



ieeee.es

Strategic Panorama 2017



# Strategic Panorama 2017

Spanish  
Institute for  
Strategic  
Studies

ieeee.es  
Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos



MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA









# Strategic Panorama 2017

Spanish  
Institute for  
Strategic  
Studies

March 2017

**ieee.es**  
Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos



MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA

**GENERAL CATALOGUE OF OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS**  
**<http://publicacionesoficiales.boe.es/>**

Publishes:



**<https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/>**

© Author and Publisher, 2017

NIPO: 083-17-128-X (print on demand)

Release date: march 2017

Printed by: Spanish Ministry of Defence

NIPO: 083-17-127-4 (e-book edition)

The ideas expressed in this book are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the IEEE, which sponsors its publication.

The exploitation rights of this work are protected by the Spanish Intellectual Property Act. No parts of this publication may be produced, stored or transmitted in any way nor by any means, electronic, mechanical or print, including photocopies or any other means without prior, express, written consent of the © copyright holders.

# INDEX

	Page
Introduction .....	9
The end of a system.....	11
A world in disarray .....	16
From Obama to Trump .....	20
Russia and China .....	23
Farewell to the neoliberal system? .....	26
Risks, threats and trends .....	31
Strategic Panorama 2017 .....	38
United States: From Obama to Trump .....	39
Europe at a Crossroads .....	41
The Middle East in 2016: Trends and Perspectives in 2017 .....	43
The Sahel, a Growing Arc of Instability .....	44
Latin America: Unknown Quantities and Uncertainties .....	45
 Chapter one	
United States: From Obama to Trump. A strategic U-turn .....	47
Introduction: The United States under transformation.....	49
The legacy of the Obama administration in foreign policy and security: A brief survey .	51
<i>Obama doctrine versus grand strategy</i> .....	51
The good and the bad of a «small grand strategy» .....	54
The new Trump administration: the beginning of a 180-degree strategic shift.....	57
<i>The first components of a Trump Doctrine. «America first» and the new world</i>	
<i>carve-up</i> .....	57
<i>Russia: A new entente, a new Yalta?</i> .....	60
<i>Transatlantic relations and Europe's response</i> .....	63
<i>China as a rival: The Asian pivot as a showdown</i> .....	67
<i>The Middle East: A new regional headache</i> .....	70
<i>New tension with Mexico and Latin America</i> .....	73
Conclusions .....	75

	Page
<b>Chapter two</b>	
Europe at a Crossroads .....	79
Introduction .....	81
The European economy .....	82
The unsustainable institutional structure .....	84
The migratory crisis .....	85
Is the terrorist threat exaggerated? .....	87
Turkey, an ally or a rival? .....	88
Russia, the awakening of the «bear» .....	90
Brexit: A catalyst of the fragmentation of the European Union? .....	92
Donald Trump: «America first» .....	97
2017: The year of crucial elections .....	99
The crossroads .....	101
<b>Chapter three</b>	
The Middle East in 2016: Trends and Prospects for 2017 .....	103
Introduction .....	105
Regional perspective. The deep-seated causes of Middle East instability .....	106
<i>Structural weakness of the nation states in the Arab world and lack of governan-</i> <i>ce</i> .....	106
<i>Rivalry between regional powers versus internal division in Islam between Sun-</i> <i>nis and Shias</i> .....	109
<i>Changes in the relative influence of the superpowers in the Middle East</i> .....	112
<i>Economic factors</i> .....	116
The Middle East countries in 2016 .....	118
<i>Saudi Arabia: a year of internal reforms and dynamic external relations with little</i> <i>to show for it</i> .....	118
<i>Iran: unfulfilled economic promises, a year of external successes and an uncer-</i> <i>tain outlook for 2017</i> .....	121
<i>Iraq: Ups and downs after Mosul, the light at the end of the tunnel or back to squa-</i> <i>re one?</i> .....	125
<i>Syria: 2016, a year of decisive changes, but no end in sight</i> .....	130
<i>Turkey: Hurling towards the unknown</i> .....	136
Conclusions .....	144
<b>Chapter four</b>	
The Sahel: A Permanent Arc of Instability .....	149
Introduction .....	151
The Sahel: A context of corruption and fragility .....	152
Illegal trafficking, the principal way of life in the region .....	155
The action of the jihadist groups .....	159
Boko Haram: Weakened but not defeated .....	161
AQIM: in the process of recovering? .....	164
The decline of Daesh .....	168
Local responses to the jihadist threat .....	169
The limits of Algeria's non-intervention policy .....	172

	Página
International cooperation in combating jihadism .....	176
Critical assessment of operation Barkhane .....	178
Conclusions .....	183
 <b>Chapter five</b>	
Latin America: Unknown Quantities and Uncertainties.....	187
Introduction .....	189
Outlook for integration in Latin America and the Caribbean: The simplification that never happens.....	192
The most significant political changes in Latin America.....	195
<i>Political instability in Venezuela</i> .....	196
<i>New influences in Brazil and Argentina. Political changes in a context of economic recession</i> .....	202
Towards a solution for long-standing conflicts in Latin America and the Caribbean .....	208
The conflict between Cuba and the USA: The «appeal» of Cuba.....	209
The definitive solution to the Colombian conflict: The peace agreements.....	214
The «heated» border dispute between Bolivia and Chile: 133 years of conflict .....	219
Final considerations .....	223
Composition of the working group .....	225





## Introduction

Felipe Sahagún

«Revolution will be in the air in 2017», announced Daniel Franklin, editor of *The Economist's* annual publication focusing on the year ahead, in mid-November. «Not only is it the centenary of the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, it is also 150 years since the publication of the first volume of Karl Marx's 'Capital' and 50 since the death of Che Guevara... For good measure, the year marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 theses... which led to the Protestant Reformation.»<sup>1</sup> It will not be hard to find parallels between the conditions that have produced upheaval in the past and the rebellious mood in the year ahead.

Robert Cooper, former advisor to Tony Blair and subsequently to Javier Solana in the European Union, compares the current transition with that from the medieval to the Renaissance worlds which Shakespeare experienced and recounted in several of his works. «Things are no different today», writes Cooper. «How were we stupid enough to think that overthrowing Saddam Hussein would bring peace and democracy? New states always run the risk of developing into civil wars.»<sup>2</sup> Based on his analysis, the team of editors of *Política Exterior* relativised the current changes in the first edition of the journal in 2017: «Order and disorder have always coexisted. Even in periods

<sup>1</sup> *The World in 2017*, *The Economist*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> COOPER, Robert, «Aprender de Shakespeare», *Política Exterior*, no. 175, January-February 2017. <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/politica-exterior/aprender-de-shakespeare/>

of prosperity of empires or of balance between major powers, conflict and instability have, with varying degrees of intensity, been permanent elements of history.»<sup>3</sup>

If we were to ask Google every December which has been the worst year ever it would probably always reply that the past one. Our short collective memory, the media's tendency to always highlight the most negative aspects and the jumble of information from the social media, dominated by the latest breaking news, lead to the same result.

Aware of how easy it is to manipulate the often biased and uninformed opinion of the majority, in 2013 *The Atlantic* asked a select group of intellectuals and academics which year they considered to have been the worst for mankind. One went back sixty-five and a half million years to the meteorite Chicxulub, which changed life on Earth. Others chose the smallpox epidemic which in 1520 ravaged the Americas, then newly discovered by the Spaniards. Others still opted for 1914, the start of the First World War, or the ill-named Spanish flu of 1918, the deadliest pandemic experienced to date. The magazine *Slate* repeated the survey with experts in July 2016. One historian suggested the year 72,000 BC, when a volcano in Sumatra erupted with the force of a million and a half Hiroshima bombs. Another pointed out 1348, the year the Black Death hit Europe. Someone else mentioned 2003, the year the United States invaded Iraq, with negative effects that heightened the tension that had been latent since the decolonisation of the Middle East and northern Africa.

«Bolshiness is back», was the title of the Economist columnist Adrian Wooldridge's reflection on the transition from 2016 to 2017. «The similarities to the world that produced the Russian revolution are too close for comfort. This is a period of miserable centenaries.»<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, 2014 was the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, which destroyed the liberal order built in Europe west of the Danube and the Rhine following the Vienna Congress of the previous century. In 2016 came that of the Battle of the Somme, one of the bloodiest in military history. In 2017, it will be 100 years since the Bolsheviks seized power, putting an end to the tsarist empire and unleashing one of the worst tragedies of the twentieth century: from Stalinism, with its 20 million people killed as a result of the collectivisation of agriculture and forced industrialisation in the USSR, to the Nazism and fascism that emerged partly in reaction to communism. It is also 60 years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which marked the start of the European project now in the grip of what its leaders describe as an existential crisis.

<sup>3</sup> «Aceptar la incertidumbre», Editorial column, *Política Exterior*, no. 175, January-February 2017. <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/politica-exterior/polext175-aceptar-la-incertidumbre/>

<sup>4</sup> «Bolshiness is back», *The World In 2017*, cited in note 1, p. 17.

«I like to think I'm an optimistic guy, but 2017 is the most significant year for political risk since World War II», tweeted Ian Bremmer<sup>5</sup> of Eurasia Group on 30 January.

The sources or causes of such a high risk, in his opinion, are Trump's election victory, a possible reaction by China to his excesses and/or provocations, the foreseeable weakening of Merkel, a slowing of the structural reforms needed in both developed and emerging economies, fragmentation and crisis in the Middle East owing to war, terrorism and the consequences of technological revolution (energy, connectivity, cyber, automation and forced transparency), political pressure on the central banks, the clash between the White House and Silicon Valley, political uncertainty and economic volatility in Turkey, all the risks associated with a nuclear regime in North Korea versus an unpredictable United States and a South Korea in the throes of political crisis, and the destabilisation of southern Africa owing to internal conflicts.

### The end of a system

The primary aim of the western powers since the death rattle of the Second World War has been to prevent a repetition of the conflicts into which the left- and right-wing authoritarian movements of the last century developed. For this purpose, they founded four global institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the GATT and the UN) and three regional ones (the Atlantic Alliance, the OECD and the European Communities) whose essential objectives were stabilisation, economic development and military security. The first two were achieved by means of more or less advanced social welfare systems that guaranteed growth with hitherto unseen minimum levels of solidarity and justice. The third, always directed by the US hegemon, was underpinned by a policy of containment and deterrence which halted the Soviet Union's initial expansion and, beginning in the 1970s, hastened the end of the USSR.

«This golden age is coming to an end», wrote Wooldridge<sup>6</sup> in reaction to the uncertainty triggered by the results of the US presidential election of 8 November and the referendum on the United Kingdom's future relationship with the rest of the European Union on 23 June, and the inevitable parallels between the victories of Donald Trump and Brexit and the destruction of the liberal international order in 1917.

«How to address strategic uncertainty in a turbulent age?» asked Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US national security advisor during the Carter

<sup>5</sup> For further information on his risk forecasts, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlkJuYuL2tM&feature=youtu.be>.

These forecasts are summed up in «Top Risks 2017: the geopolitical recession», Eurasia Group. <https://www.eurasiagroup.net/issues/top-risks-2017>.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

administration, on 3 January. «Since the end of the last major world war some 70 years ago, international peace has been preserved by the threat of the nuclear bomb», he pointed out. «However, its impact on global stability began to fade as more countries developed similarly destructive capabilities.»<sup>7</sup>

Brzezinski is convinced that today the three major world powers – the United States, Russia and China – have no incentive whatsoever to resort to nuclear provocation, but he believes that caution and collaboration must prevail between them if a fundamental conflict is to be avoided. What many observers find most worrying is that the new president of the United States seems to pay more heed to Twitter and TV audiences than to his diplomatic and intelligence services.

During his first days in office, President Trump began reversing the domestic policies of the past eight years, wrote Fareed Zakaria on 26 January in the *Washington Post*: «But with regard to the United States' relations with the world, Trump seems far more radical. In word and deed, he appears to be walking away from the idea of America at the center of an open, rule-based international order. This would be a reversal of more than 70 years of US foreign policy.»<sup>8</sup>

With the unilateral protectionist and anti-immigration measures he began coming out with no sooner had he taken up the presidency, Andrés Ortega warns that «he can stir up a global clash between middle and working classes: those of the United States and 'other mature economies' that have been short sold by globalisation and automation, and those of the emerging or developing economies that want to carry on emerging. That, translated into political terms, also in dictatorships, can lead to dangerous and destabilising situations.»<sup>9</sup>

As Jessica Matthews recalled in the *New York Review of Books*, since the Second World War the two main US parties had accepted a foreign and security policy based on three principles: the decisive importance of extensive close allies, an open global economy that allows the United States to prosper and others to grow and is far removed from a zero-sum game,

---

<sup>7</sup> BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew, «How to address strategic insecurity in a turbulent age?» Article adapted in an address delivered by the author at the Nobel Peace Prize Forum in Oslo, Norway, in December, HUFFPOST, 3 January 2017. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/us-china-russia-relations\\_us\\_586955dbe4b0de3a08f8e3e0](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/us-china-russia-relations_us_586955dbe4b0de3a08f8e3e0).

<sup>8</sup> ZAKARIA, Fareed, «FDR started the Long Peace. Under Trump it may be coming to an end», *The Washington Post*, 26 January 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/fdr-started-the-long-peace-under-trump-it-may-be-coming-to-an-end/2017/01/26/2f0835e2-e402-11e6-ba11-63c4b4fb5a63\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.97f9a87dfd1b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/fdr-started-the-long-peace-under-trump-it-may-be-coming-to-an-end/2017/01/26/2f0835e2-e402-11e6-ba11-63c4b4fb5a63_story.html?utm_term=.97f9a87dfd1b).

<sup>9</sup> ORTEGA, Andrés, «Trump atiza el choque global de las clases media», *eldiario.es*, 26 January 2017. [http://www.eldiario.es/zonacritica/Trump-choque-global-clases-medias\\_6\\_605849442.html](http://www.eldiario.es/zonacritica/Trump-choque-global-clases-medias_6_605849442.html).



and faith in democracy and its advantages, though there was always debate about whether dictatorships should be tolerated, managed or confronted.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to be optimistic or entirely trust the balancing poles of the US system with a president who has been attacking these principles for 30 years as he believes them to be naïve and very costly.

«Let's hope not», answered Angus Deaton when asked in late December if the post-war liberal economic order is coming to an end. Deaton, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, argues in *The Great Escape* (2013) that the world is a much healthier and wealthier place thanks to centuries of economic integration. Deaton is loath to blame globalisation for the dissatisfaction expressed by millions of Americans and Europeans in last year's elections. «I don't think that globalisation is anywhere near the threat that robots are», he states. «I find it very hard not to think about the billion people who have been dragged out of poverty as a result.»<sup>11</sup>

In an analysis published in 2016 on the rejection of globalisation, the Real Instituto Elcano agrees with Deaton's diagnosis and explores five hypotheses which, according to the authors, explain the support garnered by the new parties: the economic decline of the middle classes, growing xenophobia in the West, large sectors of the population's difficulties coping with technological change (as Branco Milanovic argues),<sup>12</sup> the crisis of the welfare state and growing disgruntlement with representative democracy.<sup>13</sup>

«All these intermingle and threaten the open society and the international order that has held sway for decades and been responsible for spectacular economic progress but has also produced growing material inequalities and inequalities of opportunity in advanced societies», they conclude.

«Responding to the well-founded fears of their citizens is perhaps the greatest challenge confronting Western nations. The nationalist, protectionist, xenophobic and authoritarian leanings of many anti-establishment parties' new agendas need to be combated by focusing on the causes from which they arise. Simply ignoring them and hoping that the storm will blow over, as has been the habit of recent years, is a recipe for failure. Developing better policies for integrating immigrants and refugees is crucial in this context. It is

<sup>10</sup> MATTHEWS, Jessica T., «What Trump is throwing out the window», *The New York Review of Books*, 9 February 2017. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/02/09/what-trump-is-throwing-out-the-window/>.

<sup>11</sup> DEATON, Angus, and DONNAN, Shawn, *Lunch with the FT. Financial Times*, 22 December 2016. <https://www.ft.com/content/bbf54b3e-c5f3-11e6-9043-7e34c07b46>.

