the alliances is the rule at the strategic centre of bipolar competition, and no State is allowed to cross the demarcation line that divides Europe’ (p. 70).

The Europe of Berlin emerged in 1990, with the German reunification, the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and is defined by the ‘European democratic revolution’ (p. 81). But

unlike the process of rebuilding Europe in 1945, in 1991, reconstruction is marked by the continuity 'of the multilateral institutions built by the transatlantic security community in the Cold War' (p. 95) and by the institutional enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union (EU). However, the Europe of Berlin too, despite not emerging from a hegemonic war, is a deeply unstable Europe which cannot avert successive crises. At the end of the second decade of post-Cold War, Europe is paralyzed by multipolar instability, which 'is more dangerous than unipolar instability': to the 'concurrence of the strategic retreat of the United States following the Iraqi adventure, the offensive turn of the major revisionist powers, [and] the multiplication of peripheral conflicts' (p. 123) is added 'the growing insecurity of Europe' due to the 'rise of populist movements' and the 'fragmentation of the party systems prevalent in continental Europe' (p. 124), and the epidemic crisis, which 'has a brutal impact on a depressed Europe' (p. 125) which has just emerged from its worst economic and financial crisis since the beginning of the European project.

In this context, Carlos Gaspar's thesis is not exhausted by the notion of a competition between the great powers, resumed for at least more than a decade. The thesis he proposes is also that, in the face of the end of the American 'unipolar moment', a bipolarization is already underway between the transatlantic community and the Asian democratic community, between the democracies of the transatlantic Quad and the Asian Quad, 'the United States and its allies – the main conservative powers (p. 127)',

on the one hand, and, on the other hand, China and Russia, whose ambitions of the Great Eurasia project define 'Chinese and Russian autocracies as the main revisionist powers' (p. 127).

In this 'new dynamic of the international system' (p. 127), 'Washington's defensive turn, marked by the decision not to intervene in the Syrian War, it is the signal for Moscow's offensive turn, marked by the decision to annex Crimea' – which 'confirms Russia's resurgence as a major revisionist power' (p. 131) whose strategic priority 'is to divide NATO and the European Union and to exclude the United States from the European security order' (p. 133). The new dynamic also corresponds to the offensive turn by Beijing, whose 'offensive strategy [...] in Europe, consolidated by Xi Jinping, has three main objectives: to separate Europe from the United States, to divide the European Union and to integrate European States into the alternative system that China is building on a global scale', in the framework of which Europe becomes 'the terminus and political destination of the new "Silk Roads", which confirm China's determination to reorder 'Greater Eurasia' through an 'interconnectivity' strategy' (p. 135).

In this sense, 'the triangular balance confirms the decline of Germany, France and Britain in the international hierarchy dominated by the United States, China and Russia, which recognize Europe as a crucial theatre in their fight for power' (p. 127). For Carlos Gaspar, this 'decline in Europe's international position' is further exposed by the 'divergent strategies' with which these 'three major European

powers, middle powers in the new configuration of the international hierarchy' respond 'to successive crises' (p. 137). These differences are defined by Britain's radical strategy when it leaves the EU and 'returns to its original position as the only one of the three European powers that favours NATO and its "special relationship" with the United States' (p. 138) thus regaining its international status as Global Britain; by France's Europeanist strategy, whose dilemma 'is to survive the symmetrical risks of European isolation and German hegemony' while also aware of its 'increasing dependence' and of the fact that its vision of 'European sovereignty' can only be accomplished if and when it is part of the German strategy' (p. 141). To bridge this Franco-German asymmetry, the old Gaullist dream of a pan-European security system resurfaces, which includes Russia but excludes the United States. Germany, for its part, is deluded by the possibility of an equidistance between the great powers and the idea that 'the decoupling of European security from American security' would be 'a way of subtracting Europe from the security dilemmas of the United States and of isolating the European security system from the competitive dynamics of the international system' (p. 142). At the same time it acknowledges, since the annexation of Crimea, «the containment of Russian strategic pressure from the Baltic to the Black Sea' as a strategic priority (p. 143). Thus, concludes Carlos Gaspar,

'thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the perpetual division between

Great Britain's Atlanticism, the exceptionalism of France and the centrism of Germany entails a collective inability to define a European strategy to address changes in the international conjuncture, at a time when the systemic rivalry between the West and a Russia-aligned China conditions strategic alignments on a global and regional scale' (p. 147).

