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THE AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: THE GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES OF THE BARACK OBAMA'S ADMINISTRATION

A POLÍTICA EXTERNA AMERICANA: OS DESAFIOS GEOPOLÍTICOS DOS MANDATOS DE BARACK OBAMA

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Abstract

As if it were a law of nature, each century gives birth to a country, a group of countries or a region with the power, the will, and the intellectual and moral impetus to shape the international system in the field of defence and security, according to its own values. The US is undoubtedly one such country. Against the backdrop of a changing world, where large-scale events seem to be the hallmark of the first quarter of this century, it seems crucial to look more closely at Foreign Affairs and at the geopolitical challenges they pose to one of the few States that, in our opinion, still maintain the status of 'Great Power', as the country continues to influence the international agenda and to determine the pace of international events.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, USA, Democratic Party, Security, Defence, Globalization

Resumo

Como se de uma lei natural se tratasse, em cada século emerge um país, um grupo de países ou uma região, com o poder, a vontade e o ímpeto intelectual e moral para moldar o sistema internacional no campo da defesa e da segurança e de acordo com os seus próprios

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valores. Os EUA são definitivamente esse país. Assim, perante um mundo em mudança, onde acontecimentos com grande impacto parecem ser a marca que caracteriza o primeiro quartel deste século, olhar com mais atenção para a Política Externa e respectivos desafios geopolíticos de um dos poucos Estados que, no nosso entender, ainda mantém o estatuto de "Grande Potência" parece-nos essencial, já que se trata de um país que continua a condicionar a agenda internacional e a determinar o passo dos acontecimentos internacionais.

Palavras-Chave: *Política Externa, EUA, Partido Democrata, Segurança, Defesa, Globalização*

1. Brief Introductory Note

During the Cold War, the international environment was much simpler than it is today. National security objectives were much clearer and less ambiguous. Guaranteeing the individual security of States was the main concern, an objective that was tempered by the actions and moral force of international organizations such as the United Nations, or through the forging of traditional alliances such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

The influence of non-state actors, be them non-governmental organizations, private volunteer organizations, terrorist groups, drug cartels, international crime syndicates or others was limited at the time. This all changed when the 'Berlin Wall' was finally torn down in 1989. If, up to that moment, the rivalry between the two great powers of the time inhibited the action of regional players and the ambitions of non-state players, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in deep changes in an international system that had ruled the world for over four decades. The communist threat had ceased to exist overnight. As a result of this change, the US and their allies were compelled to shift the focus of their attention, at the same time as the interdependence of a global economy emerged, accompanied by a revolution in the information society and communications, causing the erosion of the traditional concept of sovereignty.[1]

Contrary to popular belief, the end of the Cold War did not bring with it the calm which the world expected and desired. The events that ensued, especially the most relevant event of the early 21st century - September 11, which proved crucial for the definition of a new North American national security strategy for this century, forced the country to enter into new conflicts[2] and to make new commitments in distant regions.

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[1] On the issue of globalisation, cf. ERIKSEN, Thomas H., *Globalization – The Key Concepts*, Berg Publishers, Oxford/ New York, 2007, JARVIS, Darryl S. L., Ulrich Beck, *Globalization and the Rise of the Risk Society: A Critical Exegetic Analysis*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, July 2008, MARTELL, Luke, *The Third Wave in Globalization Theory*, in International Studies Review, 9, 173-196, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, MOREIRA, Adriano, *Teoria das Relações Internacionais*, 8ª edição, Editora Almedina, 2014, RODRIGUES, Teresa, *Globalização, População e Ambiente*, Instituto de Altos Estudos, Instituto de Estudos Académicos para Seniores, Academia das Ciências, Lisboa, 25 pp., Lisboa, 2012, SANTOS, BOAVENTURA SOUSA, *Globalizations*, in Theory, Culture & Society, 23, 393, SAGE Publications, 2006.

[2] On these conflicts, cf. LOUREIRO DOS SANTOS, José Alberto, *A Ameaça Global – O Império em Cheque*, Publicações Europa-América, Lisboa, 2008, e *As Guerras que já aí Estão e as que Nos Esperam se os Políticos não mudarem*, Publicações Europa-América, Lisboa, 2009.

One decade passed, and in a changing world where large-scale events seem to be the distinguishing mark of the first quarter of this century, it seems crucial to look more closely to the Foreign Policy[3] of one of the few States that, in our opinion, still maintains the status of 'Great Power', as the country continues to influence the international agenda and to determine the pace of international events, either by being directly involved in them, or by acting by proxy in the regions where those events occur.

It is clear, then, that the USA are a model of success, and that the hard core of its foreign policy has surpassed all other political-economic and social ways of understanding the world, becoming a hegemonic model closely followed by many of the actors in the International Community. That is to say, it is a State with a vast territory, a large population, and which, during over two centuries of existence as a Federation, always sought to fulfil its expansionist ambitions[4].

As if it were a law of nature, each century gives birth to a country, a group of countries or a region with the power, the will and the intellectual and moral impetus to shape the international system in the field of defence and security, according to its own values. The USA is undoubtedly one such country. However, in order to achieve this, paraphrasing Loureiro dos Santos in his book *Reflexões sobre Estratégia VII – Tempos de Crise* [Reflections on Strategy VIII - Times of crisis], 'it has the permanent national objective of creating the conditions to prevent any actor (State or coalition of States), anywhere in the world, from becoming powerful enough to jeopardise its dominant position in the international order'[5].

Thus, the US has been relying on a cultural model which includes the concept known as 'American way of life'[6], supported by a global language, a strong economy (that suffered a severe setback in the last decade, as did other international actors), and a military power that continues to surpass all others, and that is seen as a guarantor of stability by the International Community, supported by the vast sums (public and private) spent to ensure the country's a pivotal position and presence in several parts of the world at once[7].

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[3] For an introductory approach to the issue, see MARQUES DOS SANTOS, Victor, *Elementos de Análise de Política Externa*, ISCSP-UTL, Lisboa, 2012 e COSTA DEUS, Ruth, *A Política Externa Americana e a Europa – Dos Primórdios ao Final do Século XX*, Editora Autonomia 27, Lisboa, 2004.

[4] On this subject, see CHOMSKY, Noam, *Hegemonia ou Sobrevivência – O Sonho Americano de Domínio Global*, Editorial Inquérito, Lisboa, 2003, LOUREIRO DOS SANTOS, José Alberto, *A Idade Imperial – A Nova Era*, Publicações Europa-América, 6ª edição, Lisboa, 2003 e KISSINGER, Henry, *Precisará a América de Uma Política Externa – Para uma Diplomacia do Século XXI*, Editora Gradiva, 1ª edição, Lisboa, 2003.

[5] Cf. LOUREIRO DOS SANTOS, José Alberto, *Reflexões sobre Estratégia VII – Tempos de Crise*, Ed. Diário de Bordo, Lisboa, 2014, p. 30.

[6] Cf., on this subject TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis de, *Da Democracia na América*, Relógio D'Água Editores, Lisboa, 2008. On the matter of current issues, see also KENWORTHY, Lane, *America's Social Democratic Futur*e, in Foreign Affairs, January/February, vol. 93, Nº 1, New York, 2014.