<sup>12</sup> MILANOVIC, Branco, *Global inequality. A new approach for the age of globalization*, Harvard University Press, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> OTERO, Miguel, and STEINBERG, Federico, «Causas del rechazo a la globalización: más allá de la desigualdad y la xenofobia», ARI 81/2016, Real Instituto Elcano, 22 November 2016. [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/ari81-2016-oteroiglesias-steinberg-causas-rechazo-globalizacion-mas-alla-desigualdad-xenofobia](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari81-2016-oteroiglesias-steinberg-causas-rechazo-globalizacion-mas-alla-desigualdad-xenofobia). Available in English on the website.

also necessary to ensure a better redistribution of the enormous amounts of wealth generated by globalisation, to emphasise the advantages of diversity and to prepare citizens for technological change, equipping them with the resources to adapt themselves. It is not so much a case of protecting against the effects of globalisation as empowering citizens, enabling them to get the most out of it to the fullest extent possible. Finally, it is necessary to give a better explanation of the limitations faced by the welfare state and the reforms it needs in order to be sustainable, and to open new public forums and channels enabling citizens to feel more and better represented.»<sup>14</sup>

China's president, Xi Jinping, made the most of his presence at the Davos summit this year to respond to Trump's threats and present his country as a bastion of economic liberalism, free trade and globalisation. He stressed that the problems that concern today's world «are not an inevitable outcome of globalisation», arguing that «no one will emerge as a winner in a trade war.»<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, he distinguished between globalisation and the global governance system that still prevails 27 years on from the fall of the Berlin wall and, in his opinion, is obsolete as it serves a global order centred on the West. «The global financial governance mechanism fails to meet the new requirement and is thus unable to effectively resolve problems such as frequent international financial market volatility and the build-up of asset bubbles», he pointed out. «Yet his message was undercut by thumping contradictions: could the standard bearer for global liberalism really be an authoritarian Communist party boss who presides over a regime of media censorship, strict capital controls, a structural trade surplus and an economy that keeps key sectors closed to foreign investors?»<sup>16</sup>

Judging by Trump's inaugural speech of 20 January, this message fell on deaf ears: «For many decades we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidized the armies of other countries, while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We've defended other nations' borders while refusing to defend our own and spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay... From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it's going to be only America first. America first.»<sup>17</sup> And «we must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our

---

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Opening Plenary with Xi Jinping, president of the People's Republic of China. *World Economic Forum*, 17 January 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2017/sessions/opening-plenary-davos-2017>.

<sup>16</sup> KYNGE, James, «China stakes a claim for globalism without liberalism», *Financial Times*, 27 January 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/11c80d68-e47f-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a>.

<sup>17</sup> «Donald Trump's inaugural speech, annotated», *The New York Times*, 20 January 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript.html?_r=0).

products, stealing our companies and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.»

We need to go back quite far in time, to the interwar period of the twentieth century, to find a message that is so critical of globalisation and its benefits – which vastly outweigh its negative effects in particular sectors and countries and which nobody denies – and so wrong about the situation of the United States and the world in the twenty-first century.

The immediate response of the Chinese state-run tabloid *The Global Times* was to predict much more troubled times: «Frictions between the US and its allies, and trade tensions between the US and China seem inevitable within the four years ahead,» warned its editorial of 21 January. «Undoubtedly, the Trump administration will be igniting many 'fires' on its front door and around the world. Let's wait and see when it will be China's turn,» it added.<sup>18</sup>

Germany's first reaction was not much different from China's, except that what Germany does affects all Europeans, and considerably. «I know, we must prepare ourselves for turbulent times, unpredictability and uncertainty,» wrote German's foreign minister, Frank Steinmeier, on 22 January. «But I am convinced that we will find in Washington attentive listeners, who know that even big countries need partners in this world.»<sup>19</sup>

This may be inferred from the first telephone conversation between the new chief of the Pentagon, retired general James Mattis, and NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg. Both «agreed on the fundamental and enduring value of NATO for the security of both Europe and North America», explained the Alliance in a communiqué. «They also discussed pushing for increased military spending by NATO allies and stepping up counterterrorism.»<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of what comes of the first meeting scheduled for February, Ambassador Carlos Miranda, former Spanish representative to NATO and London, advised first implementing the guidelines of the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union (Mogherini document) adopted in June 2016, stepping up NATO-EU cooperation and avoiding regional specialisation (NATO for the east and the European Union for the south).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> «Chinese media warns of 'dramatic changes' and discord...», *The Global Times*, 21 January 2017. [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/21/chinese-media-warns-of-dramatic-changes-and-discord-after-trumps-inaugural-speech?CMP=twit\\_gu](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/21/chinese-media-warns-of-dramatic-changes-and-discord-after-trumps-inaugural-speech?CMP=twit_gu).

<sup>19</sup> «Germany must ready for turbulent times under Trump: foreign minister», 22 January 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-usa-idUSKBN1560TI>.

<sup>20</sup> «Stoltenberg habla con Mattis...», Europa Press, 24 January 2017. <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-stoltenberg-habla-mattis-primer-contacto-otan-administracion-trump-20170124095531.html>.

<sup>21</sup> MIRANDA, Carlos, «2016 y la seguridad europea», Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 8/2017, 23 January. [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/ari8-2017-mirandaelio-2016-seguridad-europea](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari8-2017-mirandaelio-2016-seguridad-europea).

Are these fears far-fetched? Will the new US president respect the alliances and agreements established by his predecessors? Will he merely renegotiate them to improve existing relations or will he distance himself from his traditional allies and adopt the ad hoc method begun by George W. Bush in Afghanistan in October 2001?

Regarding what spurred more than 60 million Americans to vote for Trump, have globalisation, the digital world and the technological changes of the recent years been overvalued? Even former president Obama, influenced like so many others by Robert Gordon, an economist at Northwestern University, thinks they have. In Gordon's opinion, the last major technological revolution is that which took place between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the economic growth achieved for decades as a result will not be repeated for a long time.<sup>22</sup>

### A world in disarray

«The liberal world order established in the aftermath of World War II may be coming to an end, challenged by forces both without and within», wrote Robert Kagan in Brookings in January. «The external challenges come from the ambition of dissatisfied large and medium-size powers to overturn the existing strategic order dominated by the United States and its allies and partners... In recent years, however, the liberal order has begun to weaken and fracture at the core.»<sup>23</sup> By voting for Trump, millions of Americans have shown they are unwilling to maintain the existing order.

In a book published at the start of the year, *A World in Disarray...*, Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, analyses the origins of today's international system based on the principle of national sovereignty following the Protestant reforms and the Peace of Westphalia which put an end to the Thirty Years' War in Europe. He calls it World Order 1.0 and points out that «it is increasingly inadequate in today's globalized world». After examining the main changes it has undergone since the mid-twentieth century, he concludes that states' sovereign autonomy is no longer much use for solving many of the major international threats and proposes, on the basis of multilateral agreements and ad hoc coalitions along the lines of the recent Paris global warming agreement, negotiated limits on sovereignty to gradually build a new system, the World Order 2.0, in areas or fields such as terrorism, cyberspace, the proliferation of weapons, the environment, organised crime, migratory movements, the use of military force, health,

<sup>22</sup> NOSENGO, Nicola, and BOLINCHYS, Patricia, «La gran estafa de la revolución tecnológica», *El Mundo*, 3 January 2017. <http://www.elmundo.es/papel/futuro/2017/01/03/5863bf3046163f58378b4573.html>.

<sup>23</sup> KAGAN, Robert, «The twilight of the liberal World order», Brookings, 24 January 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-twilight-of-the-liberal-world-order/>.

self-determination, finance, tariffs and international trade. To start off with, he does not believe in bilateral and multilateral consultations at existing forums such as the G-20 or the UN Security Council. The aim, he stresses, is to gradually rebuild – or, where hardly anything has been done, as in cyberspace, create – new codes of international conduct or game rules that bring a bit of order to the jungle.<sup>24</sup>

If Haass is right, the Trump administration's first steps have been in the opposite direction, and if the fears of Kagan and many other observers are confirmed, «this new approach in American foreign policy is likely to hasten a return to the instability and clashes of previous eras... History suggests that this is a downward spiral from which it will be difficult to recover absent a major conflict.»<sup>25</sup>

A few months before Brexit and Trump cast their clouds on the horizon, Emilio Lamo de Espinosa, president of the Real Instituto Elcano, made a detailed survey of the history of Europe from Juan Sebastián Elcano's first voyage around the world in the sixteenth century to the fast-paced Europeanisation-westernisation of the world, which has given way in recent decades to «a global civilising process in which the explanatory variable, the driving force, is technoscience, which is spreading and converging all over the world, leading to a homogenisation of values and lifestyles through three processes.»<sup>26</sup>

These three processes, which neither Trump nor anybody else can easily stop, are driven by:

1. Products that pervade and westernise all societies, while paradoxically severing their ties with their origins.
2. Technoscience, which today is taken to be software, logic and a way of thinking, a dominant culture.
3. Science in its social dimension, its cultural impact, good governance, the rule of law, law, good economic policies, management of social problems.

Faced with these challenges, which he describes as a «vital crossroads», «Europe is organising itself as a single unit in order to take on a central role in governing the new globalised world, in the 'geopolitical ocean' as it is called by 'the president of the European Council' Van Rompuy. Otherwise it will be relegated to increasingly more dependent and secondary role», he concludes.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> HAASS, Richard, «World Order 2.0», *Foreign Affairs*, Jan-Feb 2017, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-19. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-12-12/world-order-20>.

<sup>25</sup> KAGAN, Robert, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> LAMO DE ESPINOSA, Emilio, «Europa en el mundo», Real Instituto Elcano, 8 January 2017. [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/ari1-2016-lamodeespinosa-europa-mundo](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari1-2016-lamodeespinosa-europa-mundo).

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*



In the first 2017 issue of *Política Exterior*, Professor Manuel Muñiz points out three main causes for the current political turmoil: the handling of the financial crisis of 2007, the uneven effects of globalisation and the breakdown of several states in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

He furthermore recognises that amid the din and confusion «another, more silent and incremental event has occurred: the advent of smart machines... with a deeply disruptive effect on the labour market and the distribution of income in our societies.»<sup>28</sup> The solution calls for a new role of the state and the public sector.

Some of the gravest consequences of the sum of all these processes, which date back to long before 2007, are widespread rejection of the elites, increased support for the far right in Europe – from 1 percent in the 1980s to more than 12 percent in 2016 – and for the far left in southern Europe; and loss of support for the institutions and democracy as a form of government. Paradoxically, this is taking place in countries that generate significant aggregate wealth. Income per capita today is ten times higher in the United States and a hundred times higher in Spain than it was in 1960. This is a sign that the main problem lies in the distribution of wealth and the loss of credibility of the ruling class.<sup>29</sup>

All the processes of transformation that defined the post-Cold War period – pacification, globalisation, regionalisation, free trade, disarmament, democratisation and defence of human rights – are beset by crisis. The recession of the liberal democracies is one of the most important. «One out of every six democracies that has existed during this past decade has failed – twice the failure rate of the late 1980s and early 90s», states Larry Diamond in his recent global study for Stanford University.<sup>30</sup>

According to his study, the signs of this downward spiral are:

- Increasing state surveillance and censorship of the internet.
- Diffuse decay in the rule of law.
- Increasing fear and intimidation as protections for civil liberties crumble.
- Banning the receipt of financial and technical assistance by international aid agencies and democracy foundations.
- Blatant pressure on the business community to serve the ruling party.
- The cancerous spread of crony capitalism and state corruption.

«This is the playbook for strangling democracy that was deftly implemented by Vladimir Putin in Russia and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in the early 2000s.

<sup>28</sup> MUÑIZ, Manuel, «El colapso del orden liberal», *Política Exterior*, No. 175, Vol. XXXI, January-February 2017, pp. 58-69.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> DIAMOND, Larry, «Global democracy is spiralling down», FSI Stanford, 13. December 2016. <https://medium.com/@FSIStanford/global-democracy-is-spiraling-down-7b2206643ad4#.v1hgfhftfg>.

In recent years Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has pursued it more and more aggressively, especially after the failed military coup attempt this past July. And the newly elected president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, is quickly treading along a similar path», adds Diamond.<sup>31</sup> Many other countries could be added to this list.

Two further elements have hastened the global democratic recession:

- Ascendancy of new tools and strategies by the most powerful and entrenched autocracies – especially Russia, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia – to contain democratic pressures in their own countries, undermine its spread regionally, and subvert the liberal international order by promoting authoritarian norms and institutions.
- Weakness of advanced democracies (especially in Europe and the United States), which have failed to respond to the authoritarian trend while struggling with growing illiberal, nativist and populist pressures of their own.

In its ninth «Democracy index» published in January 2017, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) shows that 72 countries recorded a decline in democracy in 2016, almost double the number in which democracy advanced. The other 57 of the 167 countries analysed are at the same levels as in 2015. No region of the world recorded improvements, but Eastern Europe suffered the greatest setback.

According to the EIU, nearly half of the world's population lives in democracy, but only 4.5 percent enjoy «full democracy», half the number

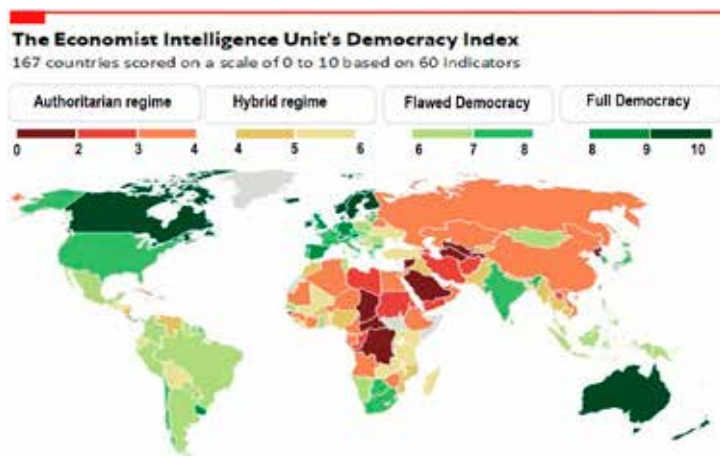


image 1

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. See *Freedom In The World 2016*, Freedom House. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH\\_FITW\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2016.pdf).

recorded the previous year.<sup>32</sup> If the United States was already among the fragile democracies, Trump's victory and his statements on immigration, investments, trade, freedom of expression and torture, even if they do not translate into decisions, will undermine democracy and empower autocrats.

### From Obama to Trump

As the outgoing US vice-president pointed out, figuring out how Donald Trump will conduct his foreign policy «is like a Rubik's cube... We have no freakin' idea what he's gonna do ... The question I get everywhere is: 'Is American leadership going to continue?'»<sup>33</sup> We would soon find out.

Former British diplomat Shaun Riordan, the author of the chapter on Europe in the 2017 edition of the *Panorama*, compares Obama's uncertain legacy with Britain's ambiguous diplomacy prior to the First World War. Instead of disparaging or underestimating Trump, as many authors do, he recalls how many European intellectuals similarly disparaged Ronald Reagan. He points out that the decline of US hegemony following the Iraq war and the global financial crisis «may have been inevitable» and that although President Obama was not responsible for either, «the dangers of a transition to a multipolar world may have been exacerbated by his foreign policy, or rather the lack of a consistent policy.»<sup>34</sup>

In his exit memo<sup>35</sup> to President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry defended the foreign-policy and security legacy of the outgoing administration with the following data:

- «President Obama has brought home about 160,000 troops from Iraq and Afghanistan» and ended «our combat missions».
- «We have decimated al-Qaeda core's senior leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including bin Laden, and we've targeted al-Qaeda's affiliates in Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere... the al-Qaeda that perpetrated 9/11 is today a shadow of what it was on January 20, 2009.»
- «Over the last two years, we have assembled a 68-member global coalition to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL», which «is also responsible for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing», but «the fight against ISIL and violent extremism more broadly is a generational challenge that cannot be won overnight».

<sup>32</sup> Democracy Index 2016, EIU.

[http://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2016](http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2016).

<sup>33</sup> «Biden: Predicting Trump foreign policy...», *The Hill*, 17 January 2017. <http://thehill.com/policy/international/314655-biden-predicting-trump-foreign-policy-like-a-rubiks-cube>.

<sup>34</sup> RIORDAN, Shaun, «Might Trump's Foreign Policy Actually Make Sense?», *BideDao*, 5 January 2017. <http://www.shauriordan.com/?p=341>.

<sup>35</sup> KERRY, John, «Exit memo from Secretary Kerry to President Obama», 5 January 2017. <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/01/266480.htm>.

- «Through bilateral channels and more than two and a half years of intense multilateral negotiations, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, the European Union and Iran agreed on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an agreement that has verifiably cut off all of Iran's pathways to a nuclear weapon.»
- «The threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program is among the gravest our country faces today... we are handing off to the next Administration a strong foundation for increasing pressure on Pyongyang that will be critical to address this threat. Twice this year, the UN Security Council came together to pass the toughest resolutions ever on North Korea, in an attempt to get Pyongyang to change its course.»
- «The four Nuclear Security Summits, beginning with the first in 2010 in Washington, D.C... have resulted in concrete plans and actions to achieve key nuclear security goals by countries around the world... the United States helped remove 1,000 tons of chemical weapons from Syria... but unfortunately other undeclared chemical weapons continue to be used ruthlessly on the Syrian people.» And together with another 10 countries, including Spain, in 2016 «the United States also took significant steps to remove Libya's remaining chemical weapons precursors».
- «As a result of years of deliberation and negotiations, we and our partners finally cemented an international consensus around how to address climate change» and «other high-emissions countries, like China and India, have gone from adversaries on these issues to partners in finding ambitious solutions». The agreement reached by nearly 200 countries in 2015 is finally in force.
- With respect to conflicts, Kerry attempts to justify – not very convincingly – US action in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Ukraine, Colombia, Cyprus, South Sudan and the Palestinian territories. He points out that «there is no military solution to this conflict» and that «Bashar al-Assad has lost all legitimacy to lead Syria». In Yemen, the United States «must continue to press all sides to reduce the violence, increase humanitarian access, and negotiate a political solution to end this war as soon as possible.» He likewise states that «the choices to shape Libya's future are in the hands of its leaders and its people.» With respect to Russia, if it «implements its commitments» in Ukraine, the sanctions imposed on it «can be rolled back.» He believes that the peace accord negotiated between the Colombian Government and the FARC... «will help achieve a just and lasting peace.» On Israeli-Palestinian peace, «we have remained committed to realizing the vision of a two-state solution». He praises Cypriots' efforts to overcome their division, stating that «we are closer than ever to helping to achieve a reunified Cyprus». Lastly, the solution to South Sudan «ultimately relies on more robust and urgent engagement of its leaders from all parties and ethnic groups, supported by the United States and neighbouring states.»

