

# Thoughts on Global Political and Geostrategic Governance

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Speech by  
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Last week, Pascal Lamy brilliantly presented to us the current state of global governance as well as the desirable reforms at three levels. You asked me to share with our Academy, and I quote, my “reflections on optimal global political and geostrategic governance, seen, in particular but not exclusively, from the perspective of the UN”.

Faced with ongoing tragedies, from the war in Ukraine to the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, from jihadist surges in the Sahel to Hamas terrorist massacres, the first question is, of course: but what is the United Nations doing? Or rather: why don't they do more?

I will speak to you with the freedom of a “retiree”, who has had the chance to serve three times at the United Nations, but also three times at the Elysée.

A good starting point for these reflections is a rereading of the Charter of the United Nations, adopted unanimously by the 850 delegates from 51 States meeting in San Francisco from April to June 1945.

Let us be clear: this remarkable text reflects a Western vision of international relations, based on (I quote its preamble): “the equal rights of men and women, as well as of nations, large and small”, aiming “to promote social progress and establish better living conditions in greater freedom”. In article 2, it is written that : “the members of the Organization refrain, in their international relations, from resorting to the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of every State”.

This Western domination is also reflected in the choice then made for the headquarters of the UN organizations: New York, Geneva, Vienna, The Hague, supplemented by Washington for the IMF and the World Bank. It was not until 1972 that a specialized institution, UNEP, dedicated to the environment was created outside the West, in Nairobi.

It must be said that among the 51 founding members, the Western countries or those close to the West very clearly dominated to the point that Stalin demanded (perhaps presciently?) and obtained that in addition to the USSR, Ukraine and Belarus are admitted as member states of the UN. As for China, in the grip of civil war, it was represented until 1971 by the Kuomintang regime, which took refuge in Taipei from 1949. If the powers in place today in Moscow, Beijing, but also in Delhi or Ankara, had participated in the 1945 negotiations, the text would undoubtedly have been different...

If this Western vision of the sovereignty and equality of States, large or small, persists today, it is because it is perfectly suited to all countries that became independent with decolonization. From 51 in 1945, UN member states have grown to 193 today. The latest to join the organization are Switzerland, Timor, Montenegro and South Sudan.

Representatives of the 193 states meet each fall in New York for the session of the General Assembly, most often at the level of heads of state. It is the General Assembly which appoints the Secretary General of the UN on the recommendation of the Security Council (and more precisely: on the basis of a compromise between its five permanent members). It is also the General Assembly which elects the non-permanent members of the Security Council, those of the International Court of Justice and those of the Human Rights Council.



The debates that take place there make the General Assembly a sort of world parliament. For a State, to be condemned by a majority of the General Assembly is a heavy humiliation. But, according to Article 24 of the Charter, it is the Security Council which has the main responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. From the outset, it had five permanent members with veto power: the United States, the USSR (replaced by the Russian Federation in 1991), China (represented by Taipei until 1971 then by Beijing), France and the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, the number of non-permanent members elected for two years by the General Assembly and without the right of veto, has varied: it increased from six in 1945 to ten in 1965. Since that date, the world has profoundly changed and it would be logical for the composition of the Security Council to reflect these changes. To aim, in your words, Mr. President, for “optimal” global governance, many countries, including France and the United Kingdom, estimate that the Council could have up to 25 members. They are calling in particular for the addition of six new permanent members (with or without the right of veto): India, Japan, Brazil, Germany and two undesignated African countries (for the Africans to choose them!).

Unfortunately, this reasonable proposal, which France continues to support with conviction, comes up against the hostile mobilization of countries which consider themselves the losers of this change: Italy, Mexico and Argentina, Pakistan and even China, hostile to Japan. It’s an impasse and it risks continuing!

But beyond its composition, the work of the Security Council, like that of the General Assembly, reflects the state of relations between member countries. Since 1945, three main periods must be distinguished:

- that of the Cold War, from 1945 to 1991, which often paralyzed the Security Council, from veto to veto, and referred the treatment of crises, that of the Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba for example, to direct discussions between Washington and Moscow.
- Then came, from 1991, a new era which lasted around ten years during which the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, were able to fully fulfill their mission in the service of peace.
- Finally, for several years, a new cold war has been taking place, this time between the United States and China, while the war has returned to European soil with Russia's aggression against Ukraine. These two major developments concern three of the five permanent members of the Security Council, endowed with the right of veto. The question that arises today is therefore whether this new context puts an end to the successful initiatives which marked the United Nations during the decade 1991-2001.