[7] On this subject, see BADIE, Bertrand, VIDAL, Dominique (Dir.), *Puissances D'Hier et de Demain*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 2013; CHOMSKY, Noam, *Mudar o Mundo*, Bertrand Editora, Lisboa, 2014; CLINTON, Hillary R., *Escolhas Difíceis*, Editora Dom Quixote, Lisboa, 2015; FRIEDMAN, George, *The Next 100 Years – A Forecast for the 21st Century*, Random House, New York, 2009; RODELAS, Javier Redondo, *Presidentes de Estados Unidos – De Washington a Obama, la historia norteamericana a través de los 43 inquilinos de la Casa Branca*, La esfera de los Libros, Madrid, 2015; GOLBERG, Jeffrey, *The Obama Doctrine – How he´s shaped the world* in The Atlantic Review, April 2016, p.72-90.

These premises form the basis of our research, which is grounded on hermeneutics and phenomenology, which, in addition to understanding and interpreting texts, aims to understand, describe and interpret perceived phenomena. We relied on a descriptive/interpretative research strategy, based on empirical observation of data, which was later analysed, deepening our knowledge of the reality which is the subject of the research.

This research paper aims to be a case study on North American Foreign Policy during the two terms of President Barack Obama (elected in 2008), beginning by characterising the structuring aspects which influence the diplomatic decision-making process in the USA. The study goes on to describe and interpret the events of the period under analysis as a way to provide empirical knowledge to build a theory/interpretation of the issue under examination, which can be refuted at any moment, given the contingencies of the surrounding reality, which the chapter 'Consequences for the International System: Final Reflections' seeks to address.

With regard to the literature survey, we relied on works by national and foreign authors, opinion pieces, and data from international indexes in order to frame, develop and make the relevant final reflections on the selected theme. The research will not be exhaustive, but it will seek to encompass reference and fundamental works on the subject, while recent essays will allow us to identify the nuances of the current Administration's foreign affairs.

2. Fundamental Aspects That Influence The Diplomatic Decision-Making Process

When we speak about 'Western-type Civilization'[8] and of its legacy, the aim is to identify a set of basic attitudes built on dominant values, an absolute, uniform and 'intolerant' attitude, which has known moments of disenchantment followed by moments of missionary spirit, times of certainty and times of dissidence. In light of this legacy, both outside and in the States that form the country, the alternative is the way of life.

It is precisely with this specific way of life, a model based on a superior power seen as exceptional by its people, with pillars that still rest on a form of (somewhat regulated, depending on the times) capitalism and democracy, that the USA, certain of their potential and of the effectiveness of their political archetype, seek to influence international life, coordinating a global strategy abroad.

In view of a model with permanent internal contradictions, which over the years have been reflected in the formulations of the structuring principles of the country's Foreign Policy, such as its *isolationist nationalism* in the face of a vocation for *international leadership*, the defence of the *principles of freedom and non-discrimination*, in contrast with *ethnically determined conflicts* and with a *tendency for plutocracy*, its sense of *pragmatism and 'realpolitik'* and the e*thnic-religious basis for its culture*, the defence of a *relative historical*

[8] For a contextual interpretation of this theme, see HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., *O Choque das Civilizações e a Mudança na Ordem Mundial*, Editora Gradiva, Lisboa, 1999 e MEARSHEIMER, John J., *A Tragédia da Política das Grandes Potências*, 1ª edição, Editora Gradiva, 2007.

evolutionism and the *alternative succession of the State Administration*, or *the primacy of the economic and the urgency of the political*, the country's diplomatic decisions also reflect the influence of prominent agents in the political and economic life of the country. In fact, the political alternation (Democrats vs Republicans) of Administrations[9] is permeable to popular support, and is thus the best way for Executive Chiefs to subjugate the Congress, which is not always 'amenable' to their legislative initiatives. However, appearing too much like a representative of the people carries the risk of alienating the electoral body and of subordinating the definition of a foreign policy to the whims of public opinion. Thus, there are often contradictions between the demands of diplomacy and those of national policy[10].

Thus, in any 'four-year cycle', American Presidents may be faced with problems that compel their Administrations to rather different stances from the first to the second term. The fact remains that 'bipartisan' policies triumph in Congress in matters of diplomacy, but they do so to the detriment of a firm and clear definition of broad policy options. The preparation and application of Foreign Policy guidelines is divided among different areas of the Administrations, with interwoven responsibilities: from the Department of State to the Department of Defence, to the National Security Council, and, on the field, the activities of the Embassies and of the CIA.

In addition to these different vicissitudes, as a result of the magnitude of the problems and of the multiple forces vying for decision-making power, the process of formulation and implementation of a foreign policy is excessively intricate. Furthermore, the country which continues to compete directly with the USA for the leadership of the international system, the former Soviet Union, has been replaced with a less extensive territory, the Russian Federation, and holds, within the framework of international policy, the initiative to act within a strategic plan with general guidelines. This strategic action is defined by expansionism and by the use it makes of its own strengths and of the weakness of its adversaries.

This is the reason why analysing US foreign policy implies a focus on its times of affirmation and retraction, a crucial element in understanding that policy, as well as the actions and orientations of its adversaries. Thus, over the last two centuries, the American Federation has fluctuated between an *isolationist vocation*, suspicious of the benefits and good intentions of extra-continental interventions, consolidated by an increasingly justifiable superiority complex, sometimes known as 'Paradise Lost syndrome', and the tendency for regional and global leadership, an *expansionist or crusade vocation* entangled in the recognition of a general supremacy in terms of capabilities and resources, which the US is clearly seen as having.

North American foreign policy is then characterised by cycles that mirror the prevalence of different trends in the definition of its foreign relations in any given situation. The territorial, demographic, economic, military and technological evolution of this 'great power' and the shift

[9] On this subject, see the detailed manner in which Henry KISSINGER, in his book *Diplomacy*, sheds light on the nuances of the various democratic and republican administrations in the diplomatic history of the United States.

[10] For an example of these contradictions, see TOOZE, Adam, *The Deluge – The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order 1916-1931*, Penguin, 2014.

in the international balance of power are the factors responsible for the changes in response, considering that diplomatic decision-making is characterised by constant revisionism and, under certain circumstances, by action by reaction to surrounding events.

3. American Foreign Policy In The Barack Obama Administrations

According to the first North American Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson (1790-1793), 'Crafting American foreign policy has always been a high-wire balancing act between continuity and change' (CLINTON, 2015, p. 55).

Thus, writing on Foreign Policy during the Obama administration is an arduous task, as it implies taking into account who will be the next Chief Executive to lead the country's diplomacy in this first quarter of the 21st century. This task becomes more intricate as we consider the fact that there was a change in the leadership of the team responsible for this task from the first to the second term, and that this might translate into changes in how strategy is implemented. In fact, between 2009 and 2013, the person in charge of the State Department and of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) was Senator and presidential candidate for the democrats, Hillary R. Clinton, who was succeeded by the 68th Secretary of State, democrat Senator John F. Kerry, himself also a former presidential candidate for the democrats in 2004, at the time of President Obama's re-election in 2012, and at the time of the latter's nomination as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

a. The First Term: The Actions Taken By Secretary Of State Hillary Rodham Clinton (2009-2013)

After being his rival in the US Presidential campaign primaries, Hillary Clinton was chosen by President Obama to integrate the most prominent position in the presidential office, fourth in the line of succession to the presidency. In order to persuade her to accept the office, the President argued that he would have to devote all his attention and time to the economic crisis that was hitting the country, and would thus need someone with prestige to represent him internationally. He also believed that the USA was in a difficult position, both domestically and internationally. Hence, he needed a Secretary of State who could intervene immediately on a global scale to begin repairing the damage that the USA 'had inherited'. Hillary Clinton eventually accepted the position and put an end to the 'Obama-Clinton drama' that had been generated during the presidential campaign and that had fed the news cycle for quite some time.