- He ends his report with a section on alliances, partnerships and international institutions, and another on defending and advancing universal values.
- He states that in the past eight years the United States has become much more respected in the world, has strengthened transatlantic relations, rebalanced its foreign policy to reflect the growing importance of Asia-Pacific, established a positive relationship with China, strengthened relations with Israel (he makes no mention of the head-on clash with Netanyahu), abandoned the failed policy pursued for half a century towards Cuba, promoted free trade and, upholding universal values, helped further the cause of democracy and human rights. «By rejecting such agreements – by refusing to participate in them – our competitiveness will suffer», he warns. «Walking away from TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) would be a strategic mistake.»

Writing for the *New York Times*, Russell Goldman contrasted this assessment with Trump's main stances prior to his advent to the Oval Office.<sup>36</sup>

- Trump has called the agreement with Iran «the worst deal ever negotiated.» At a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in March, he said, «My No. 1 priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran.» He later said he would renegotiate it.
- He has repeatedly praised Putin, promised to improve relations with Russia and, despite the report of the US secret services on how Russia helped tip the balance in Trump's favour, he did not acknowledge such meddling until 11 January, but still remained reluctant to criticise the Russian president and hopeful of being able to work with Moscow to combat the Islamic State. Such cooperation would push nuclear arsenals out of control. «Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all,» he stated.
- After calling climate change a «hoax» and vowing to dismantle the Paris agreements and the Environmental Protection Agency, he placed the agency in the hands of Scott Pruitt, who has led the legal battle against Obama's climate-change policies.
- In a message posted to Twitter – the president elect's favourite means of doing politics – on 3 January, he called for banning further releases from Guantanamo as the prisoners are extremely dangerous people. He was always opposed to its closure.
- Following the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015, Trump called for «a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States». Given the difficulties of putting this into practice, he made many changes during the campaign, but never abandoned his idea of the connection between immigration and terrorism.

<sup>36</sup> «Kerry lists Obama era's diplomatic successes... », *The New York Times*, 6 January 2017. [http://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/06/world/kerry-lists-obama-eras-diplomatic-successes-trump-opposes-them-all.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/06/world/kerry-lists-obama-eras-diplomatic-successes-trump-opposes-them-all.html?_r=0).



## Russia and China

The replies given in the Senate by Trump's top administration nominees for the posts of defence and state secretaries and director of the CIA imply that the new president's policies towards Russia, NATO, the Middle East and other regions will be less radical than insinuated in many of his statements, which seemed to anticipate serious internal clashes in the new administration.

«Right now the most important thing is we recognise the reality of what we deal with with Mr Putin, and we recognise that he is trying to break the North Atlantic Alliance, and that we take the integrated steps – diplomatic, economic, military – and the alliance steps, working with our allies, to defend ourselves where we must», stated the new Pentagon chief, James Mattis, in reply to a question from the Republican senator John McCain.<sup>37</sup> He went on to point out that the international system is «under the biggest attack since World War Two», with the threats coming from Russia, from terrorist groups and China's activities in the South China Sea.<sup>38</sup>

These statements made by the former general of the Marines clearly contradicted the opinions voiced by Trump so far, though at a press conference on 12 January the still president elect was more sceptical about the future of relations with Putin. «Russia can help us fight» the Islamic State, he pointed out, but «I don't know that I'm gonna get along with Vladimir Putin. I hope I do. But there's a good chance I won't.»<sup>39</sup>

Pressed by McCain to elaborate on the threat he believes that Russia – with a defence budget ten times smaller than that of the US and an economy a twentieth of the size – can pose to the Baltic States, Mattis declared himself to be in favour of a permanent military presence in the area. A few hours earlier, Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, had described as «a threat to Russian security» the arrival in Poland of about 1,000 US soldiers belonging to a 4,000-strong force with 87 combat tanks and 144 armoured vehicles.

This deployment, approved at NATO's Warsaw summit in the summer and officially temporary to avoid violating the current deal with Russia, is the main response to Russia's intervention in Ukraine – in the autumn it transferred nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles to its Kaliningrad base – and other actions carried out by the Russian army at its western borders which are

<sup>37</sup> FLEMMING, Sam, «James Mattis calls Vladimir Putin a threat to global order», *Financial Times*, 12 January 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/da62528a-d8de-11e6-944b-e7eb37a6aa8e>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> RYAN, Missy, and LAMOTHE, Dan, «Placing Russia first among threats...», *The Washington Post*, 12 January 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/senate-set-to-question-trumps-pentagon-pick-veteran-marine-gen-james-mattis/2017/01/11/b3c6946a-d816-11e6-9a36-1d296534b31e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e4f3dae4f02b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/senate-set-to-question-trumps-pentagon-pick-veteran-marine-gen-james-mattis/2017/01/11/b3c6946a-d816-11e6-9a36-1d296534b31e_story.html?utm_term=.e4f3dae4f02b).

of increasing concern to the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and other NATO members.<sup>40</sup>

Trump's pick to head US diplomacy, Rex Tillerson, was somewhat less categorical in his replies about Russia, but very firm about China: «We're going to have to send China a clear signal that, first, the island-building stops and, second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed.»<sup>41</sup>

Tillerson regards China's construction of islands in waters claimed by neighbouring countries as «akin to Russia's taking of Crimea» in 2014 and a threat «to the global economy». Lu Kang, spokesman for China's foreign minister, replied that China has every right to carry on its legal activities in Chinese territory.<sup>42</sup>

Satellite pictures showed that some time ago, after completing nearly all the major construction work envisaged, Beijing began to lay out runways and possible launchpads for surface-to-air missile batteries on some islands. All this would be consonant with its goal of using the islands to support its claim to 85 percent of the sea in the area. The next step, if Chinese leaders pay no heed to the warnings of the new Washington administration, would be to declare the maritime area an Air Defence Identification Zone, which would be tantamount to seizing control of its airspace.

Tillerson differed from Trump in that he acknowledged climate change to be a «real threat» and ruled out a nuclear Japan and South Korea, but his attitude towards China was perfectly consonant with what Trump had been saying for months. Like the president, he accused Beijing of failing to fulfil its global trade and economic commitments, stealing American intellectual property, aggressive conduct and expansionism in the digital field and failing to put pressure on North Korea to stop its military programmes.

He added that the US had to be realistic about what China is willing to do about North Korea and not expect much, pointing out that, ultimately, it will need to pursue a different policy towards China so that it realises what the US expects of it, as what has been done in the past is insufficient. And if China does not implement the UN sanctions on North Korea, it is appropriate for the United States to consider adopting measures to force it to do so.<sup>43</sup>

The underlying issue in the conflict is China's slow but steady emergence as a maritime superpower that is challenging and defying the United States'

---

<sup>40</sup> MACASKILL, Ewen, «Russia says US troops arriving in Poland pose threat to its security», *The Guardian*, 12 January 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/12/doubts-over-biggest-us-deployment-in-europe-since-cold-war-under-trump>.

<sup>41</sup> CLOVER, Charles, «Tillerson sets stage for clash with Beijing over South China Sea», *Financial Times*, 12 January 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/5edf5fe4-d876-11e6-944b-e7eb37a6aa8e>.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

control of the oceans – a decisive element of Pax Americana since the Second World War. It is not amiss to recall the consequences of Germany's defiance of the English Navy during the last decades of the nineteenth century and remember that today China understands maritime influence in the same way as Alfred Thayer Mahan, the nineteenth-century American strategist. «Control of the sea,» Mr Mahan wrote, «by maritime commerce and naval supremacy, means predominant influence in the world; because, however great the wealth of the land, nothing facilitates the necessary exchanges as does the sea.»<sup>44</sup>

With respect to Russia, although the previous year Tillerson had told students at the University of Texas that he had «a very close relationship» with Vladimir Putin and that Exxon Mobil had profited greatly from its investments in Russia, he made a conscious effort to dispel this idea with a view to his confirmation by the Senate.

He unhesitatingly acknowledged Russia's campaign of aggression and intimidation towards its neighbours, stating that «Our NATO allies are right to be alarmed at a resurgent Russia,» since it has invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea. The «Article V (of the North Atlantic Treaty) commitment is inviolable».<sup>45</sup>

He also denied that Russia has any valid claim to control Crimea, described the conflict in eastern Ukraine as the result of a Russian invasion, not a separatist conflict or insurgency, but hesitated to condemn Russia's violation of the Minsk agreements. As for recommendations, he parted ways with both Donald Trump and Barack Obama by calling for the provision of defence weapons to Ukraine. When forced to define his stance on human-rights violations in Russia, he acknowledged that it «is a dictatorship on par with Iran» that supports «Syrian forces that brutally violate the laws of war».<sup>46</sup>

Despite his harsh words for Russia, Mattis gave few clues away about the possible use of military force and referred to Iran as «the primary source of turmoil» in the region with its support for regional militant cells, its ballistic missile capability, its maritime provocations and cyber initiatives. So far no substantial differences with respect to Trump. Regarding the nuclear deal with Iran, he was more realistic: «I think it is in an imperfect arms control agreement – it's not a friendship treaty, but when America gives her word, we have to live up to it and work with our allies.»<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> «How China rules the waves», *Financial Times*, 12 January 2017. <https://ig.ft.com/sites/china-ports/>.

<sup>45</sup> ADESNIK, David, «FPI Bulletin: Tillerson, Trump and Putin», *THE FPI*, 19 January 2017. <http://www.foreignpolicyi.org/files/2017-01-19-Bulletin-Tillerson%20Trump%20Putin.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> RYAN and LAMOTHE, *op. cit.* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/senate-set-to-question-trumps-pentagon-pick-veteran-marine-gen-james->

Trump played down the clashing or different opinions he holds with respect to prominent members of his cabinet, to which we can add the opposition of his nominated CIA chief, Kansas representative Mike Pompeo, and of the man chosen as homeland security secretary, John Kelly, to the new wall along the border with Mexico, which they consider pointless. «All of my Cabinet nominees are looking good and doing a great job», Trump tweeted. «I want them to be themselves and express their own thoughts, not mine!»<sup>48</sup>

Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* seven days before his inauguration as the 45th president, he again declared himself open to lifting the sanctions on Russia if the Kremlin collaborated with Washington on counterterrorism. As for China, he stressed that he was not committed to a longstanding agreement with China over Taiwan. These are two clear signs that he would use any available leverage to realign the US's relationship with its two biggest global strategic rivals.<sup>49</sup>

Although, he explained, sanctions would not be lifted immediately, this opened a window for cooperation between Washington and Moscow. Even so, the difficulties of pleasing Putin's demands – acceptance of the faits accomplis in Ukraine and its strategy of backing Assad's regime in Syria, the end of western sanctions and the recovery of a sphere of influence in the republics of the former USSR – stood in the way of a hasty rapprochement.

The main Republican leaders' opposition to Trump on this issue and the long shadow of possible blackmail following the leaking of the secret reports on Russia's meddling in the elections, which the Senate Intelligence Committee undertook to investigate, also impeded any fast progress.

### Farewell to the neoliberal system?

Will the international system that emerged in the mid-twentieth century survive a US president who has shunned permanent alliances, called for protectionism and not concealed his admiration for well-known despots? What sort of European Union will result from Brexit, from the curbing of democracy in several of its members and from the results of the 2017 elections in three or four of the six founding countries of the three original European Communities? How can Russia's irredentism and China's demands

---

mattis/2017/01/11/b3c6946a-d816-11e6-9a36-1d296534b31e\_story.html?utm\_term=.e4f3dae4f02b.

<sup>48</sup> TUMULTY, Karen, «Trump's cabinet nominees keep contradicting him», *The Washington Post*, 12 January 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trumps-cabinet-nominees-keep-contradicting-him/2017/01/12/dec8cccc-d8f3-11e6-9a36-1d296534b31e\\_story.html?tid=pm\\_pop&utm\\_term=.6d68511a5b00](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trumps-cabinet-nominees-keep-contradicting-him/2017/01/12/dec8cccc-d8f3-11e6-9a36-1d296534b31e_story.html?tid=pm_pop&utm_term=.6d68511a5b00).

<sup>49</sup> «Trump open to shift on Russia sanctions (one China policy)», *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 January 2017. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trump-sets-a-bar-for-russia-and-china-1484360380>.

to be acknowledged as a superpower be reconciled with Trump's «America first»?

«Putin and Trump are not Hitler and Mussolini, admittedly (even if May appeasing Trump at the White House has something of Chamberlain about it, he as tragedy, she as farce)», warned Santos Juliá on 30 January. «Neither Russia nor the United States today is what Germany and Italy were in the 1920s and 1930s, admittedly too. But this does not mean to say that the wave that has twice swept mankind to the disasters of two major wars is not similar to that which has swept these two autocrats to power in elections. This wave has a name: nationalism, and nobody was capable of predicting its terrible destructive force until it was set in motion.»<sup>50</sup>

After conducting a thorough survey of the ups and downs on the geopolitical journey from the birth of the USSR in 1917 to its collapse in 1991, Martin Wolff wrote at the start of the year that «the first geopolitical period of the post-war era ended in disappointment for the Soviets and euphoria in the West. Today, it is the West that confronts geopolitical and economic disappointment.»<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it seems that most of the premises on which the post-Cold War period of the 1990s was built are losing validity, or perhaps we are paying the price of failing to make the necessary changes to the system, beginning with the United Nations Security Council.

«These geopolitical shifts are, in part, the result of desirable changes, notably the spread of rapid economic development beyond the West, particularly to the Asian giants, China and India. Some are also the result of choices made elsewhere, not least Russia's decision to reject liberal democracy in favour of nationalism and autocracy as the core of its post-communist identity and China's to combine a market economy with communist control.»<sup>52</sup>

«After a turbulent 2016, and with little positive news in international politics, 2017 is shaping up to be a year of challenges and uncertainty», wrote Javier Solana in his last column of the year for the digital *Project Syndicate*. «But the biggest uncertainty of all is whether this is simply the end of another year, or the end of a geopolitical epoch», he concluded.<sup>53</sup>

The answer will largely depend on what the new US president decides, and is able, to do – the avalanche of executive orders no sooner had he taken up office did not bode at all well – but the challenges are beyond the capabilities of any single leader or any single country. It would therefore be

<sup>50</sup> JULIÁ, Santos, «Predicciones fallidas», *El País*, 30 January 2017. [http://elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/27/opinion/1485539967\\_925089.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/27/opinion/1485539967_925089.html).

<sup>51</sup> WOLFF, Martin, «The long and painful journey to world disorder», *Financial Times*, 5 January 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/ef13e61a-ccec-11e6-b8ce-b9c03770f8b1>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> SOLANA, Javier, «¿Fin de año o fin de época?», *Project Syndicate*, 21 December 2016. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/2016-end-of-an-epoch-by-javier-solana-2016-12/spanish>.



a mistake to go down the known route of protectionism and unilateralism when it is more necessary than ever to pool resources and coordinate multilateral support.

The causes and consequences of the most important challenges – in Xi Jinping's China and Putin's Russia, in the wars in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Libya, in the clash between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the North Korean nuclear threat, in a European Union with elections coming up in the Netherlands, France, Germany and possible Italy and shaken by Brexit, the tsunami of refugees, the growth crisis, the lack of leadership, growing authoritarianism, rising populism and the serious questioning of globalisation – will be more difficult to address unilaterally than from a position of multilateral consensus.<sup>54</sup>

«We need strong American leadership and Europeans to shoulder their share of the burden – but above all, we must recognise the value of our partnership», wrote the NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg, four days after Trump's victory. «But above all we need to recognise the value of the partnership between Europe and America. It remains indispensable ... Going it alone is not an option, either for Europe or for the United States.»<sup>55</sup>

Although Trump did not give much away during the campaign about his view of the world, those who have followed him closely for years foresee an essential change in the notion of concentric circles upheld by the White House for decades – the first formed by Canada, the United Kingdom and other English-speaking allies; the second by other members of the Atlantic Alliance, Japan, South Korea and Israel; the third, by other long-standing economic and military partners such as Taiwan, the Philippines and Saudi Arabia, and so on ...»<sup>56</sup>

«For decades US foreign policy has attempted to strengthen ties with and between friendly countries and to weaken or isolate those that are excluded», states Professor Michael Klare. «Sometimes this involved going to war to protect peripheral allies out of fear, real or assumed, that the closest allies felt endangered.»<sup>57</sup>

Trump is oblivious to this vision shared by most Democrats and Republicans and, like Tillerson, the new secretary of state, he regards the world as «a great jungle where competition prevails and where opportunities and

<sup>54</sup> See «Perspectives», introduction by Thierry de Montbrial, founder and president of the IFRI (Institut Français des Relations Internationales), in Ramses 2017, Edit Dunod, pp. 17-35.

