

# GEOPOLITICS OF THE *GLOBAL COMMONS*: SECURITISATION OF SPACES AND RESOURCES NOT SUBJECT TO STATE JURISDICTION

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## Keywords:

- > Geopolitics
- > Global commons
- > Environment
- > Natural resources
- > Securitisation

## ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, large spaces not subject to state jurisdiction under the concept of global commons have entered the security considerations of NATO's central powers. *Think-tanks*, international development agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations have been dealing in reports and official documents with various initiatives on a global scale to implement actions for the projection, control and denial of access to the global commons.

These initiatives, which also include the sovereign spaces of developing and peripheral

countries, particularly regions with a rich endowment of natural resources such as land, water, forests, fish fauna and biodiversity, are evidence of a clear process of growing strategic interest, which at the same time is coupled with pre-existing dynamics of securitisation of the environment, both of which could potentially legitimise the *ius ad bellum*.

Today, the projection of power over the global commons takes on a structural, indirect, asymmetric, dispersed, soft and discrete mode. This subject is of vital importance for National Defence, as it is evidence of the new character that hegemonic competition has acquired in the 21st century.

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### INTRODUCTION

In June 2020 the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos launched The Great Reset initiative, whose purpose was to offer *“perspectives to help inform all those who determine the future state of global relations, the direction of national economies, the priorities of societies, the nature of business models and the management of the global commons”*.

Alongside opening remarks from WEF Director Klaus Schwab, the UN Secretary General, the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the CEOs of Microsoft and British Petroleum among others, the Prince of Wales said: *“There is a golden opportunity to make something good out of this crisis... global crises know no borders and highlight how interdependent we are as one people sharing one planet”*<sup>1</sup>.

The so-called global commons are directly related to the environment in a planetary perspective, and in turn to the actions of high-level leaders and agencies of the powers of the Anglo-sphere, large corporations, non-governmental organisations and international bodies.

What impact does this issue have on the defence affairs of countries that do not have a pre-eminent position on the global geopolitical chessboard?

The aim of this article is to carry out a geopolitical analysis of the recent process of securitisation

of the global commons, i.e. the inclusion in the security agendas of maritime powers of large spaces that are not subject to state jurisdiction. According to the classical security paradigm, the object of protection of any nation-state is sovereignty over its own space. In recent decades, however, spaces beyond state jurisdiction, such as the atmosphere, the high seas, the polar regions and outer space, have gained strategic interest.

In this sense, the paper is divided into sections that briefly address certain central aspects of the issue: first, how the global commons issue emerged during the last decade of the Cold War, and in particular to which actors and entities it is linked. Then, during the 1990s, the double dynamic, tending to converge in the following years, of linkage with the environmental discourse of international organisations and non-governmental organisations, and in the sphere of NATO Defence, the passage from a perspective based on the military supremacy of the unipolar moment to a conception of domination over the global commons based on the deployment of complex technological systems.

In the next section, a relationship is elaborated with the change in the multidimensional approach to space and the conception of the

new generations of warfare, an issue currently being pondered in strategic reports by the United States and the United Kingdom. The implications for peripheral and developing countries of extra-regional powers projecting power in the spaces of intersection between the jurisdictional and the non-jurisdictional are inferred as the analysis progresses between the third and last sections. Without the intention of concluding this dynamic and complex subject matter in this article, the final section considers, according to current trends, the possible geopolitical implications of a ‘global closure’ from a structural level to spaces not only not subject to state jurisdiction, but also to sovereign spaces rich in resources and biodiversity.

Although central aspects of the environmental question and how it relates to the global commons are mentioned, variables of the degrowth paradigm commonly referred to as “sustainable development”, such as demography, energy, industrial and agricultural production, food, education and propaganda, and the use of time and resources, are not addressed in detail. The major importance currently given to the environment by the Anglo-sphere’s state secretariats, international bodies and non-governmental organisations requires a treatment



of the subject that would go far beyond the scope of this study.

Beyond the explanatory scope of this paper, which is the result of a research project at the IIFA for the years 2020-2021, a task to understand in greater depth the implications of this issue should bring together a heterogeneous team of specialists for the discussion and formulation of prospective scenarios around the global commons, in particular on the possible means for the violation and defence of the global commons. This article is not only academically relevant, but also of great importance for national defence, given that it is evidence

of the character that hegemonic competition has acquired in the 21st century.

### **I. Genealogy of the global commons issue**

The original concept of “commons” refers to certain common law benefits that commoners, in particular peasants and shepherds, had during the Middle Ages to usufruct meadows, streams and portions of land for agriculture. These spaces, which were not entirely free but under the control and allocation of local lords, were the material basis for hundreds of thousands of rural dwellers to produce their livelihood.