Thus, in the first pages of her book, "Hard Choices", Hillary Clinton begins by highlighting the public stance by renowned historian, Paul Kennedy, taken shortly after President Obama took office in January 2009, demonstrating how the world perceived US power at that point in History: he called the period 'American decline', a prevailing criticism during 2008 and 2009, and, in this author's opinion, even during 2010 and 2011. In a column for the Wall

Street Journal, Paul Kennedy 'blamed declining U.S. power on mounting debt, the severe economic impact of the Great Recession, and the "imperial overstretch" of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan' (CLINTON, 2015, p. 48).

The historian used an evocative analogy to explain how America had ceased to be the undisputed world leader: 'A strong person, balanced and muscular, can carry an impressively heavy backpack uphill for a long while. But if that person is losing strength (economic problems), and the weight of the burden remains heavy or even increases (the Bush Doctrine), and the terrain becomes more difficult (rise of new Great Powers, international terrorism, failed states), then the once-strong hiker begins to slow and stumble. That is precisely when nimbler, less heavily burdened walkers get closer, draw abreast, and perhaps move ahead' (CLINTON, p. 48).

Hillary Clinton included him in a group of 'people predicting catastrophe' in their assessments of the situation of the country during the first quarter of the 21st century. In her opinion, 'Every time we've faced a challenge, whether war or depression or global competition, Americans have risen to meet it, with hard work and creativity'. The new Secretary of State had thus set the tone, considering that it would not be smart for the world to bet against the United States. According to Clinton, the analysts of the time had undervalued some of the country's characteristics, like its capacity for resilience and reinvention, its military, considered one of the most powerful in the world, the fact that it is one of the world's biggest economies, that its capacity for influence is backed by an unrivalled diplomatic apparatus, the role of its universities in setting the global standard for education, the fact that values like freedom, equality and opportunity still draw people from all parts of the world to the country, and, finally, when the USA needs to solve a problem anywhere in the world, it could 'call on dozens of friends and allies' (CLINTON, p. 49).

The international environment in which Hillary Clinton took office was not the most favourable for American interests. For this reason, and under the motto 'keeping America safe, strong and prosperous', which implied an infinite set of choices, many of which come with defective intelligence and contradicting requirements, the Secretary of State and her team were forced to divide the challenges that would have to be dealt with in the four years to come into three categories: the problems inherited by the Administration, which included two wars and a global financial crisis; new events, frequently unexpected and emerging threats, which range from the 'quicksand' of the Middle East to the turbulent waters of the Pacific and the uncharted territory of cyberspace; and the opportunities presented by a world increasingly interconnected by globalisation.

With these premises as a starting point, the head of North American Diplomacy began the task of redirecting the American foreign policy towards what she called 'smart power'. According to Clinton, for the US to succeed in the 21st century, it would require the integration of the traditional tools of Foreign Policy - diplomacy, development assistance and military force - with the energy and ideas of the private sector, while also empowering citizens, especially the problem solvers commonly known as civil society.

Indeed, for decades the instruments of Foreign Policy were known as the 'Hard Power' of the Armed Forces and the 'Soft Power' of diplomatic, economic, humanitarian or cultural influence. The Obama Administration sought to break with this paradigm, which it saw as outdated, and to encompass all the elements of American foreign policy, using them in close collaboration with one another. Thus, in addition to everyday tasks such as negotiating treaties and participating in diplomatic conferences, it was necessary to address other tasks such as dealing with social media activists, tracing pipeline routes, reducing carbon emissions, fostering political participation among marginalised groups, defending universal human rights and providing economic rules for humanity's common journey. The Obama Administration believed that the ability to perform these tasks would decisively determine US national power.

Thus, to enact the desired changes, the Obama Administration integrated a new concept, 'Smart Power', which had been whispered for some years in Washington's political corridors, as well as used by Harvard professor Joseph Nye and others, and that was now reclaimed by this Administration and defined as 'choosing the right combination of tools—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—for each situation' (CLINTON, p. 57). In fact, according to Clinton, smart power and its expansion to other issues such as technology, public-private partnerships, energy, economy, in addition to the usual attributions of the Department of State, aimed to complement the traditional tools and priorities of diplomacy. However, for this Administration, complementing did not mean replacing. Each asset would have to withstand the challenges of national security, no matter how great or difficult they were.

Hillary Clinton also relied on the experiences of her predecessors for inspiration. She drew on the teachings of General George Catlett Marshall, a hero of World War II, who served as Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence in President Truman's administration. In this officer's opinion, the safety and prosperity of America depended on good allies who shared common interests and bought American products. He was aware that the US had the responsibility and the opportunity to lead the world, therefore, new challenges could only mean new opportunities for leadership. These were the auspices under which Marshall and Truman launched an ambitious plan to rebuild Europe's ravaged countries while simultaneously hindering the spread of communism. Through military, economic, diplomatic, cultural and moral power, the US has crossed borders to obtain bipartisan support and commitment from rulers, entrepreneurs, unionists and academics, and has also needed to explain these objectives to the American people.

These are the guidelines which assist the current Administration in determining the course of the new Foreign Policy, beginning with the message sent by the choice of destination for the diplomatic team's first official visit. Commonly considered the journey which marks the course of the foreign policy strategy, Hillary Clinton's first task was to reaffirm America as a power in the Pacific without causing unnecessary friction with China. It was decided that the journey's objectives would be threefold: to visit the main allies in Asia, beginning with Japan,

followed by South Korea, and to forge bonds with Indonesia, an emerging country and regional power also on the rise and the seat of ASEAN, and to begin a deeper involvement with China. In the eyes of this Administration, America needed to get the message out to Asia, and to the world, that it was again establishing a presence in the region.

The reasons for this choice are not difficult to understand. The region spreads from the Indian Ocean to the small insular nations of the Pacific, home to over half the world's populations, several of the most reliable and most prominent commercial partners of the USA, and to many of the world's most dynamic energy and trade routes. US exports to the region helped stimulate economic recovery after the crisis of 2008, and this Administration considers that the future growth of the country depends on the ability to reach Asia's growing middle class consumer segment.

However, the region is also home to credible threats to US security. The unpredictable dictatorship of North Korea and the rise of China, one of this century's strategic developments, pose difficult challenges to this Administration. In spite of this, the USA and China share common interests[11], which means both countries benefit considerably from one another, contribute to stability in the region and worldwide, and safeguard the regular flow of energy and trade. However, relations between the two economic giants are far from peaceful: certain points of contention still cast a shadow over relations between both countries, such as North Korea, Taiwan, Tibet, the issue of human rights, and new disagreements such as climate change and the border disputes in the[12] South China Sea and in the East China Sea.[13]

The Obama Administration was convinced it was time to find a strategy to manage the competition between both countries while simultaneously stimulating cooperation. This was, indeed, what happened. The Asia-Pacific region became a priority in the diplomatic objectives of this Administration. This required a new approach to the region. Three options were presented, which amounted to i) focusing efforts on the development of US/China relations, assuming that if an appropriate policy for China could be established, the rest of the work to be done in Asia would be facilitated; ii) concentrating efforts on reinforcing alliances through pre-existing Treaties in the region (with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia), in order to counterbalance China's growing power; iii) promoting and coordinating multilateral regional organisations such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Organization).