<sup>55</sup> STOLTENBERG, Jens, «Now is not the time for the US to abandon NATO», *The Guardian*, 12 November 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/12/us-must-not-abandon-nato-europe-go-alone-jens-stoltenberg>.

<sup>56</sup> KLARE, Michael, «Le monde selon Donald Trump», *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2017, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

dangers arise everywhere regardless of countries' loyalty or supposed hostility to Washington».<sup>58</sup>

The United States' oldest and most influential international policy magazine, *Foreign Affairs*, went much further in its first 2017 issue with the following headline on the cover: «Out of order? The future of the International System».<sup>59</sup>

In the introduction, the director Gideon Rose takes us back to the first half of the twentieth century with two world wars, a global depression, tyranny and genocide. «That happened largely because the Western great powers hunkered down in the face of economic and geopolitical crisis, turning inward and passing the buck, each hoping that it might somehow escape disaster. But there was nowhere to run or hide, and catastrophe swept over them regardless», he points out.<sup>60</sup>

«Reflecting on this afterward, Western policymakers swore not to repeat their mistakes and designed a postwar order based on mutually beneficial cooperation rather than self-interested competition. They recognized that foreign policy and international economics could be team sports rather than individual ones. So they linked their countries to one another in international institutions, trade agreements, and military alliances, betting that they would be stronger together. And they were correct: backed by extraordinary American power, the system they created has led to seven decades of progress, great-power peace, and economic growth.»

Trump alarmed many people with his main election slogan, «America first». It was the same catchphrase adopted by the pro-German isolationists who opposed the United States entering the Second World War, the antithesis of nearly everything its foreign policy had stood for for generations. Most experts believed it would lead to his defeat, but, as we are increasingly finding with experts, they were wrong, albeit only just in this case – the Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by nearly three million ballots but lost the electoral college to Trump, who in the campaign and his first decisions as president defended an international platform closer to the nationalism and protectionism of the 1930s than to the world we have known since 1945.

«If the new Administration tries to put this vision into practice, it will call into question the crucial role of the United States as the defender of the liberal international order as a whole, not just the country's national interests», warns Rose. «At best, this will introduce damaging uncertainty into everything from international commerce to nuclear deterrence. At worst, it

---

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2017, Vol. 96, Number 1. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2017/96/1>.

<sup>60</sup> ROSE, Gideon, «Out of order?» *Foreign Affairs*, *op. cit.*

could cause other countries to lose faith in the order's persistence and start to hedge their bets, distancing themselves from the United States, making side deals with China and Russia, and adopting beggar-thy-neighbor economic programs.»<sup>61</sup>

«But governing is different from campaigning», especially in such a complex constitutional system of internal and external counterweights, «and nobody knows yet just what the Trump administration's actual foreign policy will involve», thought the most optimistic. Only time will tell, but everything – his repeated promise to get out of the main multilateral agreements, his threats to US companies to invest in the country, his chosen cabinet of multimillionaires and military, his public condemnation on Twitter of Obama's most important policies, his criticisms of the US secret services for denouncing Russia's interference in the elections, his seamless support for Netanyahu after the US abstained from a Security Council resolution condemning Israel's policy of settlements – indicated that Trump was prepared to fulfil his campaign promises.

«Trump has made clear that he is no longer interested in promoting America's «democratic faith,» or an America that maintains a special relationship with «free states and free peoples», warned Anne Applebaum on 5 January in *The Washington Post*.<sup>62</sup> Except for the United Kingdom that is, we should add, judging by his commitment to strengthen the bilateral link after Prime Minister Theresa May visited the White House on 27 January.

If he goes ahead with his agenda, Trump will be giving up on the principles that have guided the United States' foreign and security policy since Harry Truman. Of particular concern was the influence of Stephen K. Bannon, senior advisor and chief strategist of the new White House, who has unreservedly supported Putin's Russia, the National Front in France and Alternative for Germany in the Federal Republic of Germany. Many found Trump's inaugural speech to have much in common with what Bannon has been defending for years on his website.

It is difficult to imagine NATO and the European Union disappearing, but according to the weekly *Der Spiegel*, Angela Merkel, Europe's most influential leader, has started to prepare for the worst.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> APPLEBAUM, Anne, «An existential moment for the Euro-American Alliance», *The Washington Post*, 5 December 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/an-existential-moment-for-the-euro-american-alliance/2017/01/05/23407646-d360-11e6-945a-76f69a399dd5\\_story.html?postshare=3401483693391553&tid=ss\\_fb&utm\\_term=.818576919074](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/an-existential-moment-for-the-euro-american-alliance/2017/01/05/23407646-d360-11e6-945a-76f69a399dd5_story.html?postshare=3401483693391553&tid=ss_fb&utm_term=.818576919074).

<sup>63</sup> «Trump's World Order. Merkel anticipates frosty relations with U.S.», *Der Spiegel*, 4 January 2017. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/donald-trump-angela-merkel-anticipates-frosty-relations-with-u-s-a-1128442.html>.

The similarities some members of the Berlin chancellery saw in November between Trump and Ronald Reagan soon vanished. Reagan did not chart a collision course with his own party. And before entering the White House, he had spent eight years as the governor of California, a state that is larger than Germany and has a population of around 40 million people. The most worrying thing about Trump is not his ideology, given the inconsistency of many of his stances and opinions, but rather his character and the unpredictability and instability it was already generating both within and outside the United States.

Even before he came to office, his heterodox opinions on the interference of Russian computer experts in the US elections, his harsh criticism of the US intelligence services, his telephone call to the Taiwanese president, his insistence on going ahead with the wall at the Mexican border, his scrapping of the TPP, his determination to revise the agreement of 2015 with Iran, his criticism of Saudi Arabia and his promise to move the US embassy to Jerusalem had already questioned fundamental cornerstones of Washington's strategy.

For Europeans, the most serious alarm was raised by Anthony Gardner, outgoing US ambassador to the European Union, at a parting press conference days before Trump's inauguration. «I was struck in various calls that were going on between the incoming administration and the EU that the first question is: what country is about to leave next after the UK?» he said. «The perceived sense is that 2017 is the year in which the EU is going to fall apart. And I hope that Nigel Farage is not the only voice being listened to because that is a fringe voice.» And he added that «we should not become the cheerleaders for Brexit, particularly if Brexit appears more likely to be a hard, disorderly, unmanaged Brexit».<sup>64</sup>

### Risks, threats and trends

The catastrophic and apocalyptic visions increasingly used by populists, demagogues and extremists of all persuasions to describe the present and future do not stand up to critical analysis, however superficial. Prestigious political scientists, economists and journalists like Peter Apps, the founder and director of PS21 (Project for the Study of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century), are unwittingly fuelling this trend.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> BARKER, Alex, «Trump team rang EU and asked «What country is leaving next»?», *Financial Times* 12 January 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/1b70c98a-d9a9-11e6-944b-e7eb37a6aa8e>.

<sup>65</sup> SAHAGÚN, Felipe, «Apocalípticos, rendíos, la humanidad tiene remedio», *El Mundo*, 11 August 2016. <http://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2016/08/11/57ab5ca2468aebbb308b464e.html>.

After a well-documented survey (published by Reuters on 28 July) on the latest terrorist attacks – not all by the Islamic State – Brexit, the Trump «phenomenon», the failed coup in Turkey, the tension with China and Russia and the progress of extremist parties, both left- and right-wing, Apps wrote:

«In many ways, the years to come could be among the most dangerous in recent human history, particularly with the risk of both outright collapse and great power conflict higher than they've ever been. Many of the drivers that had been seen delivering greater stability – globalization, international consensus, a move to the political center in many countries – are now under threat or have unraveled completely.»<sup>66</sup>

Radical changes in the international system can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Since the Renaissance, the Eurocentric world has known at least five: Westphalia, Utrecht, the French Revolution, the three continental wars (1870-71, First and Second World War, three campaigns in the same struggle and the end of the bipolar system, German reunification and the end of the USSR).

The causes and consequences of these upheavals – to which should be added, looking beyond Europe, Europeans' conquest and subsequent loss of the rest of the planet, and the collapse two centuries ago of a China that began to stage a comeback 35 years ago – have been determined by technological, economic and social changes, the end result of which, despite all the tragedies, mistakes and crimes, is a more prosperous, more peaceful and more stable world than that of our ancestors.

From his Copenhagen observatory, Bjorn Lomborg has been publishing the data that prove this in books and articles for years.

During the last two centuries, between 1800 and 2000, production per capital increased 18 times over, and since 1950 global poverty has been reduced more than in the previous 500 years. In the first decade of this century alone more than 200 million people ceased to live in poverty in China.

A quarter of a century ago, the UN calculated that one out of every two inhabitants of developing countries lived in poverty. Today it is one out of every four. There is still much to be done, but income per capita in the developing countries is five times as high as it was in 1950.

«But it's not just about money», wrote Lomborg in *Newsweek* in June 2011. «Illiteracy in the developing world has fallen from about 75 percent for the people born in the early part of the 1900s to about 12 percent among the young of today», he pointed out. «More and more people have gained access to clean water and sanitation, improving health and income. And

---

<sup>66</sup> APPS, Peter, «How much worse could 2016 get?», Reuters, 28 July 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-conflict-commentary-idUSKCN10527R>.

according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the percentage of undernourished people in the developing world has dropped from more than 50 percent in 1950 to 16 percent today.»<sup>67</sup>

*New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristoff expressed a similar opinion on 21 January after hearing Trump describe the state of his country as «carnage» in his apocalyptic inaugural speech. According to the polls, nine out of every ten Americans believe that global poverty has worsened or stayed the same. «But in fact ... every day, an average of about a quarter-million people worldwide graduate from extreme poverty, according to World Bank figures», Kristoff explained. «When I began writing about global poverty in the early 1980s, more than 40 percent of all humans were living in extreme poverty. Now fewer than 10 percent are. By 2030 it looks as if just 3 or 4 percent will be.»<sup>68</sup> Extreme poverty is defined as less than \$1.90 per person per day, adjusted for inflation.

The most optimistic forecasts are unlikely to come true if the protectionism and nationalism of the new US administration prevail. Even the US's own intelligence services acknowledged in their latest report on global trends<sup>69</sup> that «the emerging global landscape is drawing to a close an era of American dominance following the Cold War.»<sup>70</sup>

Over the coming five years, the National Intelligence Council (NIC), which authored the report, predicts a rise in internal and external tension, a slowdown in growth, deep differences between states' values and interests, a deterioration or weakening of the democratic system in many countries, intensification of terrorism and the growing influence of the internet and information worldwide.

«Uncertainty about the United States, an inward-looking West, and erosion of norms for conflict prevention and human rights will encourage China and Russia to check US influence. In doing so, their 'gray zone' aggression and diverse forms of disruption will stay below the threshold of hot war but bring profound risks of miscalculation. Overconfidence that material strength can manage escalation will increase the risks of interstate conflict to levels not seen since the Cold War. Even if hot war is avoided, the current pattern of 'international cooperation where we can get it' – such as on climate change – masks significant differences in values and interests among states and

---

<sup>67</sup> LOMBORG, Bjorn, «Bjorn Lomborg explains how to save the planet», *Newsweek*, 12 June 2011. <http://europa.newsweek.com/bjorn-lomborg-explains-how-save-planet-67833?rm=eu>.

<sup>68</sup> KRISTOFF, Nicholas, «Why 2017 May Be the Best Year Ever», *The New York Times*, 21 January 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/opinion/sunday/why-2017-may-be-the-best-year-ever.html>.

<sup>69</sup> «Paradox of Progress», Global Trends 2035. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/global-trends-home>.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/global-trends/the-future-summarized>.

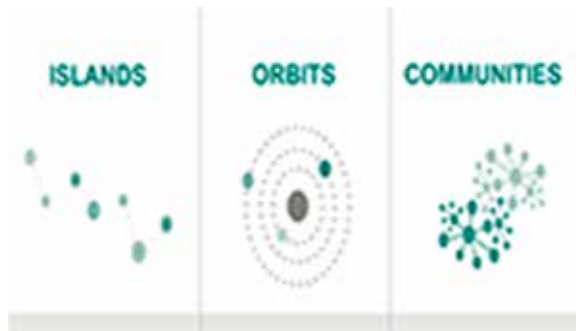


Chart 1. The three scenarios of Global Trends 2035

does little to curb assertions of dominance within regions. These trends are leading to a spheres of influence world.»<sup>71</sup>

But as no future is cast in stone, whether the next five or twenty years – the two periods he envisages – are brighter or darker will depend on how «individuals, groups, and governments renegotiate their expectations of one another to create political order in an era of empowered individuals and rapidly changing economies.» He identifies three possible responses or scenarios, not necessarily incompatible, which he calls «islands», «orbits» and «communities».

Islands investigates the impact of a change in the traditional models of economic prosperity and globalisation, emphasising the challenges to governments in meeting societies' demands for both economic and physical security. Orbits explores the tensions created by competing major powers seeking their own spheres of influence while attempting to maintain stability at home. Communities describes a society with growing public expectations but diminishing capacity of national governments and the multiplication of local and private actors who compete with them in support of different agendas. «Most national governments resist, but others cede some power to emerging networks. Everywhere, from the Middle East to Russia, control is harder», he concludes.

In its Preventive Priorities Survey of 2017, the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations does not deem any scenario to be both highly likely and highly impactful. This is a change from last year, when Syria was considered the most urgent threat.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* See also the articles by Uri Friedman in *Defense One*, 11 January 2017, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/01/what-world-might-look-5-years-according-us-intelligence/134511/> and by Andrés Ortega at the Real Instituto Elcano, 17 January 2017, <http://www.blog.rielcano.org/en/map-of-the-future-islands-orbits-or-communities/>.

<sup>72</sup> Preventive Priorities Survey 2017, CFR, December 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/conflict-assessment/preventive-priorities-survey-2017/p38562>.



According to this year's study, the most serious threats in 2017, which are moderately likely to occur and would have a high impact were they to do so, are:

- A deliberate or unintended military confrontation between Russia and NATO members, stemming from assertive Russian behaviour in Eastern Europe.
- A severe crisis in North Korea caused by nuclear or intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) weapons testing, a military provocation, or internal political instability.
- A highly disruptive cyberattack on US critical infrastructure.
- A mass casualty terrorist attack on the US homeland or a treaty ally by either a foreign or homegrown terrorist(s).

Moderate-impact threats with a high likelihood are:

- Increased violence and instability in Afghanistan resulting from a continued strengthening of the Taliban insurgency and potential government collapse.
- Intensification of violence between Turkey and various Kurdish armed groups within Turkey and in neighbouring countries.
- Intensification of the civil war in Syria resulting from increased external support for warring parties, including military intervention by outside powers.

Tier-two crises, with a high impact but a low likelihood, include:

- An armed confrontation in the East China Sea between China and Japan, stemming from tensions over the sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which draws in the United States.
- An armed confrontation over disputed maritime areas in the South China Sea between China and one or more Southeast Asian claimants – Brunei, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, or Vietnam – which draws in the United States.

Among those with a moderate impact and likelihood are:

- Political instability in EU countries exacerbated by the influx of refugees and migrants, with heightened civil unrest, isolated terrorist attacks, or violence against refugees and migrants.
- A severe India-Pakistan military confrontation triggered by a major terrorist attack or heightened unrest in Indian-administered Kashmir.
- Further fracturing of Iraq caused by political differences and violent clashes among Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish communities, worsened by the presence of the Islamic State.
- Heightened tensions between Israelis and Palestinians leading to attacks against civilians, widespread protests, and armed confrontations.
- Continued political fracturing in Libya.
- Increased internal violence and political instability in Pakistan.
- Growing political instability in the Philippines stemming from opposition to the government's domestic and foreign policy agenda.

- Increased political instability in Turkey stemming from growing authoritarianism after the July 2016 coup attempt.
- Increased violence in eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed militias and Ukrainian security forces.
- Intensified civil war in Yemen.

This year's survey includes only one threat with a high likelihood but a low or weak impact:

- Deepening economic crisis and political instability in Venezuela leading to violent civil unrest.