From the 17th century onwards, the English Parliament began to restrict this system with a process of legal change and privatisation of land on a large scale, the so-called Enclosure Acts. In our time, the concept of commons, although it still covers small portions of territory in the British Isles, has moved to the international level to refer to global commons, i.e. a broad set of large spaces that are not subject to the jurisdiction of any state, such as the atmosphere, the high seas and deep oceans, outer space, the North Polar region and the South Polar region, particularly the Antarctic continent.

Such a shift to the international level was initiated in 1980 by a group of influential environmental organisations in the Anglo-sphere: the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN),<sup>2</sup> together with United Nations (UN) agencies such as the United Nations Environment

1. On: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/great-reset-launch-prince-charles-guterresgeorgieva-burrow/>, y en: <https://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/thegreatreset> (última consulta: 12 febrero 2022).

2. Both IUCN and WWF were created at the initiative of the biologist Sir Julian Huxley. The former in 1948, when he was director of the newly created UNESCO; the latter in 1961, together with Prince Philip, Duke of

Edinburgh, King Bernard of the Netherlands, Royal Dutch Shell, Barclay's Bank and Royal Navy admirals. Since then, WWF has been the world's largest (para-governmental) conservation organisation. See: Borrell, Juan José. 2008. "Un panda verde en el jardín: el caso de la World Wildlife Fund - WWF y su geoestrategia internacional", in *Ambiental*, UNR, Nº 8, Year 8, pp. 203-230.

Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The joint document, “World Conservation Strategy. Living resource conservation for sustainable development”.

Living resource conservation for sustainable development, calls for international action to restrict the use of natural resources as they consider the planet’s ecological systems to be saturated. On the one hand, they suggest a targeted change in the domestic legislation of each country, and on the other hand, they propose the implementation of an international conservation law and the strengthening of multilateral agreements. In the publication they introduce the concept in question to refer to those areas that are beyond the jurisdiction of the state and should be included in a global programme:

*“A Common Good is an area of land*

*or water that is owned or used jointly by members of a community. The global commons include those parts of the earth’s surface that lie outside national jurisdictions - in particular, the open ocean and the living resources found there - or that are held in common - in particular, the atmosphere. The only landmass that can be considered part of the global commons is the Antarctic, in particular the open ocean and the living resources found there. The only landmass that can be considered part of the global commons is Antarctica, although several countries have claimed parts of it (the claims are currently frozen under the Antarctic Treaty)”<sup>3</sup>.*

The document is produced in a unique context in which the notion of “sustainable development” will appear on the scene, a catch-all word or key word repeated since then in every report on the environmental issue, as for example currently in the UN’s Millennium Development Goals or Agenda 2030. In its current meaning, the notion is a slogan that

generically proposes taking care of the environment and natural resources in the present so that future generations can make use of them in equal proportion. However, beyond the idealism and formalistic discourse of international diplomacy, the term signifies a gradual but ultimately structural change in the economic and social organisation of countries as it has been held since the beginning of modernity.

The opposite of the universal goal of sustainable development would be ecosystemic collapse, i.e. a sort of apocalyptic future planetary scenario. The underlying assumption of such a pessimistic narrative for large-scale restrictions on both resource use and world population growth is set out in the report *The Limits to Growth* in 1972. Drawn up by scientists meeting at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) for a closed group of representatives of the industrial powers brought



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together by the Club of Rome, the document proposed a paradigm shift in the growth matrix: the population + capital equation would lead to civilisational collapse. With a long-term prospective model, they pointed out that if the growth of developing countries continued to be driven forward, the planet's resources would not be enough for everyone, and ecosystems would be severely polluted and depleted to the point of no return. The response had to be a global shift towards degrowth<sup>4</sup>.

In the same context, various institutions emerged to globally promote programmes with a similar Malthusian perspective, such as the United Nations Population Fund in New York in 1969 at the behest of the Rockefeller Foundation, the United Nations Environment Programme in 1972, and the influential Trilateral Commission in 1973, also an initiative of the Rockefeller clan coordinated by Zbigniew Brzezinski.

In the field of strategic security, in 1974, under the presidency of Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger's Secretary of Homeland Security drew up the much-mentioned National Security Memorandum No. 200, entitled "Implications of worldwide population growth for U.S. security and overseas interest", which was implemented as foreign

policy from 1975 onwards.

For their part, in the field of scientific popularisation in the Anglo-sphere, various studies with similar proposals had great resonance, such as *The Population Bomb* (1968) by the biologist Paul Ehrlich, and *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) by the ecologist Garrett Hardin, in which the idea that the planet's "commons" were being subjected to extreme pressure by human economic activity was put forward early on. Sir James Lovelock develops the Gaia hypothesis, according to which the entire planet earth is a single integrated bio-cybernetic system, a sort of entity with its own life and intelligence that is being preyed upon by humans, a "naturally" aggressive "species".