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[11] In 2013, trade between both countries reached 562 billion dollars, with China also holding large quantities of US treasury bonds.

[12] This Administration maintains that the US does not have any territorial ambitions in the South China Sea or in the East China Sea, and hence will not take part in any disputes, as well as opposing any unilateral efforts to change the current situation. The interests of the US lie in the protection of freedom of navigation, maritime trade and international law. Due to obligations resulting from Treaties, they have made the commitment to provide assistance to Japan and to the Philippines.

[13] Throughout the presidential campaign of 2008, Hillary Clinton stressed the need to find a way for the US to defend common interests while also defending its stance towards China. At that time, she underlined the importance of persuading the country to abide by the rules of the global market, foregoing discriminatory business practices, allowing the value of its currency to rise and preventing dangerous foods and products from reaching American consumers.

The Obama Administration chose to combine the three approaches. It was their understanding that, if Asian multilateral institutions were supported and modernised, they would be able to reinforce regional rules in various areas, such as intellectual property rights, nuclear proliferation and freedom of navigation, and also mobilize initiatives on challenges such as climate change and piracy.

Based on this strategy, over the next four years, the US practised what it called 'forward-deployed diplomacy' in Asia, a military term that basically meant accelerating the pace and broadening the scope of American diplomatic engagement in the region, sending high officials and development experts to various parts of the region, intensifying participation in multilateral organizations, renewing traditional US alliances and establishing contacts with new strategic partners. The next step was a tour of the Asia-Pacific region. Hillary Clinton went to Japan and to South Korea, took the opportunity to visit the demilitarized zone (DMZ - Parallel 38) dividing the two Koreas since 1953, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos (which had not been visited by a Secretary of State for 57 years), Mongolia, the Philippines, Burma (present day Myanmar), India, and China.

The primary objective of the American foreign policy for the region is thus to promote political reform and economic growth in multiple countries in the region. The aim is to make the 21st century a time of prosperity and freedom, in order to contain the rise of a China that combines an authoritarian political model with State capitalism, becoming an attractive example for some leaders in those parts of the world. It is due to this fact that India, another Asian giant, may, in the view of the US, play a key role in this containment policy. The country is an important trading partner for the US. In the eyes of the Obama Administration, if India overcomes its unsolvable conflict with Pakistan and becomes more active in the defence of democracy and free market values across Asia, the US is prepared to support India's 'Look East' policy, as well as to support the idea to have the country 'lead East'.

Moreover, this American diplomacy strategy for the Asia-Pacific region is supported on the pillar of economic development and, to implement it, the US entered into negotiations with several countries in the region to promote the conclusion of a trade agreement (reached on OCT15 and waiting for the approval of the national Parliaments) entitled Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which aims to link markets all across Asia to the Americas, to promote the reduction of trade barriers, and to raise the standards of labour, of the environment and of intellectual property. For President Obama, it is imperative to establish a high level, feasible and meaningful trade agreement, a tool for American companies that hitherto were often excluded those markets. However, one thing is indisputable in this agreement: the TPP covers a third of the world trade, a figure that should not be overlooked by stakeholders and competitors in this process.

With regard to other parts of the world such as the AF-PAK (Afghanistan-Pakistan) region, the military and civilian strategy for these two countries, announced on 27 March 2009, set very specific goals for the war: 'to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in AF--PAK, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future'. This

strategy included more active regional diplomacy and greater economic development, support to agriculture and to the construction of infrastructures, as investment areas that could have an immediate impact on the lives of the Afghan people. Reducing corruption in Afghanistan has become yet another priority area, a task which was the responsibility of the State Department and USAID during the years that followed, at least until the final withdrawal of US forces from the country.[14]

As for Europe, the alliance with the continent 'is worth more than gold', in the words of the Secretary of State (CLINTON, p. 239), who, in our opinion, intentionally referred to the territorial space of Europe that exceeds the 28 countries, possibly influenced by the legacy of the events of WWII and by the space occupied by NATO today, and, despite the emphasis placed on Asia by this administration raising concerns among allies elsewhere in the world, the Secretary of State made it clear that America had the ability and the determination to make a pivot to Asia without turning its back on other obligations and opportunities. Of all the ties with European leaders that were maintained in the four years that followed, we must also highlight one of the strongest links in the transatlantic chain, NATO, the military alliance between the countries of North America (USA and Canada) and their European allies. The organizational challenges of the post-Cold War period consisted in the integration of the former Soviet republics, which felt vulnerable without the security guarantees provided by the West and feared that one day Russia would go back to its aggressive posture in the wake of renewed expansionist amazement. Led by the US, the organization's mission in the years that followed was to open the doors to any country in Eastern Europe, and to establish a network of partnerships with many of the former Soviet republics, as well as to create an advisory board with Russia.

Upon the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (Ukraine) by Russia in the summer of 2014, deemed illegal by the international community, there were claims that this aggressive decision was a response to the expansion of NATO limits over the last decade. However, the current administration is convinced that this argument stems only from the fact that Putin's Russia continues to refuse to accept the idea that the country's relations with the West should be based on partnerships and mutual interests, as Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev believed. Thus, for this Administration, NATO is a crucial element in the response to the emerging threats of the 21st century, since America cannot and should not do everything alone. Creating partnerships based on common interests and objectives within this organization appears to be the most appropriate response to these threats. To provide examples of this, one must only recall the assistance provided by NATO in situations outside its area of intervention, as was the case in Bosnia (in 1995), in Afghanistan (still ongoing), and in Libya (at the onset of the 'Arab Springs' in 2011), in what became one of the most successful military alliances in History.

[14] After several postponements, President Obama stipulated that US forces would remain in the country until the end of 2016, thus responding to the Afghan President's request that the US not withdraw its forces before Afghanistan and its institutions were sufficiently trained and prepared to meet the current challenges.

Alongside this organization of a military nature, the US also has a special interest in what it considers to be, despite its heavy bureaucracy, one of the most prosperous political and economic organizations in the world, the European Union. During its first term, this administration made efforts to establish an Energy Council with the EU, including the US and Europe. The aim was to coordinate transatlantic efforts to help the most vulnerable countries, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe, develop their own energy reserves and reduce their dependence on Russian gas. The two economic blocs also began talks to discuss a comprehensive economic agreement entitled TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), still under negotiation, to reconcile protocols, increase trade and promote growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

Turkey and Russia are two other priorities of the current administration. Both territories are situated halfway between Europe and Asia, which results in culturally rich peoples, integrating both European Judeo-Christian traditions and Muslim and eastern references to even more distant places. As for Turkey, the country proved to be an important partner during the four years of the first term, but, according to the Secretary of State, relations were sometimes frustrating. On some occasions, the countries were in agreement on issues like Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism, the issue of Syria; in others, they were not, as in the case of Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, Turkey's internal dynamics remain unclear, making its future uncertain. However, this Administration believes that the country continues to be a major player in the Middle East and in Europe, and thus considers this relationship to be vitally important, although it should not be discounted that the role played by Turkey as an 'automatic stabilizer' in this part of the world can be performed without it imposing conditions, particularly taking into account the most immediate geostrategic interests of the country (the EU and the Kurds).