Third-tier threats with a low impact and moderate likelihood are:

- Intensification of political crisis in Burundi.
- Growing political instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Growing civil unrest and ethnic violence in Ethiopia.
- Intensified violence and political instability in Nigeria related to conflicts with Boko Haram in the northeast and other conflicts in the Delta region.
- Continued al-Shabab attacks in Somalia and neighbouring countries.
- Intensification of the civil war in South Sudan.
- Political instability in Thailand resulting from the uncertainty of the succession of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and continued military rule.
- Violence in Zimbabwe related to the succession of President Robert Mugabe.

The survey reports two threats with a low impact and low likelihood: Colombia, if the agreement between the government and the FARC were to fail, and an outbreak of military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

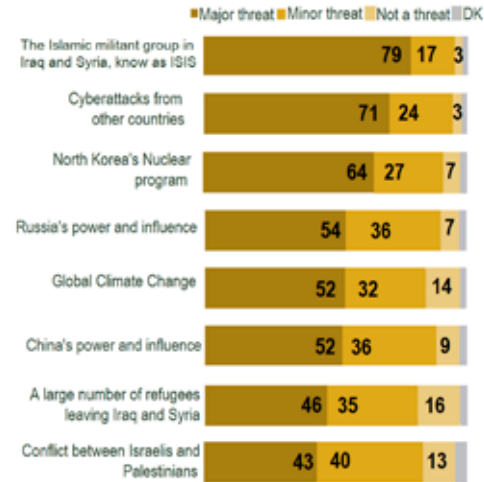
These are the 30 most serious contingencies cited by some 5,000 academics, government officials and security and foreign-policy experts consulted in November. Others which were mentioned by many but are considered less serious are violent crime in Central America, a possible rise in organised crime and instability caused by Trump's policy in Mexico, lack of stability in Mali, increased sectarian violence in Myanmar, attacks against foreigners and laypeople in Bangladesh, increased terrorist attacks in Egypt, the risks of a potential confrontation with Iran over the collapse of the nuclear agreement, renewed confrontation between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia or Abkhazia, increased tension between China and Taiwan, and the danger of succession crisis in Algeria.

Charts 2, 3 and 4 show Americans' perceptions of the main global threats according to a Pew Research poll conducted shortly before Trump took up office.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> The World Facing Trump: Public Sees ISIS, Cyberattacks, North Korea as Top Threats, Pew Research, 12 January 2017. <http://www.people-press.org/2017/01/12/the-world-facing-trump-public-sees-isis-cyberattacks-north-korea-as-top-threats/>.

## Public sees an array of global threats, led by ISIS, cyberattacks and North Korea's nuclear program

% who say each is a...



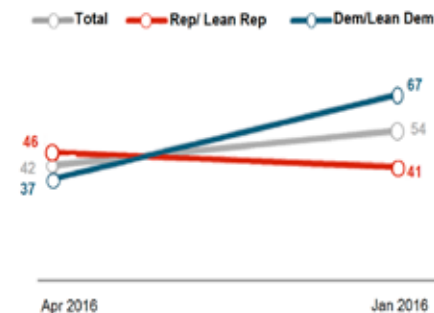
Note: Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Q58.  
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 4-9, 2017

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Chart 2. Global threats

## Sharp rise in share of Democrats who describe Russia as a major threat

% who say Russia's 'power and influence' is a major threat to the well-being of the United States\*



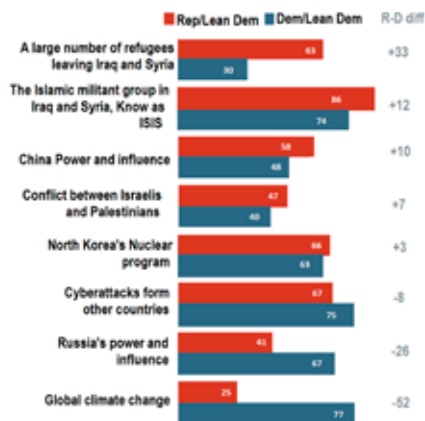
Note: \* April Survey Asked about "Tensions With Russia". Q58.  
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 4-9, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Chart 3. The Russian threat

### Two-thirds of Democrats - and just 41% of Republicans - say Russia's power is a 'major threat'

% who say each is a major threat ...



Note: Q58.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 4-9-2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Chart 4. Differences between Democrats and Republicans

Without domestic consensus or close foreign cooperation, beginning with the support of allies and partners, it will be very difficult to address most of these threats successfully.

## Strategic Panorama 2017

Since the first *Strategic Panorama*, published by the Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE), came out 21 years ago, we have been analysing the events of the past year. Without attempting to predict an increasingly uncertain future, we survey the prevailing short- and medium-term trends and risks, trying to anticipate patterns and point out sources of friction or warnings that can help make decisions.

«The 'forecasting' business is deeply unprofessional, a little like the practice of medicine until the 20th century», pointed out the Australian ambassador to Israel, Dave Sharma, in his blog on 21 January. «There is no measurement, no data, no reviews or post-mortems (except in extreme cases – think Iraq WMD). Professional pundits are rarely assessed against their track record or held accountable for their failures of insight. With no assessment of effectiveness, there is no ability to identify which methods and tools work and which ones don't, and hence no possibility of improvement.»<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> SHARMA, Dave, «Superforecasting and diplomacy», Keeping It Real. Official blog of the Australian Ambassador to Israel, 21 January 2017. <https://ausambisrael.com/2017/01/21/>

Other common problems of prospective analyses are their vagueness («the risks of X are rising»), the tendency to list alternative or complementary causes («on the one hand ... on the other»), and often the use of indeterminate timeframes («in the medium term»). With so many conditioning factors it is difficult to be wrong, but the value of the analysis is limited. It is always preferable to explain degrees of likelihood with weighty arguments than insist on binary judgements. It is the system used in the CIA's intelligence estimates since the one devoted to Iran in November 2007 to avoid repeating the serious mistakes of previous years. Lastly, studies based on multiple sources are usually better than individual judgements.

Halfway between a piece of individual research and collective works by dozens of authors such as the IFRI's Ramses annual report or the Stockholm-based SIPRI's classic yearbook, the *Strategic Panorama* features contributions from five or six prestigious authors every year.

This year the chosen authors are internationalists Vicente Palacio de Oteyza and Shaun Riordan, colonels Ignacio Fuente Cobo and José María Martínez Ferrer (who took up his post as new director of the Academia de Artillería in Segovia), and two lecturers in public international law and international relations, Cástor Miguel Díaz Barrado and Sagrario Morán Blanco, from the Universidad Juan Carlos I in Madrid.

Under the supervision of General Miguel Ángel Ballesteros, director of the IEEE, who in 2016 enlightened us with two books that provide a useful insight into the shaping of security strategies and the roots and evolution of jihadism,<sup>75</sup> five topics were chosen for this year's edition: the United States and the international system following Donald Trump's election win on 8 November; the challenges Europe faces following the Brexit referendum; the turmoil in the Middle East 14 years after the invasion of Iraq and six years after the failed Arab uprisings; the challenges of the Sahel and northern Africa, an area of priority importance to Spanish security; and changes in Latin America, which, if peace in Colombia is consolidated, will become the first war-free continent in the world.

### United States: From Obama to Trump

Written immediately after Trump took office, Vicente Palacio's chapter on the United States assesses the previous period, identifies the new administration's priorities, underlines what remains the same and what has changed and the paradoxes, and surveys the possible effects and likelihoods of failure or success.

---

[superforecasting-and-diplomacy/?utm\\_content=buffer99670&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://www.superforecasting-and-diplomacy/?utm_content=buffer99670&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer).

<sup>75</sup> BALLESTEROS MARTÍN, Miguel Ángel, *En busca de una Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional*, Ministerio de Defensa, Madrid 2016, *Yihadismo*, La Huerta Grande Editorial, Madrid 2016.

«The idea», he states, «is to provide an overview of the United States' new strategic focus, which already seems to be pointing to a 180-degree shift in perspective.

He acknowledges Obama's major macroeconomic successes, but describes the recovery figures as «deceptive» owing to «the doubts, disgruntlement and anger of the middle classes ... who have been hard hit by deindustrialisation and the crisis», which have hastened polarisation and increased inequality to unprecedented levels. «Domestic difficulties have inevitably weakened the United States' international position», he adds.

According to his detailed survey of the ups and downs the Obama doctrine, the outcome is somewhat paltry results in Europe, little progress in his attempt to reset relations with Russia, complicated relations with China and a weak image in Syria and Iraq but important achievements in global governance (trade, non-proliferation and climate change).

«By and large», states the author, «his electoral commitments in foreign-policy and security matters now range from trade protectionism (tariffs on Chinese and Mexican products), isolationism and rejection of the major trade deals (TPP, NAFTA; TTIP) to occasional adventurism (against ISIS) or revisionism of the international organisations (NATO, the United Nations).»

What might be called the new Trump doctrine, he adds, «amounts to an all-out questioning not only of his predecessor's doctrine but more generally of the cornerstones of the liberal order created after the Second World War».

«In a sense the Trump doctrine could be regarded as having taken the baton from Obama and his retrenchment, though much more radically, embracing many US citizens' rejection of the elements of the bipartisan grand strategy: free trade, interventionism and the defence of democracy and freedoms.»

How will the new president's intentions and first measures turn out? «Such a strategy could draw on a classic spheres-of-influence-based realpolitik in keeping with an international climate that is witnessing the rise of nation states and nationalist movements», he replies. «He could also adopt a neo-realistic strategy such as offshore balancing, which consists in renouncing liberal interventionism but indirectly maintaining the United States' dominance in Europe, the Middle East and Asia by handing over regional leadership to other countries and intervening sporadically to steer the course of events and restore the balance in favour of the United States' interests.»

Will China go back to being the United States' major rival instead of Russia, as stated in the National Security Strategy of 2002? Will it be possible to avert a trade war and military race in Asia between the two rivals? Will the European Union become fragmented, opt for a sort of «Europe first» or dare to give impetus to the enhanced integration of the Europe the Europe of Defence and Security? How will Trump's team attempt to reconcile a new

entente with Russia with renegotiating the deal with Iran and overcoming the entrenched conflicts in Syria and Iraq?

Palacio examines the various options and alternatives and concludes in nearly all cases that «the most likely result would always be regional destabilisation».

In Asia, bearing in mind that Beijing will wait until after the 9th Chinese Communist Party Congress of autumn 2017 before it makes any important decisions, «The Trump administration can therefore be expected to adopt a maximalist position as a negotiating strategy and not put its threats into practice for several months at least». If so, the author points out, we are in for a long phase of mutual sounding out, position taking during which less dangerous intermediate options may appear.

«The very fact that principles and strategies are being questioned entails at least one potentially positive aspect», notes Palacio hopefully at the end of his analysis. «the White House's new approach could open up new future prospects as well as unblock a few dialogues in many directions.<sup>76</sup> A few examples are the United States' decision not to conduct «imperial wars», a better understanding with Russia and progress in pacifying conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, and a revision of the future mega-regional trade agreements (having rejected the TPP and TTIP) to achieve greater social protection.»

### Europe at a Crossroads

The internal and external challenges the European Union must face lead Shaun Riodan, a former diplomat and senior visiting fellow at the Clingendael Institute, to consider 2017 to be a decisive year that could mark the survival or fragmentation of the integration project, which completed its 60th year in March.

Among these challenges are the migratory crisis, terrorist attacks (a threat he considers to be exaggerated in the European Union, though not in Turkey), the menace of Russia in Ukraine and the Middle East, the economic slowdown, integration difficulties in the euro zone, Brexit as a reflection of citizens' disgruntlement with the elites, Britain's exit negotiations, the uncertainty generated by Trump's election victory and this year's elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany and possibly Italy too.

«A victory for Le Pen would ... be a more powerful earthquake than Trump's election. It would question the European Union's future in the very short term», he writes.

---

<sup>76</sup> Henry Kissinger suggests the possibility of positive progress in these negotiations. See GOLDBERG, J., *op. cit.*



To an extent domestic crises stem from the very creation of the project, Riodan claims. «They might be said to be encoded within the Union's very DNA.»

A fresh euro crisis was averted in 2016, but solutions to nearly all the problems have been left for the future: the German and Italian bank crisis, Greece's vulnerability, the future of the ECB's purchases of bonds and fiscal and bank union, at a standstill due to differences between France and Germany.

«The economic and financial crisis has made it clear that this two-speed Europe is neither provisional nor short term but rather a permanent situation», he adds. «The European Union institutions are not designed for this structural asymmetry.»

The only sustainable solution, he points out, involves divided the European Union into two groups: «a supranational and highly integrated euro zone (especially if France and Germany manage to reach an agreement on an economic and banking union) and a less integrated peripheral zone.»

He acknowledges that the agreement with Turkey on migrants and refugees worked in 2016, but warns that the Turks could denounce it due to the European Union's non-compliance. «Turkey plays a key role in the European strategy for handling the migratory crisis. However, relations between Europe and Turkey deteriorated throughout 2016 and could go from bad to worse in 2017.»

The rapprochement between Turkey and Russia in Syria, the Brexit referendum and the failed coup of July 2016 complicate any attempted solution and have serious implications for NATO and European security. As he explains, it will be difficult to improve relations «while Erdogan is president» and continues with his crackdown.

«Russia continues to be the European Union's biggest geopolitical threat in 2017», he states. After describing in detail Moscow's efforts to have the sanctions lifted and weaken Europe, he points out that the divides and disagreements within the Union, exacerbated by Trump's attitude towards Putin, make it very difficult to maintain a common European front against Russia in 2017.

After surveying the causes and consequences of the hard Brexit announced by Prime Minister Theresa May on 17 January, he underlines the strategic implications for constitutional stability and British security as well as for the security of the rest of the European Union, which will find its diplomatic, economic, intelligence, commercial and budgetary capabilities undermined. It will hard to offset this with new bilateral agreements. «Europe is not going to break up in 2017 (unless Le Pen wins the presidential elections in France), he concludes, «but it will become increasingly weaker and less influential.»

### The Middle East in 2016: Trends and Perspectives in 2017

Colonel José María Martínez Ferrer begins his analysis of the Middle East situation in 2017 by describing a context characterised by states with very weak structures, regional powers at odds with each other, a deep Sunni-Shia divide, and major changes in the relative influence in the region of the major powers and of economic factors, especially oil.

A core feature of the current geopolitical situation in the Middle East, he states, «is the strategic competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which reached an extreme in 2016 and has polarised the action of other minor actors». The main cause of «Saudi Arabia's new assertiveness», according to this author, is «the United States' perceived attitude of appeasement and naivete towards Iran's growing aggressiveness» in Syria and Yemen, and changes of attitude on the part of the Saudi Arabian rulers.

The author describes the Russian intervention in Syria as «the final coupe de grace dealt to the wavering 'old order'» in the Middle East. «Putin left Washington completely out of the picture in Aleppo and in the subsequent ceasefire in December 2016, making the United States appear powerless to change the events on the ground.»

Nevertheless, he warns that the privileged position Russia has carved out for itself could very soon be limited by its disagreements with regional allies and by the cost of a long-drawn-out intervention. Viewed from Washington's perspective, «shoring up the regional order as it exists before 2011, even if a feasible mission (and it is not clear whether it is), would require an investment ... that it is not prepared to carry out in a region that is no longer regarded as such a priority for America's global interests».

According to the author, the Trump administration's three goals in the area – the end of Daesh/Islamic State, closer relations with Israel and containment of Iran – point to «selective» involvement and amount to «unwittingly adopting the same stance as Obama».

«We may witness a sporadic rise in US counterterrorism military operations to defeat Daesh/Islamic State and are likely to see America take a more assertive stance to the "containment" of Iran, with an increase or at least the maintenance of the sanctions currently in force, irrespective of whether the nuclear deal of July 2015 is formally repealed.»

After surveying in detail the situation in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, he foresees a long campaign beset with uncertainty against Daesh/ Islamic State in Raqqa owing to «the hostility between the main allies of the US-led coalition on the ground». With al-Bab yet to be captured at the time of writing, in January 2017, «everything points to a subsequent clash between Turkey and the Kurdish forces West of the Euphrates, which will undoubtedly have repercussions on the Raqqa campaign and force

the United States to choose between two allies at odds with each other.» And «as for Daesh/Islamic State, in 2016 it was fiercely attacked and lost some territory, mainly in the north, but it still retains offensive operational capabilities», he writes. Though the possible rapport between the new Trump administration and Putin's Russia may help revive the negotiations. «2017 has thus begun with a new cycle of negotiations, just as 2016 did, but with different players on the Syrian chessboard in very different relative positions to those of a year ago and without solutions having been found to any of the many overlapping disputes that continue to ravage war-torn Syria», he concludes.

The prospects are somewhat brighter in Iraq, where the offensive against Mosul could end in the first quarter of 2017 with the total recapture of the territories occupied by al-Baghdadi's «caliphate» in 2014. However, after the defeat of the Islamic State/Daesh (which will most likely simply adapt to the situation and go back to being a terrorist and insurgent movement again as it was before 2014), the task will remain of establishing an internal structure for Iraq.