The "one world, one ecosystem" approach of Lovelock, decorated in the 1990s with the title of Commander of the Order of the British Empire, has great influence in scientific circles and international organisations. In the framework of the Cold War, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the classical paradigm of nation-state security, which understood territorial sovereignty as its object, still prevailed. Thus, although these organisations had begun their efforts by pointing out global dilemmas, issues that posed risks and threats to the nation-state still

played an important role.

It was not until the end of the 1980s that the environmental issue and concern for natural spaces not subject to state jurisdiction returned to the highest level of multilateral diplomacy. In 1987, at the initiative of the United Nations General Assembly, a World Commission on Environment and Development was set up, which produced an influential report on the subject: *Our common future*.

The report, also known by the former Norwegian minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, who chaired the Commission, is an obligatory reference for international organisations and environmental organisations in terms of establishing "the global agenda for change". The publication, under the seal of Oxford University, states that:

*"Traditional forms of national sovereignty are increasingly challenged by the realities of ecological and economic interdependence. Nowhere is this clearer than in shared ecosystems and 'global commons', those parts of the planet that lie outside national*

3. World Conservation Strategy. *Living resource conservation for sustainable development*, 1980, p.58.

4. Meadows et. al., 1972. Three decades after the first edition, the authors published a study that updates the approach: Meadows, Dennis et. al. 2005. *Limits to growth. The 30-year update*. London: Earthscan.

## Regardless of whether the fateful prospect of climate change takes place in a long-term prospective scenario, it is a powerful argument in the immediate term that serves in fact to exploit environmental issues as a just cause for security over spaces not subject to state jurisdiction.

*jurisdictions. Here, sustainable development can only be secured through international cooperation and agreed regimes for monitoring, development and management in the common interest. But what is at stake is not only the sustainable development of shared ecosystems and common goods, but that of all nations whose development depends to a greater or lesser extent on their sound management. Likewise, without agreed, equitable and enforceable rules governing the rights and duties of states with respect to the commons, the pressure of demands on finite resources will destroy their ecological integrity over time*<sup>5</sup>.

The general discourse of the Brundtland report was to be in tune with the new era of so-called globalisation: “one planet, one world”, “common future”, “common concerns, common challenges”, “common efforts”, “global agenda”, “world community”, “common goods”, etc. Although, at bottom, it upheld the assumption installed a decade and a half earlier by the Club of Rome: the planet is finite and the pressure on resources will lead to a collapse, so it is necessary to establish a strict international regime to restrict action on common spaces. According to the commission, the following priority challenges should be addressed: world population growth, food supply, depletion of species and

ecosystems, polluting energies, reduction of industrial production, and modification of cities.

In short, the environmentalist approach no longer views the economic organisation of each country and the central pillars of classical geopolitics (territory and population) from the perspective of nation-state sovereignty, but rather disaggregates them into “problematic” issues from a supposedly global perspective. After the end of the Cold War, as is well known, the environment is one of the main issues around which a cosmopolitan globalist narrative takes shape. With the fall of the Soviet bloc in Eurasia, and the security dilemma of a bipolar world no longer relevant, the care of ecosystems became a central issue on the international agenda of the thalassocratic powers, regardless of ideological differences and local particularities. Although the world during the unipolar moment seems a safer place, “the daily destruction of natural resources, water and air threatens global security as much as nuclear weapons. Policies for growth and development must now integrate efforts to sustain the global commons”.<sup>6</sup>

### **II. From post-Cold War unipolarity to a multipolar context**

The 1990s is a time of great expansion of the maritime

geostrategic sphere. The retraction of Russia’s geopolitical borders generates an advance and repositioning of NATO’s Anglo-Saxon powers in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; countries formerly under Moscow’s influence join the Atlantic alliance, and the European Union in turn expands eastwards. Corporations from the industrialised nations drive new competition in a now globalised economy, the international financial system gains new momentum, and in 1995 the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is formed. The international organisations under the umbrella of the UN were given the liquidity to expand their reach, and a proliferation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the former Third World countries proliferated, with funding and diplomatic support from the maritime powers.

During this long and dynamic decade, coinciding with the unipolarity of the US superpower, from the fall of the Soviet bloc to the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York and NATO’s subsequent advance in the Middle East, the environmental issue has remained in the background, latent, subject to multilateral negotiations and as an instrument of soft power projection. It is time to spread “ecological concern” from international organisations,

development agencies and non-governmental organisations, but without hindering the expansion of the hydrocarbon matrix or extractivist models in less developed countries.