Before addressing this new context, it is appropriate to consider all that the Security Council was able to accomplish during this prosperous decade, “optimal” to use your expression. I propose to give you three concrete examples of what the Security Council was able to accomplish during this happy decade and with which I had the privilege of being personally associated: peace in Cambodia, peace in the African Great Lakes region and the aftermath of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. As you listen to me, compare it with what international conflict management is like today, in the Sahel for example.

First file, therefore: Cambodia. This kingdom, placed under French protectorate from 1863 to 1949, had suffered two successive tragedies: the terrifying Khmer



Rouge genocide from 1975 which left at least two million dead, and the Vietnamese military occupation from 1979. This double punishment had frozen into an endless impasse, the Cambodian territory being essentially under the control of the Vietnamese army, with the exception of the mountains in the far west, close to Thailand, which remained under the influence of the Khmer Rouge. The Vietnamese troops were supported by the USSR, while the Khmer Rouge benefited from the support of China and ASEAN countries. How can we get Cambodia out of this hellish impasse?

A French diplomat, Claude Martin, who was at the time director of Asia at the Quai d'Orsay and to whom I want to pay special tribute, succeeded in convincing his minister, Roland Dumas and President Mitterrand, that France was the best placed to take a decisive initiative, in liaison with Prince Sihanouk. He designed a three-level negotiation: dialogue between Cambodian officials, chaired by Sihanouk; dialogue between regional powers under the leadership of Indonesia; finally, at the top, the five permanent members of the Security Council. France had to be present at all three levels in order to ensure the consistency of the solutions outlined.

The most ambitious element of his plan consisted of placing Cambodia under the supervision of the United Nations to demilitarize it, organize the return of refugees, prepare and conduct free and democratic elections under UN control, and finally set up the government resulting from the elections.

After months of negotiations at three levels, a Conference on Peace in Cambodia opened in Paris on July 31, 1989, under the co-chairmanship of Minister Roland Dumas and his counterpart Indonesian Ali Alatas. It could not succeed due to disagreements between Cambodian officials. The conference was therefore suspended and it returned to the five permanent members of the Security Council to develop together the essential aspects of the peace settlement: withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, disarmament of the Khmer Rouge, installation in Phnom Penh of a neutral administration under the aegis of the United Nations, responsible for organizing democratic elections, monitoring them and making them respect the results. The plan was ready in July 1990. It was approved in early August by the Council of Security then, unanimously, by the General Assembly.

It was at that time that Claude Martin was appointed ambassador to Beijing and I was asked to leave my position as ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva to succeed him as director of Asia. The priority was, of course, to ensure the implementation of what remains today the most ambitious and successful operation in the history of the United Nations.

It took months more of negotiations led by the five permanent members to convince the Khmer factions to accept the Security Council plan. This was done solemnly during the second Paris conference on Cambodia, avenue Kléber, on October 23, 1991. Then came the time for the extraordinarily complex implementation of the demining of Cambodian territory upon the return of the refugees, the disarmament of the Khmer Rouge forces to organize truly free and democratic elections, under the protection of 15,000 peacekeepers.

Throughout this period, where France remained fully committed alongside Prince Sihanouk, an essential fact facilitated the remarkable success of the plan. And it is on this point that I want to emphasize: the agreement between the five permanent members of the Security Council made it possible to exert, whenever



necessary, useful pressure on one or the other of the Cambodian parties. This understanding was, of course, greatly facilitated by the upheavals experienced at the same time by the USSR, which was in the process of imploding, and China faced with the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre. For me, Cambodia represented the perfect example of what the five permanent members can achieve when they work together.

My second example concerns the Great Lakes region, at the heart of the African continent.

Following the terrible genocide committed in 1994 in Rwanda by Hutu soldiers against the Tutsi minority, and after the victory of the Tutsis of Kagame against the genocidaires, more than a million Rwandan Hutus fled to eastern Zaire, destabilizing ethnic cohabitation within the two provinces of Kivu. In 1997, an insurrection in this region resulted in the defeat of Mobutu's army and the victory of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, supported by Rwanda. Kabila captured Kinshasa. Zaire became the Democratic Republic of Congo. But this lightning victory did not end the fighting in the east of the country, destabilizing the entire Great Lakes region, particularly Burundi. Angola, Namibia, Chad and Zimbabwe offered military support to President Kabila, but the rebels, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, maintained their control of the eastern provinces of the DRC. The clashes caused the collapse of state structures in the region and resulted in at least three million deaths. In 1999, Kabila requested help from the Security Council. Kofi Annan appointed a special representative and the Security Council was seized of the matter.