### **The Sahel, a Growing Arc of Instability**

The first difficulty one comes across when attempting to diagnose the situation in the Sahel is the many actors present in the region, where, according to Colonel Ignacio Cobo, national governments have dealings and compete with «a toxic cocktail of armed groups, insurgent movements, ethnic militias, smugglers and traffickers and religious extremists».

To shed light on this complex labyrinth, the author sets the present and future of jihadist extremism in the Sahel Para in the region's complex historical, demographic, social, ethnic, economic and military context, ravaged in recent years by corruption, illegal trafficking and the absence of state authority.

«Of all these illegal goods, the most profitable continue to be drugs, chiefly cocaine from Latin America, which generates income of approximately 800 million dollars», he writes. If we add to this arms and people trafficking, we have «a primary source of funding for the jihadist groups ... and their criminal activities», he points out.

The author points out that, in military terms, the jihadist groups' situation on the ground is much less advantageous than a year ago – none has retained significant territory under its control since the fall of Sirte – but «this does not mean to say that the terrorist not retained the ability to inflict significant material damage and loss of lives». Nor does he rule out the possibility they may recover from their defeats and make a comeback with renewed strength or find new spaces for jihad given the resilience they have shown in Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Syria.

Just as or more important than national governments' ability to keep up effective antiterrorist campaigns, he adds, is their unequal commitment to seriously addressing the threat. Indeed, he attributes the progress made in 2016 to a significant improvement in regional cooperation.

After a detailed analysis of developments in the fight against Boko Haram, AQIM and Daesh in the Maghreb and the Sahel, he warns that some groups which had deserted AQIM to join Daesh have started to return to the fold. After all, «al-Qaeda reached the Sahel long before Daesh did and will remain long after it has left».

The author examines the situation in Algeria and makes a critical assessment of the French intervention (Operation Barkhane) in Mali, ending by pointing out five trends in international jihadism which, in his opinion, will condition the fight against radicalisation in the Sahel:

- As pressure on the various groups increases and their capabilities are curbed, they will seek new operational alliances and synergies.
- Jihadist organisations will react to their leader's military failures and weakened prestige by attempting to broaden their scope of action and stage strategic actions.
- A third trend will be to intensify relations between local jihadist franchises and their international parent organisations.
- The Sahel, along with Afghanistan, could become the only region where jihadists retain freedom of action.
- The fifth and last trend is the prevalence of al-Qaeda over Daesh in jihadist narrative.

### Latin America: Unknown Quantities and Uncertainties

2016 was another negative year for Latin America owing to the fall in the price of commodities and the crises in Venezuela and Brazil. In its end-of-year survey, the news agency EFE predicted a slight improvement in 2017 despite the uncertain global outlook due to the protectionism of the new US administration and the slow recovery of the advanced economies.

According to ECLAC, the region's economy shrank by a further 1.1 percent and its exports fell by around five percent for the fourth year running. This figure was almost double in Venezuela (–9.7 percent), the worst hit country, followed by Brazil (–3.6 percent), Ecuador (–2 percent) and Argentina (–2 percent). The most critical cases were undoubtedly Venezuela – owing to plummeting oil prices, its model of state intervention and the destruction of private initiative – and Brazil, on account of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. The advent to the presidency of Argentina of Mauricio Macri marked an about-turn in the country's domestic and foreign policy, but efforts to normalise international relations have come up against a weighty legacy of internal divides, poverty and expanding drug trafficking.

Cuba mourned the death of Fidel Castro shortly before 2016, an eventful year that witnessed the visit of Pope Francis to the island in February and in March the first visit of an American president since the triumph of the revolution.

«The European Union and its member states' agreements with Peru and Colombia are proof that the European Union remains determined to play a prominent role in Latin America», state professors Díaz Barrado and Morán Blanco in their chapter on Latin America. «To this should be added the recent agreement signed with Cuba in December 2016, which not only puts an end to the Common Position of 1996 which caused so many «headaches» in relations but above all normalises what are essential relations for the European Union in both economic and trade terms».

In Latin America 2016 began with the arrest of the Mexican drug trafficker Joaquín *El Chapo* Guzmán, following his spectacular escape six months earlier. In October Hurricane Matthew caused more than 540 deaths in Haiti alone. The year ended with the major celebration of Ibero-American solidarity with the signing of the peace deal in Colombia on 24 November by President Juan Manuel Santos and the leader of the FARC, Rodrigo Londoño. This solidarity was further reinforced by the election of a Portuguese, former prime minister António Guterres, as new UN secretary general.

Díaz Barrado and Morán Blanco note that the main integration processes are coming up against the wall of nationalism and divergent expectations.

The Pacific Alliance, they write, emerged as a scheme that stood a good chance of success; Unasur is at something of a standstill; and Mercosur and the Andean Community are experiencing grave internal crises.

«We are starting to glimpse an end to some of the conflicts that have blighted the continent, which once again is seeking to settle disputes using peaceful means», they add. «The advent of Donald Trump to the US presidency brings many unknown factors, but the re-establishment of Cuban-US relations marks a significant step forward nonetheless».

They do not glimpse a light at the end of the Venezuelan tunnel, are confident that the peace deal between the Colombian government and the FARC will be complied with and extended to the ELN (talks were beginning at Quito on 7 February) and although it has not settled the historical quarrel between Chile and Bolivia, they consider that the decision to take their territorial differences to the International Court of Justice in The Hague to be an important step forward – however much it has complicated bilateral relations.

«The only solution involves dialogue and cooperation leading to a peace based on shared sovereignty and Bolivia's access to the sea», they conclude.

## Chapter one

### United States: From Obama to Trump. A strategic U-turn

Vicente Palacio de Oteyza

#### Abstract

The transition from the Obama Administration to Donald Trump's presidency heralds dramatic changes in the fundamentals underpinning US foreign and security policy, while potentially marking a 180-degree strategic shift. Over the past eight years, the so-called Obama doctrine has relied on pragmatism, consequentialism, non-interventionism and multilateralism. Even though the keystone of the Trump doctrine, the principle of America first, would appear to suggest a shift back to isolationism, it seems likely that the US government will seek a new «world carve-up» through bilateral grand bargains (big deals) with Russia and China, regional powers, emerging economies and possibly other European governments. Trump's protectionist and nationalist impulses will push the world towards de-globalisation and fragmentation, while causing significant damage to regional integration processes in Europe, Latin America and the Pacific. We should also expect multiple political and economic tensions mount among the US government, multilateral organisations (UN, NATO) and other governments and societies. However, a rethinking of US principles and strategies could also open a window of opportunity for new dialogues with China, Russia or the Middle East. At the beginning of 2017, it remains to be seen whether the Trump administration will be able to carry out his programme; whether resistance, domestic and foreign, will block his initiatives; and whether Trump's policies will be catastrophic for the world and the US's national interests.

**Keywords**

Obama, Trump, Putin, United States, Russia, China, Europe, Brexit, Obama doctrine, Trump doctrine, grand strategy, multilateralism, isolationist.



## Introduction: The United States under transformation

This chapter was written only days after the new president Donald Trump took up office on 20 January 2017 and the new administration got off the ground. As the United States is currently experiencing a period of transition, this survey does not set out to conduct a detailed analysis of the country's strategic developments over the past year, just as nor is it possible to examine in detail the possible changes indicated by the US leader's first movements.

Instead, the aim is to carry out a task that is at once much more modest and considerably vaster: after defining the main characteristics of the previous period, we will go on to outline the main features of the current transitional period, identify the Trump administration's new priorities and trace those that will possibly be continued and those that will be changed, ending with a provisional assessment of their possible impact and likelihood of success. The idea is therefore to provide an overview of the United States' new strategic focus, which already seems to be pointing to a 180-degree shift in perspective.

Viewed from the limited perspective of the short time that has elapsed, Barack Obama's presidency (2009-16) strikes one as a period of turmoil, both at home and in international relations. In the domestic sphere, the project of national renewal Obama called for to leave behind George W. Bush's age of terror and the economic and social chaos triggered by the financial crash in late 2008 gradually lost impetus and became almost unrecognisable. The United States soon recovered from the Great Recession by introducing fiscal and monetary stimuli, with the Federal Reserve playing a major role. And so, by the end of Obama's second term, the economy had grown by more than three percent in 2016 – the figure is expected to fall to around 2.5 percent in 2017 – and unemployment had dropped to less than five percent following the initial years of panic and the loss of millions of jobs. However, the final outcome is uncertain. The recovery figures in themselves are deceptive: the doubts, disgruntlement and anger of the middle class, especially in the Midwest, who have been hard hit by deindustrialisation and the crisis, are giving shape to a society and a country that are completely polarised in all respects with an unprecedentedly high level of inequality.<sup>1</sup>

Domestic difficulties have inevitably weakened the United States' international position in a period that is troubled enough as it is. The constant feature of the Obama administration was a prudent attitude consisting of weighing up the consequences of possible military interventions overseas

---

<sup>1</sup> STIGLITZ, Joseph E, *La gran brecha*, Taurus, Barcelona, 2015; BLINDER, Alan S, *After the Music Stopped: The Financial Crisis, the Response, and the Work Ahead*, Penguin Books, New York, 2014.

and supporting multilateralism. His tenure was marked by the democratic uprisings of the «Arab Spring» and the ensuing chaos and extremist violence in the Middle East, especially the war in Syria; competition with a «revisionist» Russia that seeks a significant place in the international order; and tension with China. But it also chalked up major diplomatic successes. One is the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Cuba after December 2014, which put an end to the Cold War and ushered in a new era in relations with Latin America. Another that is even more important is the signing of the nuclear deal with Iran under the auspices of the United Nations in June 2015, leading to greater regional security and paving the way for a new type of cooperation. As for global governance, there were both positive and negative developments. On the one hand, President Obama's leadership, together with that of his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, proved essential in reaching the Paris climate change agreement in 2015. But on the other, the huge trade deals promoted by the Obama administration, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), have ended up floundering owing to lack of domestic support both from Congress and from a public opinion opposed to the possible effects of these treaties in terms of job losses and more precarious working conditions. The trade protectionism displayed by the new Trump administration is a direct reflection of the opposition of the majority.

Following Trump's election win on 8 November 2016, the guiding principles of the United States' overseas action could undergo very major changes. The United States is still engaged in the lengthy process of redefining its political system, society, economy and relations with the world. At the start of 2017, everything seems to indicate that the new president will attempt to press ahead with the foreign-policy and security proposals voiced during the election campaign, which can be summed up by the catchphrase «America first». Trump will attempt to win the support of the Republican majority in the legislature – both houses – and quickly secure a conservative hegemony in the Supreme Court by nominating a new judge, Neil Gorsuch. We are thus witnessing a period in which various counterweights will be tested out, at least until the mid-term elections to the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2018. Some are domestic: separation of powers and checks and balances, envisaged in the Constitution. Other are external and will involve responses to the major powers (China, Russia, India, Brazil, the European Union), regional powers (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia), various trade blocs and regional organisations (the Atlantic Alliance [NATO], the Association of South East Asian Nations [ASEAN], the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States [CELAC], the Pacific Alliance and the Union of South American States [UNASUR], among others. The initiatives and changes in foreign and security policy will gradually give shape to a new strategy.

## **The legacy of the Obama administration in foreign policy and security: A brief survey**

### *Obama doctrine versus grand strategy*

The string of foreign-policy and security decisions and actions taken throughout President Obama's two terms make up what is known as the «Obama doctrine». To understand how it contrasts with the ideas of the new Trump administration, it is helpful to examine the guiding principles that have steered the course taken by the United States in the past eight years and have underpinned two consecutive security strategies embodying a different vision.<sup>2</sup> Obama aimed to put an end to the classic dichotomy between idealism and realism and to give preference to a pragmatism based on values: in this respect, his doctrine is more a practical guide than a «grand strategy».<sup>3</sup> Nor does Obama's foreign and security policy fit in entirely with any of the four «traditions» of US foreign policy: Jeffersonian (isolationist), Hamiltonian (global trade), Jacksonian (militarist-populist) or Wilsonian (liberal internationalist).<sup>4</sup> It is more an attempt to establish a new foreign policy tradition adapted to the twenty-first century, at times inspired by Jefferson's moral excellence, at other times on Wilson's internationalism, and on occasions even verging on realpolitik. Two novel elements help illustrate this point.

One is the vision of the significance of the United States, its position in the world and its rightful role. Ultimately, the aim is to avoid a constant omnipresence in all international affairs as in traditional hegemony and not measure real power exclusively in terms of «hard power», military and economic. Obama realised that the world power readjustment begun in the first decade of the twenty-first century with the rise of the emerging economies, the changes in vast regions of the world and interdependence as a result of globalisation would subsequently condition the United States' room for manoeuvre. The realisation that nobody dominates the world and that the United States, despite being «the most powerful nation on Earth», cannot do it all by itself, changes the terms of the rise-decline debate. The United States has sufficient resources to reinvent itself again, lead technological changes and export its model of prosperity and freedoms.

A second element of his doctrine, as mentioned earlier, is multilateralism as a means of settling conflicts and addressing global governance issues:

---

<sup>2</sup> THE WHITE HOUSE, «The National Security Strategy», Washington D. C. May 2010/ February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See the extensive interview with President Obama by GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, «The Obama Doctrine. How he's shaped the world», *The Atlantic*, April 2016. Obama defines himself: «I am very much the internationalist».

<sup>4</sup> RUSSELL MEAD, Walter, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*; Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2001.

security, the financial system, trade and climate change. This vision rejects unilateralism and the abuse of force and wars as means of forcing changes of regime, recommends a great deal of prudence in settling humanitarian crises and ultimately narrows the possibilities of nation building, as has been seen in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Any intervention requires very well-defined objectives and extensive multilateral support, or at least a coalition, and within the legal framework of the United Nations. This basic principle of prudence, which embodies a scrupulous consequentialist approach to the impacts of policies translated into a certain retrenchment, contrasts with the interventionism of the George W. Bush administration which had led the United States up a blind alley in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>5</sup> In particular, a central feature of Obama's strategy seems to have been the lesson learned from the intervention in Iraq and the defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime with respect to both the manner in which it was conducted – without an objective reason (the chemical weapons) or legal cover (without the backing of the United Nations Security Council) – and its negative consequences: more than a million victims, destabilisation of the Middle East, worsening of the Sunni-Shia divide and an aggregate cost of nearly two trillion dollars for the United States.

In practice, however, multilateralism failed to reap the expected results. Throughout the previous period the United States experienced the «strategic solitude» of having to act in rapidly-changing situations, with the rules yet to be rewritten, in finances, global trade – TPP and TTIP – and cyberwarfare and climate change. The financial crash triggered by subprime mortgages at the end of 2008 caused the crisis in American capitalism to spread to the most developed economies (especially in Europe), sparking a global recession and even endangering the dollar as the global reserve currency. After the Wall Street shakeup and the period of adjustment in the global financial markets, a series of troubles hindered the United States' progressive adaptation to an international landscape that was calling for cooperation. Amid the turmoil, the other major G20 economies did not collaborate enough to progress towards a global economic governance. The withdrawal – never complete – from Iraq and Afghanistan was followed by the crackdown on al-Qaeda and Bin Laden, the rise and fall of the democratic uprisings in the Middle East, the serious illness of the eurozone, the destruction of Libya and Syria and the refugee crisis, mounting tension with Russia over Ukraine and China's financial turmoil. From mid-2014 onwards, during the final part of his second term, the president, now a «lame duck» in both Houses, acted on several fronts single-handedly without the support of Congress: Iran, Syria, Cuba, combating climate change and launching a new energy model, while also promoting closer relations with Latin America and attempting to strengthen

---

<sup>5</sup> President Obama himself summed it up as the principle of «Don't do stupid shit». See GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, *op. cit.*

the «pivot» to Asia with respect to China, which culminated in the signing of the TPP with 11 other Pacific partners.<sup>6</sup>

The Obama doctrine has been criticised from two extremes. From a certain neo-Marxist perspective, it is considered to be merely a version, albeit somewhat more sophisticated, of the old grand strategy of dominance: the United States retains its hard power – military and economic – intact and its presence in all five continents and continues to pursue neoliberal policies linked to social inequality and even conduct contrary to international law such as the arguably illegal killings with drones.<sup>7</sup> From another, chiefly realistic, perspective, Obama is criticised for lacking a proper strategy; his doctrine is seen to amount to ceasing to think in strategic terms, embodied by a reactive policy with short- and medium-term results, which foregoes occupying the United States' inevitably rightful place, neglects building an international order and leaves spaces that can be filled by others.<sup>8</sup> But perhaps none of these criticisms is a fair reflection of the doctrine. In fact, it did not aspire to underpin any grand strategy along the lines of traditional US «exceptionalism». In contrast to the strategic approaches of realists, liberals and «hawks» in Congress, think-tanks or academia, the Obama doctrine does not conform strictly to any canon. It is a clearly pragmatic but not a «realistic» approach, liberal but not interventionist. Ultimately, it is a «make do with what you've got», attempting to keep troublemakers and free-riders at bay.<sup>9</sup> One of the catchphrases that might be used to sum up this «small grand strategy» is the principle of «leading from behind»,<sup>10</sup> coined following the intervention in Libya in 2011. According to this principle, the new strategy of the United States would consist in pulling the strings from the back seat, getting others to act (in this case the United Kingdom and France), sharing the burden and minimising material and political costs.