In the US, presidential administrations have alternated between placing the environment on the foreign agenda under the Democrats (Clinton-Gore 1993-2001 and Obama-Biden 2009-2017), and the desecuritisation of the issue under Republican administrations (Bush-Cheney 2001-2009) (Floyd, 2010). In other words, there is no firm line on the issue beyond the change of governments, as Britain is going to do. In such a context, the military and technological supremacy of the US has no rival with similar technical capabilities to prevent it from deploying anywhere on the planet. Full freedom of action and effective access translates into the “communality” of those spaces outside any state jurisdiction: they are not my own, nor do they belong to anyone else, but if I can cross them, they are under my dominion.

As political scientist Barry Posen stated in the well-known article *Command of the commons*: “The US military currently holds command of the global commons (...) The ‘commons’, in the case of sea and space, are areas that belong to no state and provide access to much of the globe. Airspace technically belongs to the countries below, but there are few countries that can deny their airspace above 15,000 feet to US fighter jets.

Command does not mean that other states cannot use the commons in peacetime. Nor does it mean that others cannot acquire military assets that they can move through or even exploit without the United States hindering them. Command means that the United States gets far more military use of the sea, space and air than others; that it can credibly threaten to deny

their use to others; and that others would lose in a military competition for the commons if they tried to deny them to the United States”.<sup>7</sup>

In general terms, it could be argued that the global commons issue is closely related to an increase in the securitisation of environmental issues. And in the last two decades, environmental issues have entered the security agendas of the maritime powers in parallel to the economic growth and expansion of emerging countries; that is, those that during the Cold War were part of the broad Third World and carried the label of “developing”, but towards the end of the 1990s began to steadily increase their GDP and have greater influence in international affairs, as in the case of China, India, Russia and Brazil, among others.

Although the growth of the so-called emerging countries is taking place peacefully - though not without tensions - within the framework of the international economic system, from a realist perspective the marked trend towards a multipolar distribution of the world system is perceived as a threat by the central maritime powers. Greater economic quantum would unbalance the regional balance of power and could translate into increased military power. Meanwhile, Russia’s growing presence in the Arctic Circle and China’s expansionary behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, in the Americas, and specifically in the South Atlantic and Antarctic space, is perceived as a clear penetration into maritime geostrategic spheres “outside” its immediate zone of influence. Even a strategist like Zbigniew Brzezinski, aware of the distribution of the global geopolitical chessboard into regions of influence, understands that outside Eurasia the common spaces serve in some way as zones of intersection between geostrategic spheres; as “glue” spaces that,

while they may be crossed by a rival power, are extremely vital as the nexus and scaffolding of a global projection.

There is no projection of power and global hegemony without the mastery of the communicating vessels, that is, the global commons. In this regard, in his latest book *Strategic vision* he euphemistically stated: “The protection and management in good faith of the global commons - sea, space, cyberspace, nuclear proliferation, water security, the Arctic, and the environment itself - are imperative for the long-term growth of the global economy and the continuity of basic geopolitical stability. But in almost every case, the potential absence of constructive and influential American leadership could fatally undermine the essential commonality of the global commons.”<sup>8</sup> Brzezinski, 2012, p. 119.

Of all possible rivals, it is the military superpowers Russia and China that increasingly have the capabilities to eventually compromise the free deployment of the US in all space on the planet. Today, Posen’s assertion of two decades ago that the US can costlessly deny other powers access to common space is no longer entirely credible. For this reason, since the second decade of the 21st century, in parallel to development agencies and international organisations, the global commons issue has been climbing up the ranks of environmental defence. Ecosystems, beyond the contamination and depletion they may suffer, become the depository spatiality of a new type of chrysogenic phenomenon that would affect stability and security on a global scale.

5. WCED, 1987, p. 261.

6. Sandler, 1992:16.

7. Posen, B., 2003, p. 8.

8. Brzezinski, 2012, p. 119.




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Such a phenomenon, which is widespread in this context but did not exist in the environmentalist documents of the 1970s and 1980s, is climate change. As the former British Treasury Secretary and World Bank economist, Sir Nicholas Stern, develops in his well-publicised report, humanity's industrial and agricultural activity is supposedly altering the average temperature of the planet due to the level of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, which when increased would trigger a series of disruptive ecosystemic effects, thus leading the world to an apocalyptic future.

To avoid these consequences, "it is in developing countries where adaptation efforts must be accelerated the most", as "over the next few decades, between 2 and 3 billion people will be added to the world's population, almost all of them in developing countries. This will only add to the existing pressure on the

natural resources - and social fabric - of many poor countries and expose more people to the effects of climate change. A broader effort is needed to encourage the reduction of population growth rates. Development in the dimensions defined by the Millennium Development Goals, and particularly income, women's education and reproductive health, is the most effective and sustainable way to address population growth.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, according to the same climate change doomsday narrative, between various disruptive events, the polar ice caps are melting, and in the long term vast, previously closed spaces will be open to unprecedented geopolitical competition. For example, under this scenario, as the US Deputy Secretary of Defence stated in 2017: "we now have to be able to operate in the Arctic because we have a whole new ocean in front of us"<sup>10</sup>.