Then Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations in New York, it fell to me to co-chair with my American counterpart, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, a ten-day mission, in May 2001, of the entire Security Council to the capitals of the Great Lakes region, starting with South Africa where we were received at length by Nelson Mandela. The objective of this mission was simple: the African governments concerned had negotiated a peace agreement between themselves, the Lusaka agreement. They needed the United Nations to ensure and monitor its implementation. This was done with the creation of the United Nations force, MONUC, with a workforce of 18,000 members and a budget of more than a billion dollars.

What remains in my memory, and which I want to emphasize today, is once again the perfect understanding which reigned between the fifteen ambassadors, including those of China and Russia: we shared the same objective, to help countries in the region to put an end to a devastating tragedy.

The other remark that I must make and which is less positive: if the States of the immense region of the African Great Lakes managed to escape, with the help of the UN, from the spiral of war, the East of the DRC unfortunately remains, even today, the prey of violence and looting despite the presence on site of MONUC, now MONUSCO. This sad observation poses a question that haunts diplomats: a peace force, welcomed with gratitude by the governments and populations concerned, can, over time, become part of the problem and no longer part of the solution. This is one of the most difficult questions and France is experiencing it today in the Sahel.

My third and final example of the understanding between the fifteen members of the Security Council, I experienced it during the worst terrorist attack in



history, the one which destroyed, September 11 2001, the Twin Towers of New York and part of the Pentagon in Washington.

I have already had the opportunity, in 2016 at the invitation of our colleague Gilbert Guillaume, to discuss the role of France which chaired the Security Council in September. I will not return to it, except to underline, once again, the perfect understanding which brought together the fifteen ambassadors of the Security Council around the draft resolution prepared by the French presidency: the very day after the attack, unanimously, the Council showed in unity the determination of the entire international community to confront the scourge of international terrorism. And it was in unity that the war in Afghanistan began, due to the Taliban's refusal to extradite Bin Laden.

Unfortunately, this happy decade of cooperation between the main actors of the international community, from 1991 to 2001, ended with a major development in the spring of 2003 when the United States decided to launch its war in Iraq without the agreement of the Security Council where, despite their efforts, they did not have the necessary majority to approve this catastrophic initiative. The stagnation of the war in Afghanistan, the consequences of the war in Iraq throughout the Middle East, then the consequences throughout the world of the financial crisis of 2007-2008, finally the growing resentment of many countries in the South over the management of debt or vaccines during the Covid epidemic, have profoundly changed the way emerging countries, from India to Brazil or South Africa, have on this international order dominated by the West for five decades, even five centuries.

Today, emerging countries are of course saying yes to the modernization of their economies. They continue to say yes, with certain reservations, to globalization. But they say no to the westernization of the international order and their societies. This is true for Putin's Russia, which wants to be the heir of Empress Catherine II and Stalin; this is true of the Turkey of Erdogan, who wants to be the successor of Suleiman the Magnificent, even if it means erasing the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; this is true of the Iran of the Ayatollahs; this is undoubtedly also true, at least in part, of Modi's India and, surely, of Xi Jinping's China, which wants to restore its country to its place as the "Middle Kingdom" with initiatives such as that of the "New Silk Roads".

The Russian aggression against Ukraine, in flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, offers a striking example of this evolution of mentalities. A few days after the start of the aggression, on March 2, 2022, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution demanding Russian withdrawal and calling for a "comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine", on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations. Certainly, the vote gave a majority of 141 countries in favor of this text. But how can we not note that, among the 45 countries which abstained or did not participate in the vote, are: China, India, Vietnam, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Togo, Guinea, Senegal, Ethiopia, Sudan, Rwanda, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa...

This vote underlines the continued importance of the United Nations General Assembly in expressing the balance of political forces at the global level. It marks the birth of what we now call the "Global South". It actually illustrates the rebirth of what was formerly called the Non-Aligned Movement. But in a radically different context: the first Cold War pitted the United States against the USSR, with an underdeveloped China at its side until 1971. Today, the new Cold War pits the United States against a China which has clearly become the other





superpower and which dreams of imposing its domination in Asia and beyond. For the Americans, for all Americans, this ambition is totally unacceptable due to the nature of the regime currently in place in Beijing, and they are increasing initiatives to counter the rise of the Middle Kingdom. However, for most countries in the “Global South”, China is now their main economic partner and a major provider of financing. There is no question of them getting drawn into the United States' anti-Chinese crusade!