Russia, however, was a 'reset and regression' for this Administration. Let us consider: the issue stems from Putin's worldview, which is influenced by his admiration for the history of his country's Czars, by Russia's long-standing interest in controlling the border territories, and by his determination that the country never again appear weak or at the mercy of the West, as occurred after the end of Soviet Union. Russia also desires to control its neighbours (which is exemplified by the attempt to occupy the separatist provinces in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008), to control their access to energy, to play a more important role in the Middle East (intervening directly in the conflict in Syria, supporting the Assad regime against all who demand its demise), reducing the Muslim threat inside and outside its southern borders, and, to that end, to reduce US influence in Central and Eastern Europe and in regions he deems part of the Russian zone of influence. This is the only way to understand the recent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the unrest in the Eastern Ukraine provinces averse to Russia, and the attempt to counteract or even negate US influence in the countries devastated by the Arab uprisings, as is the case of Egypt.

Thus, the then Secretary of State saw in the relationship with Russia a balancing act, which was not only crucial but was also difficult to achieve. In the opinion of the diplomat,

Putin sees geopolitics as a zero-sum game in which if someone is winning, someone else must be losing, a concept Clinton considers outdated and dangerous, and which requires increased efforts and patience by the US in order to work with Russia on specific issues when possible, and to rally other countries to prevent and limit their aggressive behaviour when needed[15].

The Obama Administration's attention is also turned to the American continent, especially to Latin America, a region considered particularly important for the US, as it is the destination of more than 40% of all US exports, the two largest importers being Canada and Mexico. It is not, therefore, surprising, that the value placed by the US on the region and the fact that they have always considered these territories as part of their 'living space' is related to the celebration of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in late 2015, a treaty which includes Chile and Mexico, and for which membership negotiations are underway with Colombia and other countries of the south American continent.

However, the Obama administration was committed to initiating a new form of relationship. In a speech at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009, President Obama gave assurances that the US would no longer treat the region as a 'junior partner'; instead, 'the people of Latin America could expect engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values'. The tone was set for a new approach, a 'partnership between equals', a new beginning which was consummated during the term of the then Secretary of State, during the attempt to reintegrate Cuba in the OAS (Organisation of American States) in June 2009. Indeed, the American President had made it clear that it was time to overcome the worn out discourse of the Cold-War and to reinstate Cuba, which had been suspended since 1962, as a member of the organization. It was time to update the prevalent reasoning (a country ostensibly close to Marxism-Leninism and aligned with the 'communist bloc') to a more credible and rigorous description of a country where human rights are still violated and which is still a long way from having fundamental democratic values, operating in a manner incompatible with the principles of the Charter of the OAS.

Despite the implementation, in 2011, during the first term of the Obama administration, of measures to foster greater openness towards the regime of the Castro brothers, Havana refused to make a formal application for accession to the OAS or to accept any conditions or democratic reforms. The time for a true, consequential 'handshake' had not yet come. This was only achieved later, during Obama's second term[16].

At the end of the first term, the US was seeking, after 20 years of US-Cuba relations, to revise its embargo against the island. It was time to transfer the burden of isolation to the Castros. The distance had only strengthened the authority of the regime in power. Maybe

[15] One example of this was the conflict in the eastern region of Ukraine, where US diplomacy was not involved directly, and in which the negotiations, known as the FEB15 Minsk II agreements, were conducted between Germany and France, under the auspices of the OSCE, and the representatives of Russia and Ukraine in the capital of Belarus.

[16] On this subject, see point 3.2. on the action of Secretary of State John F. Kerry during President Obama's second term .

if the Cuban people were could see the numerous possibilities and benefits of life in a more open society, it would be harder for the Havana government to explain why it still remained on a non-democratic course, why it was still violating the rights of its people.

The Obama Administration also left its mark in Africa. The US based its strategy for the continent on four pillars: promoting opportunities and development; stimulating economic growth, trade and investment; promoting peace and security; and strengthening the democratic institutions. It seems clear, then, that the head of American diplomacy was involved in issues such as assistance in the treatment of people affected by HIV/AIDS in Zambia, in actions to promote democracy and improve basic living conditions in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Central African Republic, in the Ivory Coast, Mali, Madagascar, Liberia, Kenya, Senegal and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and that her visit to the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was a watershed moment which reminded African leaders that the turmoil of the 'Arab Springs' could be reach their part of the continent, if changes were not made in order to meet the people's needs.

During her visit to Juba in August 2012, Hillary Clinton was also involved in the negotiating efforts for the pacification of the newest country in the world, South Sudan, which had become independent in 2011 and now found itself again involved in a violent conflict with its nearest neighbour, (north) Sudan, or in the support given by the Obama administration to the transitional government of Somalia and to the allied forces of the African Union in the fight against extremist movement Al Shabaab, in the Horn of Africa region.

If Afghanistan was considered by the various armies that invaded it as a 'Graveyard of Empires', the region of the Middle East has been 'quicksand' to all those who had sought to intervene in its evolution. In the past, several powers delineated borders, administered territories on behalf of local populations, without ever truly understanding the different realities of those areas. The region of the Greater Middle East is home to different ethnic groups, religions, cultures, languages and political models, forced by the colonial powers into a 'straitjacket' border that proved to be a breeding ground for disputes. At this point, the Obama administration took office, at the beginning of another dangerous period for the region of the Greater Middle East, from the stalled peace process between Israelis and Palestinians (which the Obama administration also failed to unlock during both terms), to the so-called 'Arab Springs' in North Africa (with emphasis on the support given to the intervention by NATO forces in Libya, in 2011, in the creation of a no-fly zone), or to the difficult balance with the Persian Gulf countries (such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), not to mention the issue of a nuclear Iran, which had developments during the second term. Regardless of the situation, Hillary Clinton made it clear in her travels to these countries that if the US had a long-standing collaboration with autocrats like Ben Ali, Mubarak and the various Gulf monarchs, it was because they were and, in some cases, continue to be the leaders of their respective region, just as the US has had to deal with other leaders in other parts of the world. Thus, the US did not fail to deal with these people on issues central to the interests of each party, although there major disagreements exist with many of these

countries, and lack of understanding between them (international and regional) has resulted in prolonging the conflict in Syria.