## If it is possible to maintain a leading position in the technological gap, the argument of respecting the "communality" of spaces not subject to state sovereignty is even a powerful diplomatic-discursive instrument that plays to one's advantage.

Whether or not in a long-term prospective scenario the doomsday prospect of climate change will take place, it is a powerful argument in the immediate term that in fact serves to exploit environmental issues as a just cause for security over spaces not subject to state jurisdiction. In this line, regardless of the political colour of the government, the Pentagon incorporates environmental issues into military thinking and doctrine as a major factor generating or 'multiplying' disruptions, risks and disasters that could require the intervention of the armed forces in overseas areas.<sup>11</sup> In any case, in parallel with the Pentagon, the Pentagon is also incorporating environmental issues into military thinking and doctrine as a major factor generating or 'multiplying' disruptions, risks and disasters that could require the intervention of the armed forces in overseas spaces.

In any case, in parallel to the figure of unilateral or alliance-based intervention backed by military supremacy for "environmental" causes or "natural disasters", the concept of a macro-level approach to global spaces based on complex technological systems is gradually developing, if possible, in a multilateral manner<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, a report by NATO analysts in 2011, including

cyberspace in the definition, affirmed that the value of the global commons "lies in its accessibility, communality, and ubiquity as the system of systems"<sup>13</sup>. In other words, "the global commons is a multi-domain concept, and military strategists prefer to view these domains as a complex interactive system".<sup>14</sup>

Driven then by the trend towards a multipolar sociogram of powers, a shift in the concept takes place: from the unrivalled military supremacy of the unipolar moment to the super-structural technological control of the multipolar context. In 2001, dominance is synonymous with the unilinear projection of military vectors: the global commons are any space that belongs to only can be flown by my fleet, my strategic bomber, my satellite. From the following decade onwards, and to an increasing degree, dominance will depend on deploying technological systems that indirectly act as a key to access/deny access to common spaces. In this vein, a 2017 US Army Training and Doctrine Command document stated: "The physical dimension of warfare may become less important than the moral and cognitive dimension. Military operations will increasingly aim to employ the cognitive and moral dimensions to target the will of the enemy."<sup>15</sup>

### III. Multi-domain spatiality and new generations of warfare

As is well known in academies of military training and strategic thinking, the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) being promoted by the US armed forces is redefining the forms of warfare and, in depth, the configuration of the space of force projection. Along with the incorporation of sophisticated technologies (unmanned aerial vehicles, robots, biotechnology, nanotechnology, cybernetic networks, electromagnetic fields and complex devices), a new conception of generations of warfare is emerging.

Are global commons the new spatiality of fourth generation warfare? Without enough space in this article to develop an extensive explanation of analyst William Lind's concept of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), it is only worth noting that a permanent and all-encompassing projection of power during peacetime that does not distinguish the classical internal/external figure of the battlefield from a ubiquitous spatiality is the

9. Stern, 2007, p. 99.

10. Klare, 2019, p. 126.

11. Klare, 2019.

12. Trevorton, Nemeth y Srinivasan, 2012.

13. Barrett, Bedford, Skinner, y Vergles.

14. Redden y Hughes, 2011.

15. TRADOC G-2.

**In the last two decades, environmental issues have entered the security agendas of the maritime powers in parallel to the economic growth and expansion of emerging countries; that is, those that during the Cold War were part of the broad Third World and carried the label of "developing", but towards the end of the 1990s began to steadily increase their GDP and have a greater impact on international affairs, as is the case of China, India, Russia and Brazil, among others.**

latest trend that can be observed in different spheres<sup>16</sup>.

In this regard, a recent report by two influential analysts at the RAND corporation, David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, is revealing. They interpret this trend of new technological developments with the emergence of a unified spatial dimension, called the noosphere, which implies a deeper and more encompassing shift in the multidimensional approach to strategic objectives. The key concept of noosphere that Ronfeldt-Arquilla takes is understood as "a global 'circuit of thought' and a 'realm of the mind', a collective form of intelligence enabled by the digital information revolution" (Ronfeldt-Arquilla, 2007).

This would require a new kind of strategic action called noopolitics: "the concepts of noosphere and noopolitik will fare better in the future the more they are associated with the concept of global commons (...). This seems likely given that both have links to the biosphere. This could put noopolitik in the path of several strategic issues"<sup>17</sup>.

The authors refer to a complex web resulting from various subsystems of multidimensional projection that integrate the

macro-environmental with the micro-spatial: logistical bases, supply ports, scientific platforms, satellite coverage and telecommunications (including cybernetic), complex devices of the electromagnetic spectrum, digital sensors, biomolecular prospecting, nanotechnology, genetic decoding and modification, patent registration and control, artificial intelligence, Big Data, etc. Already two decades earlier, in 1999, Ronfeldt and Arquilla had developed an approach along the same lines to formulate a US strategy in the face of the information and cyberspace revolution. In contemporary times, the scope of the projection has become more complex and includes the environment through the figure of the global commons<sup>18</sup>.

