

ANA PALACIO

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We now turn to Ana Palacio, former Foreign Minister of Spain, who will help us to define Europe's position.

Ana Palacio

Thank you, Karl.

Thank you, Thierry. And thank you to the organizers of this conference that has always been a hallmark of the new academic year and of intellectual thought. But today, it marks an even more significant “return” – the return to a post-Covid world. I will elaborate on what Mr. Laïdi said. I would say that speaking late is difficult because you would like to respond or to back much of what has been said. So, I will try to take another position.

We always face these two poles: power and rules. This morning, we have heard several times that what is at stake is the “rules-based order”, this “liberal international order” – and it is. As different speakers have mentioned, this post-World War II order is not adapted to the new reality of shifts in powers, of private actors or a plethora of actors, of a change in instruments. Law is not what it used to be; it is not just treaties, but soft law. But what is very striking today is how it is contested. I will mention the UNGA, the 76th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, which came from different geographies with different voices. I will elaborate on this and develop a kind of taxonomy in five parts.

We have the actors - and this is complementary to Mr. Laïdi's actors – vis-à-vis the rules-based order. We have the Europeans. They are no doubt the “standard bearers” of the rules-based order, with internal problems, as well as external ones, as Bogdan mentioned. We have to agree on the interpretation of Article 2, or agree that the interpretation of Article 2 of our treaty is for the court. And we could go there, but I'll leave it for another time.

We have the “ambivalent” actor: the United States, which has been historically ambivalent. The United States created this order but has always been ambivalent about participating. It signs but it does not ratify. We have seen this since the 1920s, even before the San Francisco Charter.

We then have the “smooth operator”, which is China. For me, the most awaited intervention – which was from President Biden – was loaded with the insecurity of a broken nation, of a country that needs healing, of a society that is polarized. In 1989, they asked us Europeans to



be “whole and free”, and now we ask them to heal, because otherwise it will be extremely difficult. President Biden said, and I am paraphrasing here, that they don’t want a Cold War, and insisted on that. Why make this excuse? Xi Jinping took the concept and ran with it. Ever the smooth operator of this rules-based order, China is bringing certain concepts that are completely alien to the liberal international order, such as the concept of “harmony,” and taking advantage of the United States’ weakness.

Then I would say there is “the world”. During the UNGA, it was extremely interesting to listen to other actors. I would mention Iran, which opened with aggressiveness – you have mentioned the aggressiveness of China, but Iran was brutal. It started by saying that there were two events that have marked this year: the attack by the people against the United States Congress, and then Afghans dropping from planes in Afghanistan. It was brutal.

But, for me the most salient in this complex event was Lavrov, who made “la cause générale” – a general indictment against the rules-based order. It is a speech worth reading from beginning to end, because it’s extremely well-done. It takes a position that makes Russia disruptive, but with a disruptive strategy. Therefore, we have the Standard Bearers, the Ambivalent Actor, the Smooth Operator, and Russia with a clear strategy, which is disruptive, but a strategy nevertheless.

Last but not least – and this is hopeful – is the intervention by India. I could also mention other interventions by a number of African nations that were extremely interesting. But, in the interest of time, I will just mention India. In his remarks, Indian Prime Minister Modi does something extremely interesting: he disassociates democracy from the heritage of colonialism. He says, at the beginning of his speech, that he is speaking on behalf of the “mother of democracy,” underscoring that democracy has been a tradition in India for 2,000 years. He then adds that India had just celebrated the 70th anniversary of their independence.

What do I mean by all of this? In a nutshell, we Europeans have a role to play by convincing the United States that it is in their interest to update the international rules-based order and to keep what is important – and there many important components – but to adapt it. In this adaptation, we have to give a voice to other visions of what democracy means. When you listen to Prime Minister Modi, you wonder what democracy he is speaking about, but he explains it. We need to be open to other cultures, to other formulations that do not weaken the basic pillars, but instead adapt this rules-based order to the world of today.