Given this line of action, it can be seen that despite the unease these statements generate, they are an incontrovertible truth based on a premise that characterises the foreign policy of the various successive administrations: America will always do whatever it takes to keep its citizens safe and to promote their interests, which means sometimes having to work with partners with whom it has deep and serious differences, as in the case of the disputes involving Russia and Ukraine, or the intricate conflict in Syria with repercussions in Iraq, where the Assad regime and the various opposition forces, along with the Daesh's extremist Islamist fighters, face a fratricidal war, making it harder for external actors such as the US to choose the more moderate side as a credible interlocutor in a conflict that has already lasted too long.

b. The Second Term: The Actions Taken By Secretary Of State John Forbes Kerry (2013-2017)

In his 24JAN13 speech to the members of the Senate who assess President Obama's choice to lead the Department of State as Secretary of State - the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations-, Senator John F. Kerry stated the following: '(…) It is also imperative that in implementing President Obama's vision for the world as he ends more than a decade of war, we join together to augment our message to the world. President Obama and everyone knows that American foreign policy is not defined by drones and deployments alone. We cannot allow the extraordinary good we do to save and change lives to be eclipsed entirely by the role we have had to play since September 11th, a role that was thrust upon us. American foreign policy is also defined by food security, humanitarian assistance, the fight against disease and the push for development, as much as it is by any single counter terrorism initiative. It is defined by leadership on life threatening issues like climate change, or fighting to lift up millions of lives by promoting freedom and democracy from Africa to the Americas or speaking out for the prisoners of gulags in North Korea or millions of refugees and displaced persons and victims of human trafficking. It is defined by keeping faith with all that our troops have sacrificed to secure Afghanistan. America lives up to her values when we give voice to the voiceless' (US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2013).

The stage had been set for the past and present tasks of the new head of American diplomacy in the four year term ahead. To help in this mission, John Kerry and his team established a multi-year plan, to be carried out from 2014-2017 (US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2014), defining the five strategic pillars that would guide the activity of the State Department and of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for the term:

i) strengthening and projection of America's economic capacity, through expansion and access to new markets, investment and trade, as well as promoting inclusive economic growth, reducing extreme poverty and improving food safety;

ii) strengthening the influence of US foreign policy in its strategic challenges. This will require building a new stability in the Middle East and North Africa regions, reorienting foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region through a more interventionist diplomacy, and improving cooperation on matters related to security and development. This will also be required in the prevention and response to crises and conflicts, in how issues concerning fragility are dealt with, and in the way it provides humanitarian assistance to those in need. Overcoming global security challenges through strong diplomacy and development cooperation and stepping up US efforts in the fight against new global health challenges are other objectives that must be considered;

iii) promoting the transition towards reducing CO2 emissions, creating a resilient global climate framework, as the same time as it seeks to expand global access to sustainable energy, which can be achieved through a strong domestic policy capable of heading an international campaign to fight climate change, to promote energy security, access to clean energy and the transition to a cleaner global economy;

iv) protecting US strategic interests by promoting democracy, human rights and by strengthening civil society. Thus, encouraging democratic governance and human rights protection in order to ensure stability, peace, and prosperity can only be achieved through a constructive bilateral and multilateral policy, as well as by providing targeted assistance, without forgetting the role of local civil society in the implementation of this task;

v) modernising diplomatic and international development assistance activities, allowing the diplomatic corps and international development assistance to intervene more efficiently, effectively and collaboratively.

Given the range of themes defined by the Department of State's four-year program, the schedule of the new Secretary of State has been intense, with more than two hundred trips to different countries since he was appointed to the office in 01FEB13. In fact, one of the issues that stood out during his tenure, and which compelled the head of US diplomacy to redouble his efforts, were the negotiating rounds with Cuban dignitaries and the United States, which lasted for about eight months, and which led to a simultaneous announcement on 17DEC14 by Barack Obama and Raul Castro, who enacted a historic rapprochement between the two countries, separated for over 70 years by the 150 kilometres of the Florida Straits, following 18 months of secret talks, under the aegis of the Holy See - with particular emphasis on the personal commitment of Pope Francis - and of Canada, both countries having hosted several of the meetings.

The first step had been taken for the opening of talks. On that date, President Obama announced the new US foreign policy for Cuba to the world, ending years of an approach which he considered outdated and ineffective for the interests of his country. The negotiation process had been initiated by this administration the moment it took office, fulfilling one of

the pillars established by the US State Department: the promotion of democracy, the defence of human rights and the strengthening of civil society in countries where these values are not guaranteed. In effect, and in the words of John Kerry in his speech on the occasion of the flag raising at the US Embassy in Havana, on 14AUG15, 'the people of Cuba would be best served by genuine democracy, where people are free to choose their leaders'. He continued by stating that 'the policies of the past have not led to a democratic transition in Cuba. It would be equally unrealistic to expect normalizing relations to have, in a short term, a transformational impact', underlining that President Obama's Administration strongly favours lifting the American embargo on Cuba, in place since 1962. '(...) this is a day for pushing aside old barriers and exploring new possibilities. There is nothing to fear, and we will enjoy numerous benefits when we allow our citizens to know each other better, visit each other more often, conduct business on a regular basis, exchange ideas and learn from one another'.

The ceremony held on AUG15 was preceded by several months of talks, and the process culminated on 01JUL that same year, with the resumption of diplomatic relations and the opening of Embassies in the capitals of each country, a measure that was carried out a few days later, on 20JUL15. After more than five decades of cut ties (since 1961), the visit of the head of American diplomacy to the Caribbean island was the first in 70 years since Secretary of State Edward Stettinius visited Cuba in 1945. It was thus a milestone for the diplomacy between the two countries, bringing together John Kerry and his Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodriguez, to discuss not only the upgrade of the US interests section in Havana to Embassy status, but also the lifting of the trade embargo on the island, the introduction of improvements in travel and trade between the two countries, in addition to the issues surrounding the election process in the country, in order to give the Cuban people the opportunity to participate in a truly democratic act to choose their political leadership, as well as the issue of Washington revising the status of the island as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

Although the US Congress has not yet approved the lifting of the trade embargo on the island, once relations with Cuba were normalized with Barack Obama's recent visit to the island in APR16, the US diplomacy continued its tour of several world capitals to discuss other sensitive topics in the diplomatic programme, which were put on the agenda by the Obama Administration from the beginning: negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program, which for several months brought together at the same table representatives of the five countries that make up the Security Council plus Germany, known as the P5 + 1 group, in addition to the head of EU diplomacy, Federica Mogherini, on one side, and representatives of Iran on the other.

After 12 years of stalemate and 21 months of talks, of which the last 18 days were spent in almost uninterrupted negotiations in Vienna, the various delegations that had gathered at the UN headquarters in a 'final plenary' reached an agreement to ensure that Tehran does not acquire the atomic bomb, in return for lifting the economic sanctions the international community had been imposing on the country for decades. The date 14JUL15 is thus marked by the signing of a document with almost 100 pages and five annexes, which contains

the parameters of an agreement establishing, in general terms (COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, 2015), **i)** the limitation on uranium enrichment, imposing severe restrictions to ensure that the 'break-out' time required to produce enough enriched uranium to build a nuclear bomb is at least one year, for a period of ten years; **ii)** the limitation on the production of plutonium. Plutonium is the only fossil raw material other than uranium which can be used for the manufacture of an atomic bomb. The Vienna Agreement stipulates that the Arak central heavy water reactor must be modified to prevent production of plutonium in sufficient quantities for military purposes; **iii)** the strengthening of the inspection regime, considered one the most sensitive issues in the negotiations. The agreement provides for an enhanced inspection regime throughout the duration of the agreement, and possibly after that period, with regard to certain activities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will be able to check, for 20 years, the centrifuge equipment (the number of which should be reduced from the current 19.000 to 5.060), and, for 25 years, the production of uranium concentrate (known as 'yellow cake'). In turn, Iran undertakes to implement and ratify the additional protocol of the IAEA, which provides for intrusive inspections by that body; **iv)** the termination of sanctions, considered the main Iranian objective in these negotiations. For years, the US, UN and Europe enforced a set of sanctions that have hampered the development of the country. Thus, the sanctions of the EU and the US on the financial, energy and transport sectors will be lifted from the moment the Iranian regime fulfils its commitments, which must be certified by an IAEA report. The same procedure will be applied to the cancellation of the six resolutions that the UN Security Council has adopted against Iran since 2006; **v)** maintaining the arms embargo, in force since 2007, which implies the continuation of sanctions for another eight years with regard to ballistic missiles and imports of offensive weapons for an additional five years. The transfer of sensitive materials that could contribute to the Iranian ballistics program will also be banned for eight years, unless explicit authorization from the UN Security Council. The document does not provide for the dismantling of the Iranian program, as had been considered at the beginning of the first negotiations conducted by Europe from 2003 to 2005, but the Iranian infrastructure will also be more closely monitored to prevent Tehran from starting a clandestine nuclear bomb race[17].