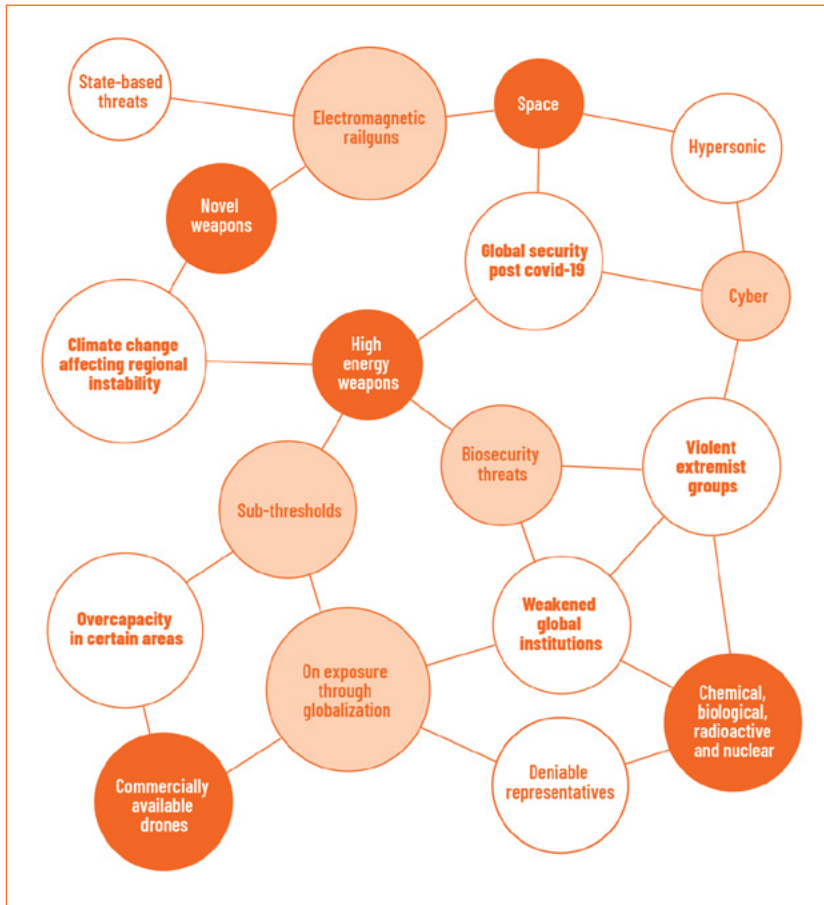
Analysts understand that in a world of increasing multipolar competition, unilateral kinetic dominance for military supremacy as posited by Posen in 2003 has no place in the long run. As long as it is possible to maintain a leading position in the technology gap, the argument of respecting the "communality" of spaces not subject to state sovereignty is even

a powerful diplomatic-discursive tool that plays to one's advantage.

The thalassocratic superpower watches over the global biosphere, while minor actors must request access to the usufruct of "humanity's" resources. The form of restricting and blocking access to space and resources would not necessarily depend on superior firepower, but on a state-of-the-art technological infrastructure deployed in different dimensions of space - including the nanometric - covering the entire electromagnetic, satellite, cybernetic, and biotechnological spectrum.

In the same vein, the latest UK Ministry of Defence white paper sets out the need for a multi-domain strategic approach to the changing battlefield of the future; that is, a strategy that is integrative "across" the space, cyberspace, maritime, land and air domains: "We will move beyond the traditional concept of 'jointness' to a deep integration of multiple domains that adds much more than the sum of its parts"<sup>19</sup>. A multidimensional hazard scenario similarly requires anticipatory responses and initiatives directed at possible interacting factors or

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UK Ministry of Defence, 2021. Defense in a competitive age. London, Ministry of Defence, page 6

necessarily military, operating within the global commons.

In this sense, areas of intersection between spaces under the state jurisdiction of peripheral countries and spaces considered global commons could be violated or be subject to pressure from the actions of powers with interests. Hence, such intersecting spaces become living geopolitical frontiers, generating a wedge effect on the line of least resistance.

While the environmental cause of global agendas serves to exert permanent pressure on sovereign spaces rich in biodiversity and natural resources, at one extreme, the environmental discourse could eventually legitimise a unilateral *ius ad bellum* or an international coalition for intervention and punitive actions against sovereign countries and spaces; or with respect to the predatory action of third parties outside their zones of influence, for example a company from a smaller country, or a rival power such as China and its fishing fleet in the South Atlantic.