And consequently, 'European security dilemmas, [...] still go unresolved in the post-Cold War', 'through Britain's withdrawal, France's flights of fancy and Germany's inaction, which prevents the three powers from carrying out a revolution in the European balance' (pp. 147–48).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine 'the largest international earthquake of the post-Cold War' (p. 154) – has transformed relations between the three major international powers. First,

'[the war] confirms the relative decline of the main international power, whose efforts are focused on trying to limit the conflict and prevent escalation, which excludes the direct involvement of NATO military forces and European allies in the war, without, however, leaving Ukraine unarmed and isolated vis-à-vis Russia' (p. 154).

Second, the Ukraine War 'ends the brief intermission during which Russia's reintegration into Europe was a real possibility' (p. 160) as well as the 'opportunity to reconstitute European unity with Russia' (p. 161). However, the War 'leaves Russia more isolated and more dependent on

China', confirming the asymmetry in the Russian-Chinese relationship which favours the Asian power.

Third, the Russian War in Ukraine has defined the new demarcation line on the European continent, between Europe and Russia, and placed Ukraine and Moldova, after three decades of uncertainty, on the European side. As Carlos Gaspar states, 'The invasion renders the separation between Russia and Ukraine definitive, and the future demarcation line between the two former Soviet republics defines not only the border between the two states, but also the border between Europe and Russia' (p. 160). With the request for formal accession to the EU, 'Ukraine ceases to be Russia's border with Europe and becomes Europe's border with Russia' (p. 160).

What is Europe's place in this context of bipolarisation of alliances and the return of War in Europe? If the Europe of Versailles, of Yalta, of Berlin did not last, what is and what should be the purpose of Europe in the face of its own "September 11th" (p. 150)?

The purpose of this Europe, for Carlos Gaspar, is threefold and crucial.

First, 'the bipolarization between the democratic field and the autocratic field that dominates the fight for international power makes it essential to consolidate the alliance with the United States' (p. 148).

Second, to recognise the need to strengthen the transatlantic community and the 'multilateral frameworks in the scope of which Berlin, Paris and London can come to an agreement, among themselves and with their democratic allies, regarding strategies for containing authoritarian

powers'. To this end, 'the three European powers must converge on a Europeanisation strategy for NATO that can guarantee their collective capacity to contain Russia's strategic pressure' (p. 148). In this sense, 'Germany's revolution in foreign, security and defence policies marks the end of pacifist illusions and represents a decisive turning point for the European and transatlantic balances'. This realignment, which makes Germany 'the leading European power in all relevant dimensions except in the nuclear strategic field' (p. 158), might strengthen

'the Europeanisation of NATO, which requires a consensus by Germany, Britain and France to reduce the strategic dependence on the United States and ensure their collective capacity to halt Russia's aggression at Europe's borders' (p. 157).

Finally, Europe must strive to prevent the consolidation of the alliance between Russia and China. As phrased by Carlos Gaspar,

'the Asian turn of Putin's Russia has a strategic, political and moral significance that alters the European balance [...]. The European war and Sino-Russian convergence render imperative the strategic unity between the United States, Great Britain, Germany and France and the convergence between the transatlantic QUAD and the Indo-Pacific QUAD' (p. 156).

In conclusion, the end of our Europe remains a complex and burdensome

purpose, and the tranquility and peacefulness with which the Lady Europe of Almada Negreiros and Fernando Pessoa ‘lay reclining upon her elbows’ are once again disrupted by the turmoil and the unpredictability of the international system. ^{RI}

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■ ■ ■ END NOTE

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