---

<sup>6</sup> INDYK, Martin S., LIEBERTHAL, Kenneth G., and O'HANLON, Michael E., «Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy», The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C. 2012; O'HANLON «Obama, The Carpenter», The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2015.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Noam Chomsky in «The Legacy of the Obama Administration: An Interview With Noam Chomsky», *Thursday*, 2 June 2016, at <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/36260-a-mixed-story-ranging-from-criminal-to-moderate-improvement-noam-chomsky-on-obama-s-legacy>

<sup>8</sup> To cite only a few works from among the countless literature, see in particular Henry Kissinger in GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, «The lessons of Henry Kissinger», *The Atlantic*, December 2016; BREMMER, Ian, *Superpower: Three Choices for America's Role in the World*, Portfolio (Penguin Group), 2015; DUECK, Colin, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> LIZZA, Ryan, «The Consequentialist. How the Arab Spring remade Obama's Foreign Policy», *The New Yorker*, 2 May 2011. As pointed out by James Mann in *The Obamians*, Obama's main strategy has been the same. Robert Gates would later state that his government was the most centralised and controlling since Nixon's day. See MANN, James, *The Obamians: The Struggle Inside the White House to Redefine American Power*, Viking, New York, 2012.

Only in the event of an «existential threat» such as al-Qaeda and Bin Laden would the United States use military force, reserving the right to act alone; otherwise diplomacy takes precedence over the option of using force and the United States shares the burden with allies, preferably under the umbrella of the United Nations (as was the case in Libya in 2011, Syria in 2013, Ukraine in 2013 and Iran in 2015).<sup>11</sup>

### **The good and the bad of a «small grand strategy»**

A very brief survey of a few specific cases can help illustrate the «small grand strategy» underlying the Obama doctrine, the complexities of his approach, the substantial repercussions it has had, and the good and bad features.

Let us first take relations with Europe. The transatlantic relationship with the European allies continued much in the same way as with previous administrations in the sense that it is central to the security and prosperity of the United States and the world. Here the Obama doctrine dictated that Europe should continue to be a fundamental part of the multilateral «liberal order» led by Washington since the end of the Second World War. Obama's Washington viewed the European Union and its members in two ways. One, as appendages of NATO even though the Europeans governments failed to meet the commitment to up their defence expenditure to two percent. Whereas political relations with the European Union were low-profile, relations via NATO did not change; if anything, their profile was raised in response to the Russian threat. The Atlantic Alliance summit in Warsaw in July 2016 was particularly important in establishing the United States and the European partners' mutual defence commitment vis-à-vis the perceived threat of Moscow along the eastern flank of Poland and the Baltic countries. The other main aspect of America's relations with Europe was economic: it viewed the European countries as partners in a major trade bloc through the TTIP, which ended up losing political momentum. For political relations with Europe were generally poor and often conducted bilaterally via London, Berlin or Paris. Nevertheless, when the crisis in Europe reached its worst point, between 2010 and 2012, the treasury secretary Tim Geithner and the secretary of state Hillary Clinton travelled to the Old Continent to continue to offer their firm support for the euro and the European project. Obama even spoke out against Brexit later and called on the United Kingdom's prime minister, David Cameron, to remain

---

<sup>11</sup> See the retrospective analysis by secretary of state John Kerry on the US strategy during Obama's presidency: KERRY, John, «Remarks at the U.S. Institute of Peace's Passing the Baton 2017: America's Role in the World», U.S. Institute of Peace, 10 January 2017. Along the same lines as former secretary of state Madeleine Albright and the tradition of the Democrats, Kerry maintains that the United States is «an indispensable nation», if not the only one. For an overview of the Obama period, see PALACIO, Vicente, *Después de Obama. Estados Unidos en tierra de nadie*, Ed. La Catarata, Madrid, 2016.

in the European Union. The European Union, however, was engrossed in its own spate of crises – monetary, fiscal, migratory – and paid no heed to the substantial domestic changes that were occurring in American society and have ended up questioning the White House's transatlantic commitment. As a result, the United States' strategic interest in Europe has dwindled, and the fracturing of the European Union is threatening to become a global instability factor.

We will now examine the Obama administration's relations with Russia. The attempt to «reset» relations and establish a framework for global collaboration did not reap any significant results except for the progress made in reducing the nuclear arsenal, preventing proliferation and combating terrorism. But during the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014, instead of threatening to use force Washington responded with a diplomatic offensive and by imposing sanctions together with the European Union, weakening Russia's economy and blazing a trail in the only possible direction. A year later the conflict was stabilised at least at the Minsk I and Minsk II summits along the lines of reorganising the country's territory and economy. Obama rightly understood that Ukraine (like Georgia) is part of Russia's vital interests and that Moscow enjoys an advantage in that area, and therefore the United States' best policy is to reach progressive agreements by means other than force. President Vladimir Putin knew that the United States would never go to war over Ukraine, and Obama knew that Putin would not overstep certain limits. Here the Obama doctrine manifested itself in «realistic» action, seeking a neutral status for an independent Ukraine, but expressly outside the NATO umbrella. Washington let its European partners and the parties to the dispute take the leading role: Chancellor Merkel and presidents Hollande, Putin and Poroshenko. The short-term result has proved moderately acceptable: an escalation of violence, which would have been damaging to both parties, was avoided; the foundations were laid for an agreement; and no new fronts were opened for the United States in an area where its vital security interests are not at stake. A new medium- and long-term strategy with respect to Russia has yet to be defined, however.

Thirdly, in relation to China, Obama began the so-called «Asian pivot» aimed at increasing the United States' presence and influence in the most prosperous region in the twenty-first century. It was implemented in two ways: first, by seeking China's engagement in global issues, cybersecurity and climate change; second, by bringing together another 11 Pacific countries in a free trade area (TPP) that does not include China, and strengthening its ties with ASEAN. The White House believed that China, involved in the process of building its neighbourhood, is not a vital threat to the United States in the way that the Soviet Union once was and that therefore both powers can cooperate in the framework of China's «peaceful rise». However, the difficulties the TPP has run into in the United States, eventually coming to a standstill, coupled with the crisis in the South China Sea, where China



has been building artificial islands for military use and threatening freedom of navigation, has called the Obama administration's strategy into question.

In the Middle East, the case of Syria – where there is a civil war combined with a regional war, with half a million dead and 12 million displaced – is one of the most controversial examples of Obama's strategy. In the end, the president abandoned his «red lines» to intervene militarily in the summer of 2013, after Assad's regime used chemical weapons on the outskirts of Damascus. But irrespective of whether he made the right decision, the case of Syria raises the vital question of the United States' ability to change the course of events in the absence of sufficient collaboration from Russia and regional actors like Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran.<sup>12</sup> Obama's entire post-2013 strategy consisted precisely in paving the way for such collaboration. Once again, the Obama doctrine kept within the margins of possibility: defeating the Islamic State (ISIS) and the transition – as opposed to forced change, which would also have had destructive and equally destabilising consequences – of the Syrian regime to a future without Assad involve a much vaster and more complex task that entails building stakeholders' confidence, fostering their initiatives and reshaping regional alliances in a multilateral United Nations framework which has progressively mapped out the route of the Geneva Conferences through various resolutions. With respect to the dilemmas of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, shortly before his mandate ended, President Obama reasserted a few guidelines of his national security policy:<sup>13</sup> to maintain the military and technological superiority of the United States army, but learning from the past and avoiding trapping the United States on the ground; not to act as nation builder in regions where terrorism and chaos prevail; to seek out wide-ranging regional coalitions; and to step up the training of local troops (supported by the Special Forces).

The doctrine has huge implications in the field of global governance. Suffice it to mention a few elements that illustrate the multilateral approach of the «doctrine». One is the abovementioned strengthening of the liberal economic order through megadeals – TPP and TTIP – with which Washington aimed to position itself at the centre of a vast web of trade relations with Asia and Europe. Another novel and central feature is the introduction of the climate agenda as a touchstone of several policies all at once – economic, energy, national security. This marked an about-turn with respect to the immediate past – the oil economy and geopolitics enshrined by George W. Bush and the neocons – and steered the US economy in a different direction. The agreement reached at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21) in December 2015 committed the United States to turning to renewable energies and fighting global warming, giving rise to new geopolitical dynamics –

<sup>12</sup> KERRY, John, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> OBAMA, Barack, «Discourse on National Security. Remarks by the President on the Administration's Approach to Counterterrorism», MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, December 2016.

derived from the «curse of the black gold» – and new forms of US leadership. A third element of governance was fighting against a «vital threat», nuclear proliferation – an undertaking that earned the president the Nobel Peace Prize – by updating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty inherited to an extent from the Cold War. Four consecutive conferences on nuclear security (2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016) created a framework for multilateral cooperation on reducing nuclear arsenals, eliminating enriched uranium and preventing terrorists from using nuclear material. Similar achievements are the abovementioned deal with Tehran steering Iran's nuclear programme towards civil uses; the elimination of chemical weapons in Libya and Syria; and the initiatives for regional denuclearisation and the test ban treaty in relation to North Korea. In fourth place, in contrast to the foregoing, the doctrine never considered ISIS's Islamic terrorism to be the principal threat to the United States but rather a «potential threat», a relatively manageable, controllable phenomenon that needed to be put into perspective and coldly analysed away from the media spotlight. Not until he was well into his term in office, after the Iraqi city of Mosul fell into the hands of the Islamic State in June 2014 and the San Bernardino (California) killings took place in December 2015, did Obama make an about-turn in his policy, launching selective air strikes in Iraq and Syria. The doctrine may have underestimated the impact of ISIS – actually a reincarnation of al-Qaeda – but it took the right approach of global counterterrorism (not a «war») that requires coordinated measures with Europe, Russia, China and the regional actors on several fronts (financial, intelligence, alliances). A further element of the strategy is progress towards a new international cybersecurity regime, especially with China: after various clashes with China (when Chinese internauts hacked Google and the US government, mutual industrial and cyber espionage), in September 2016 Obama and China's President Xi Jinping met in Washington to sign several agreements on cybersecurity, cyberespionage and cybercrime, which have yet to be developed. Russia is emerging as another front in this field, especially following the cyberattacks supposedly instigated by the Kremlin during the election campaign of 2016 to damage the Democratic Party and its candidate Hillary Clinton.

### **The new Trump administration: the beginning of a 180-degree strategic shift**

#### ***The first components of a Trump Doctrine. «America first» and the new world carve-up***

2017, which began with Donald Trump as US president, is characterised by a great deal of uncertainty in the world economy and geopolitics, with outbreaks of conflict of varying intensity and major destabilising potential in areas ranging from Afghanistan to Syria and from Sudan to Yemen.<sup>14</sup> In

<sup>14</sup> GUÉHENNO, Jean-Marie, «Ten conflicts to watch», *Foreign Policy*, 5 January 2017, in <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/05/10-conflicts-to-watch-in-2017/>.

the past eight years, the leading world power has undergone changes in all aspects, paving the way for the advent to the White House of a populist present who could ultimately engineer a 180-degree shift in the United States' position. In what appears to be a swing of the pendulum, the approach has completely changed from the Obama administration to the new President Trump's «make America great again» and could signify a strategic shift:<sup>15</sup> by and large, his electoral commitments in foreign-policy and security matters now range from trade protectionism (tariffs on Chinese and Mexican products), isolationism and rejection of the major trade deals (TPP, NAFTA; TTIP) to occasional adventurism (against ISIS) or revisionism of the international organisations (NATO, the United Nations).

What might be called the new Trump doctrine amounts to an all-out questioning not only of his predecessor's doctrine but more generally of the cornerstones of the liberal order created after the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> According to this order, the United States acted as guarantor of liberal democracy in the so-called free world – as opposed to the Soviet Union – in a system of economic relations and multilateral institutions (Bretton Woods) operating under US leadership and hegemony (United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank GATT-WTO). Although in practice this system did not live up to expectations, the so-called «post-war liberal order» has survived the fall of the Berlin wall, the disappearance of the communist bloc and the subsequent crises of global capitalism to the present day. Now, some argue, this order is coming to an end owing to its many flaws.<sup>17</sup> In the country that guarantees this order, the United States, internal flaws, both social and institutional, exacerbated by the financial crisis, have triggered the explosion of antiliberal populism among middle classes who have come off worse the wear from globalisation.<sup>18</sup> The gap between much of the American public and the elites (the establishment) with respect to economic policies and financial clout also extends to their perception of foreign and

<sup>15</sup> DOUTHAT, Ross, «From Obama to Trump», *The New York Times*, 27 February 2016.

<sup>16</sup> See Henry Kissinger, in GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, «The lessons...» *op. cit.* For Kissinger, a proper strategy should clearly answer the questions of what it is we want to prevent, whether alone or accompanied. Even so, this seems easier to do in a relatively stable context like the Cold War era than at a time of systemic changes such as the Obama period and subsequently.

<sup>17</sup> Among the host of liberal analysts who share this diagnosis see FUKUYAMA, Francis, «The Meaning of the 2016 Election», *Foreign Affairs*, 17 June 2016; NIBBLET, Robin, «Liberalism in retreat. The Demise of a dream», *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2017; and NYE, Joseph, «The idea of Liberalism», *ibid.* GARTON ASH, Timothy, «Ante la ola de populismo nacionalista», *El País*, 13 November 2016, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/11/actualidad/1478878912\\_729037.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/11/actualidad/1478878912_729037.html).

<sup>18</sup> See PORTER, Eduardo, «On Trade, Angry Voters Have a Point», *The New York Times*, 3 March 2016. See the special November/December 2016 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, «The Power of Populism», especially Fareed Zakaria's article «Populism on the March. Why the West Is in Trouble». See also RUSSELL MEAD, Walter, «The Jacksonian Revolt; American Populism and the Liberal Order» 20, January 2017.

security policy.<sup>19</sup> In a sense the Trump doctrine could be regarded as having taken the baton from Obama and his retrenchment, though much more radically, embracing many US citizens' rejection of the elements of the bipartisan grand strategy: free trade, interventionism and the defence of democracy and freedoms.

Donald Trump's approach can be summed up by the principle of «America first». This principle, which he reaffirmed at his inauguration ceremony on 20 January 2017 and during the first weeks of his term in office, goes back to United States' isolationist stance of the interwar period<sup>20</sup> following the stock market crash of 1929, the 1930s marked by economic protectionism, nationalism and the rise of fascist movements. In this sense Trump's victory, coupled with the UK's Brexit vote and the rise of anti-European populist movements in France (Marine Le Pen), the Netherlands (Geert Wilders) and Hungary (Viktor Orbán), are unmistakeable signs of neo-fascism.<sup>21</sup>

According to his vision, the United States' economy and power are waning with respect to those of its competitors owing in part to trade deficits (chiefly with China and Mexico) and in part to the disproportionate costs of guaranteeing the security of its NATO and Pacific allies, and of military intervention in the Middle East. By putting «America first», the United States aims to give priority to its own interests defined strictly in a national sense, is re-examining the multilateral order and its institutions, and is accentuating its retrenchment without heeding the consequences in terms of loss of influence and prestige or hostile reactions from other actors. Now its foreign policy is underpinned by a series of bilateral grand bargains with China, Russia and the rest of the powers, based on personalistic leadership that may possibly entail resorting to ad hoc coalitions for specific military interventions – only those deemed necessary to defending the United States' vital interests. «America first» can thus be viewed as the alter ego of the traditional «indispensable nation». However it is important to stress that in no way are we dealing with an «introspective» movement in the sense of a withdrawal to moral values and perfecting of the US institutions – such considerations are completely absent from Trump's approach.<sup>22</sup> On

<sup>19</sup> GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> The catchphrase «America first» was made popular in the United States by Charles Lindbergh, who opposed trade deals and was in favour of taking economic reprisals against those who damaged the United States' interests.