Hence, the all-encompassing deployment of technological capabilities on the one hand, and the discourse of global care for the biosphere on the other, tend to converge. In the long term, even spaces subject to state jurisdiction in semi-peripheral and peripheral countries, which are large, sparsely polluted, rich in resources and biodiversity, could be exchanged under “green” financial schemes (as is already happening in several sub-Saharan African countries), or else alienated and internationalised under the declaration of having become a global commons for reasons of environmental care, or “heritage of humanity”, “reserve”

subsystems in integrated times and spaces.

This raises a key question: do global commons have limits? According to international law, projection into spaces not subject to state jurisdiction should stop when it reaches a country’s border. But the Anglo-Saxon concept of global commons has a double singularity: on the one hand, semantically it does not coincide with the spatial-territorial configuration according to which we define “Argentine Antarctic sector”, “Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands”, or “Province of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and South Atlantic Islands” (at least as defined by Argentina’s National Defence Policy Directives).

On the other hand, as mentioned above, from a technical point of view, “communality depends on the capacity to freely project oneself in depth over a space in peacetime: “ensuring freedom in the global commons could be the sign of a 21st century security challenge”<sup>20</sup>. It follows that “sovereign” spaces under the state jurisdiction of peripheral countries, particularly because they lack the necessary technical capabilities, could be violated by technologies, platforms and power projection systems, not

16. Borrell, 2017.

17. Ronfeldt-Arquilla, 2020, p. 68.

18. The notion of the noosphere is tributary to earlier multidisciplinary studies in theology, physics, chemistry, evolutionary biology, genetics, ecology, cybernetics and global ecosystem theories such as

Gaia, by authors such as Vladimir Vernadsky, Teilhard de Chardin, Julian Huxley, James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis, Richard Dawkins, and Marshall McLuhan, among others (Ronfeldt and Arquilla, 2020).

19. UK MoD, 2021, p.12.

20. Ronfeldt y Arquilla, 2020, p. 61.

or “natural sanctuary”, etc. This could imply a loss of sovereignty or limited sovereignty schemes in, for example, portions of the Amazon, Patagonia, Antarctica or the South Atlantic<sup>21</sup>.

#### **IV. Implications: towards a global enclosure act?**

Since the late 1980s, the global commons issue has been occupying an important place on the agendas of international organisations, environmental parastatal organisations and Anglo-sphere state agencies. In recent decades, environmental issues have become part of a global process of multiplication of transboundary regulations that have been uprooted from national legal systems and even relatively autonomous from international law<sup>22</sup>. It also became part of the security planning and strategic projection of NATO's central powers: “access to the global commons is vital to US national interests”<sup>23</sup>.

These initiatives have recently been joined by powerful consortiums such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, which brings together large financial funds, the largest Western corporations and Anglo-sphere governments. Together with the UN, they are globally promoting the environmentalist agenda for the year 2030 of the so-called Millennium Development Goals, with a marked anti-industrial and neo-Malthusian bias. During the 2020 summit - mentioned in the introduction - at which the edition of the Global Risks Report that includes this theme was presented, the press pointed out that the gurus of global finance agreed that the environment, the care of resources and the global commons were essential for the markets:

“Stephen Schwarzman (Blackstone) sees the fight against climate change as an opportunity. George Soros (Soros Fund

Management and Quantum Fund) takes a more philanthropic view of corporate social responsibility; and David Solomon (Goldman Sachs) places the climate crisis as one of the two most important challenges facing the global economy”<sup>24</sup>. For its part, the world's largest financier, New York-based BlackRock, warned that companies that do not take climate change and environmental and governance criteria seriously<sup>25</sup> will fall off the fund's investment radar<sup>26</sup>.

Significantly, in 2019 the Rockefeller Foundation launched the Global Commons Alliance in New York, a lobbying platform that brings together powerful consortia and influential organisations such as the World Economic Forum itself, the Club of Rome, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), World Resources Institute, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), The Nature Conservancy, and more than fifty smaller entities and centres. The strategic function of these associations, in addition to serving in the immediate term for tax exemptions via philanthropic foundations, is to permeate the management institutions of sovereign states and install modes of action and thinking that are confluent with those of the above-mentioned transnational organisations.

This is why their ideological role and the production/reproduction of knowledge is key. To illustrate this point, academic centres and environmental agencies with generous funding and press have even promoted the idea of reconceptualising the planet's geological eras and calling the current period the ‘Anthropocene’, characterised by the ‘harmful impact of humans on terrestrial ecosystems’.<sup>27</sup> Coinciding with this deterministic, catastrophist and partial perspective, which is functional to the idea of restricting

the activities of the more than 7,000 people who live on the planet's land, the current period has been called the ‘Anthropocene’.