As for Russia, of course, it is the aggressor in Ukraine. But there are many leaders of the “Global South” who make us understand that this war does not concern them. They want literally to remain “non-aligned”.

In this new geopolitical context, and to answer your question, dear President, what can be optimal global governance?

The United Nations, and in particular its Security Council, can continue to assert their role and assume their responsibilities in all conflicts that escape this new confrontation between Western countries and China or Russia. But for other conflicts, whether it is the Sahel, the war in Ukraine, the confrontation between Palestinians and Israelis or the growing confrontation between the United States and China, what paths can we consider to achieve peace solutions consistent with the ideals enshrined in the United Nations Charter?

To launch our debate, I am going to propose to you, on a purely personal basis, I emphasize, scenarios based on the possible developments of current crises or tensions and the most desirable options to put an end to them in a fair manner and in accordance with international law. We will then be able to debate because the field of possibilities is vast and experience teaches us that the unexpected sometimes finds its way into chancelleries and imposes itself on the agenda of diplomats.

I will start with Africa, a continent of major importance for Europe and in particular for France. A continent facing a series of serious crises, particularly in the Sahel. Given its long colonial presence and the links woven through history, our country has often been called upon. It has always ensured that its interventions strictly comply with international law and are, in particular, approved by the Security Council. This was the case in Côte d'Ivoire during the presidential election of November 2010 which remains today an example of difficult but perfect success: at the request of the African Union and with the assistance of the UN forces present on site, France contributed to the indisputable organization of the vote and, when its result was contested by the loser, Laurent Gbagbo, it helped the Ivorian forces and those of the United Nations to enforce the result. This was again the case in Mali with the French military intervention, in January 2013, at the request of its government and under mandate from the Security Council, to block the march towards Bamako of a column of jihadists linked to Al Qaeda.

The most difficult but also the most important question is that of duration. When should we leave? When should we put an end to an operation that was undoubtedly successful at the start, but which, over time, ends up being part of the problem, or even seen as “the” problem, fueling unjust but widespread resentment. This is what France and the United Nations are experiencing today in the Sahel.



The question of the duration of any mission is therefore essential. Of course, it is not possible to predict everything in advance. But at least we should in the future include meeting clauses in the agreements and Security Council resolutions, every six months for example. They would be an opportunity to take stock and, for the contributing countries, to present their requests: without agreement from the host country on their requests, the Security Council and the contributing countries would be in a good position to draw all the desirable consequences and, possibly, to put an end to their intervention.

I now come to the second major subject: the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian armies on February 24, 2022.

Signs had certainly appeared as early as 2014 when, in reaction to the proposed association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, accepted by President Yanukovich, President Putin reacted by annexing Crimea and launching the war in Donbass. But, let's be honest, no one anticipated the current offensive.

The results of this war of aggression are catastrophic for Russia: by destroying a country, Putin is strengthening the unity of a nation against the invader. Furthermore, while President Macron noted, in a famous 2019 interview, that NATO was "brain dead", today the Alliance has never been so strong, united and determined. It has even expanded to Sweden and Finland.

So, first question, will this catastrophic war for Russia, for Ukraine and for Europe last?

My answer: barring an improbable coup in Moscow, yes, it will last at least until the American elections in November 2024. Why? Because Putin hopes that a Republican victory in the White House and Congress would result in a halt to US arms deliveries to Ukraine. However, only the United States has the necessary stocks to allow the Ukrainian forces to continue their fight.

The day after the American elections, and if the Democrats win both the White House and Congress, the time for negotiation will undoubtedly have come. Putin will approach it from a position of weakness. Much will, of course, depend on the situation on the front. But we cannot imagine President Zelensky accepting the slightest territorial concession with the exception, perhaps, of the Crimean peninsula which was only attached to Ukraine in 1954, by a simple decree from Khrushchev. But let's be clear: it will be up to the Ukrainians, and them alone, to decide.

Much will also depend on the guarantees that the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union will be willing to offer Ukraine. This shows how crucial this moment, which will define the European order for decades, will be, at least as much as the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

Ukraine is destined to become a member of the European Union, but the same goes for the six Western Balkan countries and Moldova, which leads to considering major changes to the EU treaties, and therefore a long process. As for NATO, a lot will depend, as I said, on the president that the Americans elect in 2024.