In the words of the US president 'The deal before us doesn't bet on Iran changing, it doesn't require trust; There will be 24/7 monitoring of Iran's key nuclear facilities. (...) It is an agreement which shows that US diplomacy can achieve real and meaningful change'. In a solemn statement at the White House (WASHINGTON POST STAFF, 2015), President Barack Obama considered that the signed document will initiate a new era in relations between Iran and the United States '(...) it gives us the opportunity to move in a new direction. We must seize it', he said, promising that the US sanctions against Iran would be

[17] See also the interview to Vice Admiral REIS RODRIGUES, Alexandre, in the newspaper *Expresso* on the day of the signing of the agreement, 14JUL15.

lifted. However, he also said that if Iran violates the agreement, all sanctions will be reset for 65 days, which Iran agreed to.[18] Thus, all that remained for the document signed in JUL15 to be effectively implemented by the parties was the endorsement of the United Nations, and the agreement of the two chambers of the US Congress and of the Iranian parliament.

However, the challenges faced by the US diplomacy are even greater. China has revealed itself a strong competitor to American economic interests, even becoming the largest trading power in the world in 2013, overtaking the US, and it is also already the largest trading partner of more than one hundred countries, reaching a surplus of 260,000 million dollars (188,700 million euros) that year, according to the official Chinese press, quoting the accounts released by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Thus, bearing in mind the ambitious agenda set by this administration for the two terms, the US has sought to counteract the advance of its most direct competitor by establishing new partnerships with traditional allies, but also by creating new alliances with countries bordering China. This was the context in which the US President signed, on 29JUN15, the law approving the establishment of the aforementioned free trade Treaty with countries of the Pacific region, known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which includes countries like Japan, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, Peru, Mexico and Australia, in addition to the US, a total of twelve nations, and a similar agreement with the EU, known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)[19], which has been under negotiation since 2013.

At a time when emerging economies such as India, China and Russia seek to introduce changes in the management of the global economy and support a more meaningful participation by developing countries in driving the global economy, which implies a long-promised reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the US is committed to balancing the initiative by revitalising its economy, strengthening its military budget in response to similar initiatives undertaken by those countries, expanding the commercial networks in the Asia-Pacific region, creating a control system for the use of critical and dual-use technologies by China, implementing effective cybersecurity policies, and strengthening alliances in the peripheries of China, investing in diplomacy to mitigate any disputes with China; in essence, to create the conditions for a more open, high-level and 'private' relationship, which does not seem to be happening between the two countries at this point (BLACKWILL, TELLIS, 2015) .

Territorial disputes between China and its neighbouring countries in the Pacific region, which have been addressed in the section of this paper covering the previous

[18] Cf. also on this issue GOLDFARB, Zachary A. SWANSON, Ana, *13 charts and maps que make the Iran deal a little easier to understand*, Washington Post, July 14, 2015.

[19] In the case of TTIP, the issue seems to be the elimination of tariff and regulatory barriers between the two economic blocs. This agreement, which is expected to be a free trade agreement, is particularly important, as the negotiations involve a redefinition of trade standards on a global scale, a matter that was blocked some years ago by the World Trade Organization (WTO), an organization composed of 160 members covering approximately 97% of world trade.

term, allegations of cyber attacks on US companies, the reduction of emissions of gaseous pollutants[20], and the arguments advocating for changes in China's exchange policy[21] also emerge as points of contention between the two countries, with the US diplomacy responsible for the challenging role of maintaining a 'strategic economic dialogue', which implies, according to the latter, mutual respect, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both countries and respect for the course chosen for development; in the words of John Kerry, in a bilateral meeting between the two countries in 2014, 'in a relationship based on respect for differences'.

Thus, some of the main topics in the current diplomatic agenda of the Secretary of State until the end of the term of this administration appear to be defined. Its outcome is still uncertain in some cases, but it is not unrelated to the choice of the next president in the NOV16 elections, because if the outcome of these elections is not satisfactory, the world can expect events that will only exacerbate the current geo-political and geo-economic framework. Until then, we remain attentive spectators.

4. The Impact On The International System: Final Reflections

The international order has changed substantially and the 'architecture' of the World Order for the 21st century needs firm rules to guide the interaction between States, to protect fundamental freedoms and to mobilize a common initiative to ensure that events such as the unilateral annexation of Crimea by Russia, in 2014, do not establish a precedent for this century. If, in the recent past, the international arena had become simpler, today the world is faced with a number of opposing forces. Technology and globalization have made civilization more interconnected and interdependent than ever.

Faced with a task of this magnitude, the national security and defence authorities in charge of assessing the internal and external security environment defined that environment, in 2014, as 'rapidly changing', 'volatile', 'unpredictable', and, 'in some cases, more threatening' (HOOKER Jr., 2014, p. 14). That is perhaps why the US authorities stress that vital long-term strategic interests must not be mistaken for other, less central interests. Thus, the interests which remain vital are the defence of the American territory and its allies, the protection of American citizens residing in the country and abroad, the defence of constitutional values

[20] It should be noted that Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang, in an exploratory trip to Paris in connection with the hosting of the World Climate Conference by that city in DEC2015, said that his country is endeavouring to reduce CO2 emissions by 60/65% by 2030 and increase the use of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption up to 20%. In remarks made in 2014, the Chinese official for climate issues, Xie Zhenhua, stated that his country was in a different stage of development than the US, and, therefore, had different historical responsibilities and different capabilities. The truth remains that the countries present at the Paris Summit, aware of the urgency of the matter, came to an agreement, which resulted in about 170 countries signing the APR16 memorandum which compels States to take measures in order to curtail carbon emissions to prevent an increase in global temperatures in the coming decades.

[21] In this regard, the US has stated that it supports China in the efforts to allow the market to play a more decisive role in its economy. The transition to exchange rates determined by market exchange would be a decisive step, according to the US authorities. In the opinion of those responsible for the American Treasury, China artificially governs the exchange rates of its currency to protect exports. This is perhaps the reason for the Chinese officials' promise to accelerate the reform of the exchange rate system, although they consider that the country needs to find the 'right speed' for its financial reforms.

and forms of government that meet these same principles, and the promotion and defence of the American economy and living standards.