Coinciding with this deterministic, catastrophist and partial perspective, functional to the proposal to restrict the activities of the more than 7.5 billion inhabitants of the planet, the website of the Rockefeller Foundation's Global Commons Alliance explains: “There are two definitions of global commons: one is based on geopolitics. In this definition, the global commons are areas, and their potential economic resources, that lie beyond national jurisdiction: the atmosphere, the high seas, Antarctica and outer space.

The second definition is rooted more in economics than geopolitics and relates to how some can abuse shared resources at the expense of others, regardless of national jurisdiction.

Both definitions are relevant to the Global Commons Alliance, but we are more concerned with the second definition (...) While we all need and share these global commons, some are overusing them at the expense of others. This has now reached a critical point. Ultimately, we are jeopardising the stability of a planet that has sustained civilisation for 10,000 years”<sup>28</sup>.

#### **As a conclusion**

For the actors involved with structural power in the international system, the obvious question arises as to whether ever greater global restrictions on resource use and economic growth will be pushed to the point of severely compromising nation-state sovereignty. What strategic and long-term stance should countries like Argentina and those in the region take in the face of this challenge?

In extremis, the options seem to boil down to only two: either

## The environmental cause of global agendas serves to exert permanent pressure on sovereign spaces rich in biodiversity and natural resources. At one extreme, environmental discourse could eventually legitimise a unilateral or international coalition *ius ad bellum* for intervention and punitive actions against sovereign countries and spaces, or against the predatory actions of third parties outside their zones of influence.

to fight multilaterally for the recognition of the republican principle of self-determination and respect for sovereignty while resolutely advancing along a path of integral growth, financing, modernisation and deployment of advanced defence systems in their own space; or to bow to the diktat of the “military dictatorship”; or to yield to the diktat “one planet, one people” and give in to the reduction of industrial infrastructure, fossil and nuclear energy consumption, the violation and reduction of the population, the alienation through indebtedness and transnationalisation of sovereign spaces rich in resources and natural reserves; in other words, the demolition of the founding pillars of all geopolitics; obliteration as a country.

Without being predetermined and in the face of the daunting challenge ahead, weightings in the decision-making process of high politics should consider the following central notions:

1. The so-called global commons present themselves as a new multidimensional spatiality of hegemonic competition in the 21st century.
2. The projection on the global commons has the capacity

to penetrate indirectly and deeply into spaces subject to state jurisdiction, although it has the limitation of not being able to make sovereignty claims over spaces not subject to state jurisdiction (but to internationalisation).

3. The US openly expresses as a strategic objective to be hegemonic in competition with rival powers that are also projecting themselves (although without an environmentalist banner, such as Russia and China). Other actors with projection capabilities and intentions: the UK, Canada, France and Japan.
4. It is inferred that there is an open race to control access (ergo denial of access) to the

global commons, by means of platforms, infrastructure or devices that maintain the apparent “communality” of the goods, although they effectively restrict access to third actors.

5. The securitisation discourses argue that the global commons are subject to risks and threats of an ecosystemic nature because of anthropogenic environmental damage, which is why they agree on the need to limit and restrict the actions of third actors in such spaces.
6. Technology will be a determining factor in the future in the competition for access to multidimensional spaces considered global common.
7. The various forms of projection are multi-domain:

21. Of the countries that share the Amazon region, for years Brazil has been considering the issue of internationalisation as a possible defence issue. In this regard, during the 2019 forest fires in Brazilian territory, environmental organisations and influential Anglo-sphere media such as the BBC referred to the phenomenon as evidence of the “inability” to care for the planet’s natural assets. Even the President of France said in a widely circulated speech that “our home... the lungs of the planet” was burning, that “this catastrophe concerns the world” and was an “international crisis” that merited the intervention of the G7 bloc. See: <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/23/foretamazonienne-propositions-emmanuelmacronactfortheamazon> (last accessed: 15 February 2022)

22. Sassen, 2010.

23. Hutchens, Dries, Perdew, Bryant, y Moores, 2017, p.134.

24. Farràs, 2020.

25. The insidious concept of “governance”, widely circulated in the documents of these entities, is not synonymous with government. It is a code word that refers to natural space and resource management schemes applicable to peripheral countries, in which decision-making is horizontalised between the host state (which has become a junior partner), environmental organisations and transnational corporations, international organisations, banks and eventually groups of “original” settlers.

26. Sullivan, 2020.

27. Simangan, 2020.

28. <https://globalcommonsalliance.org/global-commons/> (última consulta: 12 febrero 2022)

logistical bases, ports and scientific platforms, satellite, telecommunications, cyberspace, electromagnetic spectrum, digital sensors,

biomolecular prospecting, nanotechnology, genetic decoding, modification and registration of patents, artificial intelligence, Big Data, etc.

8. The main form that the strategic approach to global commons spaces has taken is structural, indirect, asymmetric, dispersed, soft and discrete. ■

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