Finally, European leaders will have to keep in mind the future of their relationship with Russia. If Putin certainly deserves the fate that our colleague Bruno Cotte and Robert Badinter assign to him in their work entitled "Vladimir Poutine, the





accusation", we must remember that his two predecessors, Presidents Gorbachev and Yeltsin, had resolutely turned towards the West, and in particular towards Europe to which so many links connect the Russian people, as H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse regularly reminded us, with her unforgettable talent. Many Russians today do not imagine the future of their country as a simple subordinate of the Chinese empire.

We must therefore envisage a series of negotiations which will fit together like Russian dolls. At the heart of these "Matriochkas", perhaps it will be necessary, at a certain moment, to replace what was called the "Normandy Format": at the initiative of President Hollande, it brought together the heads of state and government of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. The difficulty will be time management: peace in Ukraine, restored within its borders, must come before its integration into the EU, but the two are linked and impact each other. Same thing for the Atlantic Alliance.

And the United Nations in all this? They will essentially be an echo chamber, for the General Assembly, and recording of treaties for the Security Council. But this is not a bad thing: when peace and cooperation advance here or there, the United Nations Security Council does not necessarily have to intervene at the negotiation stage.

This also applies to the Middle East, for the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. Let us be clear: Hamas terrorism is unforgivable. It must be condemned with the greatest firmness. It offers no future to the Palestinian people. But where has the Palestinian Authority gone? Let us remember that there was a time, that of Rabin, Arafat and Clinton, when peace seemed within reach. So let's hope that the two peoples will manage to once again provide themselves with visionary leaders. I am a member of an association where young Israelis, Palestinians and Emiratis meet who build concrete projects together. They believe in it. For them, it's possible! But on one condition: the emergence of visionary and determined leaders on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

I will end this overview of the major crises of our time with the growing and lasting tension between the two main permanent members of the Security Council: the United States and China. This new Cold War now structures all international relations. It is deployed in particular in the vast space that we call the "Indo-Pacific". Washington is developing alliances beyond those born from the Second World War with Japan, Korea and the Philippines. Australia, in particular, is asserting itself as a major pillar. To escape the tension between Washington on one side and Beijing on the other, India and the countries of Southeast Asia (with the exception of Cambodia) have chosen "multi-alignment": they seek to maintain positive relations with both Washington and Beijing. The same is true for most countries in Latin America and Africa.

This new cold war between Washington and Beijing is unfolding in international organizations where China initiated, around ten years ago, a strategy of progressively strengthening its presence, in contrast to the United States which, during the mandate of President Trump, have distanced themselves. The confrontation between Washington and Beijing also has an impact on the agenda of economic forums such as the G7, whose last summit, held in Hiroshima in May, welcomed President Zelensky, but also the heads of state or government of Brazil, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Korea and Australia.



As for the G20, the order of its successive annual presidencies from 2022 to 2025 (Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa) makes it the ideal framework for this “multi-alignment” dear to the Indian Prime Minister. And it is undoubtedly for this reason that President Xi Jinping avoided the Delhi summit on September 8 and 9, preferring (wrongly, in my opinion) the informal framework of the “BRICS” which welcomed six new members during of the Johannesburg summit in August.

You will have understood, Mr. President, the hopes of the happy decade, from 1991 to 2001, have well and truly disappeared. Today's leaders, despite being faced with colossal challenges which can only be met through cooperation between all States, whether it be the climate or the fight against poverty, are moving away from a “optimal global political and geostrategic governance”, to use the title you chose.

Should we still be pessimistic? I don't believe so for the following reasons.

This lasting rivalry between the two superpowers of the 21st century does not exclude areas of common understanding and cooperation, quite simply because this is in the well-understood interests of both the United States and China. The dialogue between Washington and Beijing has been relaunched. And I am convinced that a group like the European Union, while remaining faithful to its alliance with the United States based on shared values, has a major role to play in proposing a path of cooperation and rallying the countries of the “Global South”. It has the tools. This is obvious for development aid, of which the Union and its Member States provide more than 40% of the world total. But who knows ? This is true for the fight against climate change where the Union and its Member States are, by far, the most ambitious international actor in its reduction objectives, aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050. It is finally true with the adoption of rules to best manage the economy: the Union is undeniably, at the global level, “the empire of standards”.

This could also be true in the face of regional crises, in Africa as in the Near and Middle East. If the European Union is able to unite around important initiatives, to provide the necessary means and to build ad hoc coalitions, it can become a major driving force of the multilateral system, which includes the Bretton Woods institutions or the United Nations. But this assumes that it does not allow itself to be absorbed by the management of its internal difficulties, as has been the case until now!.