The pursuit of these major strategic objectives is not exhausted in the action of the country's military forces in the various scenarios in which they operate on behalf of these principles; it goes beyond it. Because, as in Raymond Aron's definition, 'a multiplicity of autonomous decision-making centres, thus increasing the risk of war' (ARON, 1962, p. 28)[22], still exist, American diplomacy relies on all forms of soft power combined with the hard power toolbox, giving rise to a new form of action by the Obama administration, referred to in this paper as smart power, which the US diplomacy and the Department of Defence have been using since the beginning of the first term.

Given this way of operating, it is not surprising that the country's most direct competitors display different forms of behaviour, depending on the specific situation and the nature of the player itself. In the past, it was not often that the rise of a power was not preceded by frictions. Today, the US must deal with countries undergoing accelerated economic growth, as is the case of China, which is eager to play a prominent role in the world but also determined to act unilaterally in its relations with its neighbours, at the same time as it is reluctant to get involved in the internal affairs of other countries, even in extremely serious circumstances. However, it also has to deal with other countries, such as the Russian Federation, which, 'resenting the developments of the recent past' and 'suspicious' of current US initiatives in the world, adopts a defiant stance against its closest neighbours in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and against the military organization (NATO) which protects it, seeking to rebuild its 'lost Empire', believing this to be the best strategy to return to the top of the hierarchy of the great powers of the international system.

Thus, the international system faces several problems, which render it unpredictable[23]. The return to a need for the affirmation of Nation-States in a complex and diffuse multilateral framework echoes other times in the History of Humanity, compelling its actors and, above all, the 'indispensable nation', the US, to face unexpected situations. Globalization, the interdependence model born in this century, has brought benefits, but also great difficulties to its stakeholders. States must now strive to recover a globalised economy in order to maintain strong and prosperous groups of countries, to cope with unexpected military aggressions that disrupt the international system's traditional balance of power, to respond to new violent forms of extremism, to deal with the threats resulting from advances in technology, all the while racing against the clock to fight the causes that have led to rapid and profound climate changes in the planet.

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[22] On this subject, see also DERRIENIC, Jean-Pierre, *Novas Guerras, Novos Efeitos*? in Raymond Aron – A Paz e a Guerra no Século XXI, Edições Cosmos / IDN, Lisboa, 2007.

[23] For different interpretations of the state of the world order, see DODGE, Toby, HOKAYEM, Emile (Editors), *Middle Eastern Security, the US Pivot and the Rise of ISIS*, in The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Routledge, London, 2014, HASS, Richard N., *The Age of Nonpolarity – What Will Follow US Dominance*, in Foreign Affairs, vol. 87, nº 3, May/June 2008, KISSINGER, Henry, *A Ordem Mundial – Reflexões sobre o Carácter das Nações e o Curso da História*, Editora Dom Quixote, 1ª edição, Lisboa, 2014.

Although problems exist in the world which the United States cannot solve alone, the problems that can be solved without any intervention by the American Federation, either through diplomacy or through the action of its military forces, are fewer still. In the words of then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, '(...) The United States has sacrificed enormous amounts of blood and treasure to help other people around the world achieve their own freedom (...)'. 'I will be the first to say we, like any country in the world, have made mistakes. I will be the first to say that. We've made a lot of mistakes. But I think if you look at the entire historical record, the entire historical record shows we've been on the side of freedom, we've been on the side of human rights, we've been on the side of free markets and economic empowerment' (CLINTON, p. 404).

In fact, in nearly eight years in office, the grand task of restoring credibility abroad, which had in the meantime been lost by a country that can still be classified as a 'Great Power', has become, together with economic recovery, this administration's greatest challenge. Many believe these two strands seem to be disconnected from one another, but the truth remains that to execute one without the other could prevent either from being achieved, relegating the country to a secondary position in the international system, surpassed by States that, in the medium term, will be able to sit at the top of the hierarchy of world powers, even if we do not follow some of the doctrine that categorises states as 'small, middle and great powers' because we believe that there are no half solutions, but simply the existence of an objective ability of States to project their power (political, military, economic and cultural) to condition international developments and the international agenda. As the reality demonstrates, not all States will be in this position, even when they play a somewhat prominent role in a regional context.

Thus, from the first to the second term, the certainty remains that all the progress made by the Obama Administration diplomacy, in some cases with the help of countries in other regions, in unlocking some of the most sensitive situations in the international environment (such as the conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq or Libya) should still be considered important contributions to the long journey that will characterize the twenty-first century. The international order has become unpredictable and even more threatening during the present century, and we must welcome all business initiatives that have the potential to produce balanced outcomes for all parties in the resolution of conflicts, which in some cases had become anachronistic, the end of which could pave the way for other solutions (as in the cases of Cuba and Iran).

However, Obama's terms also had their setbacks. In an interview on 16APR to *The Atlantic* magazine, the President stated that the action in Libya 'is a mess', not because the US had not safeguarded the conditions for its intervention (carried out under a UN mandate and integrated in an international coalition), but because the country has too many internal variables, eventually supplanting all the possible scenarios projected by the US forces for that territory, and the intervention ended up being a 'flop' that turned the country into a haven for extremist movements such as al-Qaeda or Daesh. Moreover, the so-called 'red line' drawn by the US on the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, which was imposed on

Assad's Syrian regime under threat of military intervention by this Administration, which turned out not to have presidential authorization for that intervention, increased the climate of suspicion regarding the new role that this administration had planned for the US in the Middle East.

It is true that this administration walked away from the region, as it considered that their interests are now focused in other places (particularly in the Asia Pacific), in part because the country is no longer dependent on the region's energy resources, but also because the current presidency preferred to assume a 'leading from behind' stance, either leaving the pivotal role in conflict resolution to other partners or sharing the responsibility (as in the case of the conflict in Ukraine). That is how the current president sees the US presence in the world, a leadership which he calls 'realistic', choosing situations where he can make an actual impact, but also 'internationalist', focusing on strengthening the multilateral forums of discussion and the international standards that regulate the international framework[24], fulfilling the intentions expressed in the inaugural speech of the first term, where he stated that the United States needed to regain their credibility as a global actor and their leading position in the global economy.

In light of the many examples of the past, the competition will no longer consist in an arms race, at least not to weapons which imply the mass destruction of people, although this century is also home to extremist non-governmental actors seeking access to this type of miniaturized armament, which means the world is not free from new conflict hotspots[25], not to mention new spaces in a new dimension which is truly without borders - cyberspace -, and the weight of geo-economics and geo-finance as factors that are likely to deepen those rivalries. These will be the factors conditioning the contest of powers in the near future. A race for global supremacy regarding resources is taking place. It remains to be seen who stays in the game.

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[24] Cf. GOLBERG, Jeffrey, *The Obama Doctrine – How he´s shaped the world* in The Atlantic Review, April 2016, p.77.

[25] The conflicts of the twenty-first century should not occupy the size, assets and space taken by past conflicts. Today's countries struggle with problems regarding the availability of financial resources. Thus, the trend should lean towards forming forces that can intervene in situations confined to small spaces, without needing to resort to the escalation of aggression. Therefore, it will be vital to equip and train those forces for interventions which should focus on actions at the tactical and operational level, as new conflicts more closely resemble guerilla warfare than general or even total warfare. On this subject, see LOUREIRO DOS SANTOS, José Alberto, *O Futuro da Guerra*, Nova Vega e Autor Editores, 1ª edição, Lisboa, 2014.

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