<sup>21</sup> KAGAN, Robert, «This is how fascism comes to America», *The Washington Post*, 18 May 2016, in [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-is-how-fascism-comes-to-america/2016/05/17/c4e32c58-1c47-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.bba2136a1378](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-is-how-fascism-comes-to-america/2016/05/17/c4e32c58-1c47-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html?utm_term=.bba2136a1378). For an analysis that does not consider movements of this type «fascist» as such but contrary to multiculturalism and civil rights and freedoms, see BERMAN, Sheri, «Populism Is Not Fascism. But It Could Be a Harbinger» in the same *Foreign Affairs* special issue on populism.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Trump's first steps as president suggest there will be many quarrels about constitutional rights – freedom of expression, rights of minorities – and a weakening of the liberal institutions.

the contrary, his isolationism goes hand-in-hand with a Jacksonian-militarist brand of populism.<sup>23</sup> The true objective of this budding strategy seems to be to establish new game rules that are more favourable to the United States and implemented through what we might call a new «world carve-up» resulting from these bilateral bargains.<sup>24</sup>

At the start of 2017, it is still early days to predict what will become of the new president's intentions and how they will be shaped into a strategy. Such a strategy could draw on a classic spheres-of-influence-based realpolitik in keeping with an international climate that is witnessing the rise of nation states and nationalist movements. He could also adopt a neo-realistic strategy such as offshore balancing, which consists in renouncing liberal interventionism but indirectly maintaining the United States' dominance in Europe, the Middle East and Asia by handing over regional leadership to other countries and intervening sporadically to steer the course of events and restore the balance in favour of the United States' interests.<sup>25</sup> All this would save political and material costs; however, it is not clear to what extent the new president's attempt to increase military expenditure and love of the limelight are compatible with this approach, which also requires a great deal of strategic patience and discretion. Finally, the visions of a few cabinet members, which apparently contrast with that of the president – national security advisor Michael Flynn, secretary of state Rex Tillerson and defence secretary James Mattis – over Russia, NATO, China, the Middle East and Iran, and expressed during the nomination process in the Senate,<sup>26</sup> could make it difficult to put together a coherent policy, let alone implement a proper strategy.

### *Russia: A new entente, a new Yalta?*

The Obama period ended with a partial failure of the reset with Russia in the sense of a very limited reduction in the nuclear arsenal, differences over Euro-Atlantic security and the role of NATO, wars in Ukraine and Syria, and divergences with respect to democracy and rights and freedoms. By the end of President Obama's terms, Vladimir Putin's Russia had become a hindrance to the United States' interests in many areas. President Donald Trump aims

<sup>23</sup> RUSSELL MEAD, Walter, «The Jacksonian revolt...» *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> In this connection, what Ian Bremmer calls the «Independent America» option, which entails a certain moral isolationism, does not reflect President Trump's vision unless it is mixed with the «Moneyball America» option that gives strict priority to the economy and business. They both in turn stand in opposition to «Indispensable America». See BREMMER, Ian, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> WALTZ, Stephen, and MEARSHEIMER, John, «The Case for Offshore Balancing. A Superior US Grand Strategy», *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2016.

<sup>26</sup> See «10 Highlights from Wednesday's Confirmation Hearings, *The New York Times*, 18 January 2017, in [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/us/politics/confirmation-hearing-cabinet.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/us/politics/confirmation-hearing-cabinet.html?_r=0).

to put this behind him and completely turn things around by taking a totally opposite approach that considers Russia to be a fundamental ally with which to cooperate harmoniously in all fields.<sup>27</sup>

Trump had already shown signs of the new approach during the election campaign and his victory has given President Putin a major opportunity to reassert himself vis-à-vis the West. The main aim of Moscow's new strategy has been to give Russia an essential role in settling conflicts in various theatres. Trump's win was thus immediately hailed by Putin as the first step towards re-establishing links between the two countries following an unprecedented election campaign in which Moscow was accused of meddling through cyberattacks on the Democratic party and even of conditioning the CIA's action.<sup>28</sup> The convergence of several elements pointed in the direction of a new reset: President Trump's business interests in Russia, the authoritarian vision of politics shared by both *strong men*,<sup>29</sup> the identification of common global objectives – fighting ISIS and jihadist terrorism, nuclear proliferation, China's regional rise and, in general, the severing of ties with the existing multilateral order and its replacement with an order based on bilateral agreements in the form of grand deals.

The main strategic shift consists in Russia ceasing to be the United States' main rival, a status that immediately reverted to China again. Trump is accordingly expected to seek the support of Moscow not only as an ally in fighting ISIS or pacifying Europe's eastern border, but chiefly in weakening Beijing as part of a concerted effort to relatively isolate or encapsulate their common competitor in Asia. This shift offers Putin advantages on several fronts: it brings Russia out of its relative isolation following its annexation of Crimea and the subsequent damage caused to its economy by the sanctions, counters the European Union's pressure in relation to Crimea and for Moscow to be more democratic, and makes Russia essential to solving a host of issues (Iran, Syria, Ukraine). The United States' strategic shift towards a new world carve-up could be seen as tantamount to a sort of «new Yalta» (1945) or a «new Reykjavík» (1986), where the respective ententes

<sup>27</sup> The best example of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian high-level security talks in recent years, including the February 2017 conference, is the *Munich Security Conference*. <https://www.securityconference.de/en/>.

<sup>28</sup> See MACFARQUHAR, Neil, «For Russia and Putin, a Surprise Gift from America», *The New York Times*, 9 November 2016. See also the Russian president's address on the state of the nation. PUTIN, Vladimir, «Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly», 1 December 2016. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>.

<sup>29</sup> See HILL, Fiona, and G. GADDY, Clifford, «What makes Putin tick, and what the West should do», *Foreign Affairs*, 13 January 2017. The authors emphasise, perhaps excessively, the Cold War mentality of president Putin and his profile as a former KGB agent to explain his use of propaganda and post-truth, and consider him an insurmountable hindrance to good relations with Europe.

between Roosevelt and Stalin, and between Reagan and Gorbachov, marked subsequent periods.<sup>30</sup>

A direct consequence of such a deal would be that the United States would no longer support and protect Kiev against pressure from Moscow, and this could incline Ukraine towards Russia's sphere of influence,<sup>31</sup> through the unilateral lifting of sanctions by the United States and an implementation of the Minsk II accords more favourable to Moscow, especially on the autonomy of the Donbas region, which is close to the Kremlin. To this should be added the permanent acceptance of the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 as a fait accompli after Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovych was toppled by the popular uprisings of the Euromaidan between November 2013 and February 2014. These movements in turn weakened the political position and security of the three Baltic states and those of the east (Poland, Romania and Bulgaria), which are particularly wary of Moscow and would demand greater protection from the United States and NATO.<sup>32</sup> It should be stressed that Europe has already adopted a highly prudent attitude towards Kiev, expressly refraining from attracting Ukraine towards a «European sphere of influence», ruling out future European Union membership, and from involving itself in Ukraine's security.<sup>33</sup> This should favour the political and business sector, which is pressing to move away from the European Union and jump on the bandwagon of the Trump administration – which also amounts to moving closer to the Russian sphere of influence, in the manner of a pincer.<sup>34</sup> With the prospect of NATO membership now a remote possibility, Ukraine's strategic orientation is at a stage of uncertainty with several options: for example, a closer partnership with the Baltic countries and Central Europe within or outside NATO.

<sup>30</sup> The United States' new approach would be reminiscent of the Cold War «spheres of influence» which had been officially banished by the 1990 Charter of Paris following the fall of the Berlin wall. See OSCE, «Charter of Paris for a New Europe», 21 November 1990, at <http://www.osce.org/mc/39516?download=true>.

<sup>31</sup> BUCKLEY, Neil, and OLEARCHYK, Roman, «Ukraine fears falling victim to Trump-Putin grand bargain», *Financial Times*, 11 November 2016.

<sup>32</sup> WILSON, Andrew, «Waiting for Donald, worrying about the EU», ECFR, 18 January 2017 at [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_ukraine\\_waiting\\_for\\_donald\\_worrying\\_about\\_the\\_eu\\_7218](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_ukraine_waiting_for_donald_worrying_about_the_eu_7218); GALEOTTI, Mark, «A Trump-Putin summit? Bring it on», ECFR, 17 January 2017, at [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_a\\_trump\\_putin\\_summit\\_bring\\_it\\_on\\_7216](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_trump_putin_summit_bring_it_on_7216).

<sup>33</sup> See EUROPEAN COUNCIL, «Conclusions», 15 December 2016, at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2016/12/47244652435\\_en.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2016/12/47244652435_en.pdf). The text adopted expressly establishes that the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement does not entail EU candidate status or an obligation for Europe to provide guarantees of security or military assistance, or any concession in terms of freedom of movement for works. The rejection of the agreement in the Dutch referendum of April 2016 strongly influenced this position.

<sup>34</sup> President Putin has often reiterated the guarantees of implementing a carefully considered policy of non-aggression towards the neighbouring Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia.

All in all, for the new administration dominated by figures with close ties to Russian businesses and the Kremlin, such as national security adviser Michael Flynn and secretary of state Rex Tillerson, the idea would be to align the US and Russian national security strategies much in the same way that Reagan and Gorbachov did in the 1980s, though this time based on very different doctrines and a very different chessboard. Even so, with the two leaders, Trump and Putin, about to hold their first meetings, it would be premature to conclude that this strategy is going to materialise into a solid arrangement in the medium and long term and that an optimal adjustment of mutual interests is going to take place. The difficulties are manifest: the desired «entente» could soon crumble under the evidence of clashing interests in a context of global interdependence. For example, it should be remembered that it is not advisable for Moscow to alienate its neighbour Beijing – with which it shares an extremely long border – as an energy client (with which it can diversify its market) and as a powerful driving force of trade and investment. In addition, the grand bargain would flounder if Moscow began to obtain evidently bigger benefits than Washington in terms of geopolitical positioning – in Eastern Europe, Ukraine, the Middle East – and in relation to its respective allies: NATO partners and key countries like Turkey. In this were to happen, internal pressure from Congress or public opinion could force a change. It is therefore evident that the main challenge for the Trump administration will be to reach a «good grand bargain» with Moscow on all fronts.

### *Transatlantic relations and Europe's response*

We have already seen how Obama had put relations with Europe on standby, without no short-term prospects of major steps either forward or backwards. In contrast, during the election campaign and his inauguration as president, Donald Trump remained firm in his criticism of the European Union and of how transatlantic relations have been conducted to date. We are witnessing an unprecedented situation where the White House is openly attacking the cornerstones of European integration; has described the European Union as a «trade competitor»; supports Brexit and the populist European parties, predicting that other countries will follow in the United Kingdom's footsteps; has described NATO as «obsolete» owing to its failure to reap results against jihadist terrorism and has called for the member states to comply with the requirement of spending two percent of their GDP on defence, threatening to withdraw US forces from Europe if they do not; and has hinted at a unilateral lifting of the sanctions imposed on Russia if it agrees to reduce its nuclear arsenal.<sup>35</sup> An especially important issue is Trump's questioning of

<sup>35</sup> See Donald Trump's interview with two European dailies, *The Times* in the UK and *Bild* in Germany, 16 January 2017, at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/full-transcript-of-interview-with-donald-trump-5d39sr09d>.



NATO as an organisation that no longer serves the United States' interests: ineffective at combating terrorism and very costly to the United States, which contributes approximately 75 percent of its military expenditure even though it accounts for no more than 46 percent of the organisation's global GDP.<sup>36</sup> The United States' threat to pull out of its commitments towards the Atlantic Alliance, completely ignoring the advantages it offers the country in terms of leadership, came at a time when the agreements reached at the Warsaw summit of July 2016 were beginning to be implemented, focusing on combating ISIS, cooperating in intelligence matters and deploying four battalions on a rotational basis to the three Baltic states and Poland as a deterrent to Moscow – a move which was soon countered when Russia reinforced its western and southern flanks and installed Iskander and S400 missiles in Kaliningrad.<sup>37</sup>

The United States' shift adds an element of uncertainty to the Alliance's mission and its internal dynamics following Brexit, when the United Kingdom's commitment to the continent's security has yet to be defined. In view of this situation, with transatlantic relations reduced to a special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, NATO no longer playing a central role and Washington's attention focused directly on Russia and China without passing through Brussels or any of the European capitals – except possibly London – Europe risks becoming trapped in a «pincer» between Washington and Moscow. However, Prime Minister Theresa May's visit to Washington in January 2017 highlighted the major disagreements between the two leaders on the sense of the Alliance – which London considers an indispensable centrepiece of security – and on the discriminatory migration policy the United States wishes to implement.<sup>38</sup> In any case, Berlin, Paris and Brussels infer that Trump neither understands the European Union (which he regards as a mere artifice of the European elites) nor is interested in a strong Union possibly capable of challenging «America first» and that, on the contrary, he prefers a fragmented Europe. It is evident that in a context of nationalistic retrenchment Trump's advent to the White House will in itself have direct consequences for Europe: in the field of domestic policymaking; in the dynamics of political and economic integration; in migratory, energy, climate and industrial policy; and in foreign and security policy and strategic positioning. The perception that Europe is in danger of being easily dragged towards positions that go against its interests as a Union prompted Donald Tusk, the president of the European

<sup>36</sup> WALT, S., and MEARSHEIMER, J. *op cit*.

<sup>37</sup> See NATO, Warsaw Summit Communiqué, Warsaw, 8-9 July, at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm); DAALDER, Ivo, «What to expect from the Nato summit in Warsaw», *Financial Times*, ft.com, 6 July 2016, at <http://blogs.ft.com/the-exchange/2016/07/06/what-to-expect-from-the-nato-summit-in-warsaw/>.

<sup>38</sup> *The New York Times*, Editorial Board, «When Donald Trump Met Theresa May». 27 January 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/opinion/when-donald-trump-met-theresa-may.html>.

Council, to issue an initial direct response in a letter to the 27 European Union heads of state and government.<sup>39</sup> What is more, in the light of changes of far-reaching significance such as the advent of the Trump administration and Brexit, it seems clear that some of the points enshrined in the Global Security Strategy adopted in June 2016 by the European Union high representative for foreign and security policy, Federica Mogherini, need to be urgently revised.<sup>40</sup>

Europe thus has several options for responding to the United States' strategic shift, though they entail different strategic stances. A possible initial response would reveal a cacophony of voices that reflect the internal divisions of opinion with respect to Russia, NATO and European Defence by highly heterogeneous governments, some populist, Eurosceptic or Europhobic: the United Kingdom, Hungary and Poland. Given the existing rifts regarding immigration and economic policy, which would favour a *divide et impera* strategy on the part of Washington, this is a very unlikely short-term option. A second response would be reactive, a sort of «Europe first» headed by the main countries in the eurozone: a «Europe first» not in the sense of a strong, united Europe open to the world but rather a European Union more or less at odds with Washington, responding with trade protectionism, reducing cooperation with United States in security and defence and seeking agreements with third countries to address conflicts in other areas. Such a merely reactive response, as well as highly unlikely – given the presence in Europe of populist governments and forces – would have negative impacts in that it could give rise to a bigger internal rift in Europe, more nationalism and even greater lack of action in foreign and security policy. Finally, a third possible response would be to strengthen European integration by furthering the Europe of Defence and Security, driven by the main eurozone countries in a context of cooling-off of relations with the Washington government. It would entail reinforcing common capabilities towards a future European army, as well as greater integration in intelligence, cyber-defence and crisis prevention in order to progress towards a more autonomous Europe. Although difficult, this path has long-term potential. President Hollande of France and Chancellor Merkel of Germany committed to making a qualitative leap in integration, capabilities and logistics, while the Council (Donald Tusk) and the European Commission (Jean Claude Juncker) announced a European fund for strategic investments in R&D&I as part of the plans for

<sup>39</sup> TUSK, Donald, «United we stand, divided we fall». Letter to the 27 EU heads of state or government on the future of the EU before the Malta summit, 30 January 2017, at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2017/1/47244654122\\_en.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2017/1/47244654122_en.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Despite correctly focusing its steps on greater integration, the new European strategy omits new elements that are essential to a correct diagnosis and guidance. See MOGHERINI, Federica/EEAS, «Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy», June 2016, at [https://eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf).

implementing the Global Security and Defence Strategy announced at the Bratislava summit in September 2016.<sup>41</sup>

It seems clear that Europe's response will be influenced by the results of the French and German elections due to take place in 2017, which could give impetus to a very significant shift. With respect to Russia, for example, so far Europe's stance on Moscow has been one of moderation, taking the lead from Germany: imposing sanctions but without closing the doors to a constructive and autonomous relationship for the European Union with Russia.<sup>42</sup> But if Marine Le Pen were to win the elections in France, the balance would be tipped in favour of the US president's pro-Putin stance. All in all, only a win for Merkel, coupled with firm pressure from other European governments, could reverse this tendency. Similarly, the economic performance of the eurozone is politically vulnerable in a context of low growth forecast of approximately little more than half that of the United States (1.4 percent compared to 2.5 percent) and an inflation rate beneath the ECB's two percent target. In this regard, another unforeseen consequence of the United States' strategic shift in conjunction with Brexit could be the emergence of a strong Germany capable of steering the Union's economic policy in a new direction, promoting integration in defence and security, and maintaining a discourse focused on European values and rights. The situation is an opportunity for Berlin to take a major step forward in foreign policy. Whatever the case, a proactive response from Europe requires firm talks with Washington to achieve a major security and defence deal establishing new conditions for cooperation in NATO and respecting the European Union's own interests in trade, energy and climate change, and migration. In this respect the European Union has the option of distancing itself from an aggressive position towards China; not ceding unconditionally to Moscow; maintaining the nuclear deal with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, of July 2015) provided that it complies with what was agreed;<sup>43</sup> pressing for a fair solution of two states, Israel and Palestine; becoming actively involved in the negotiations on Syria to establish a stable and democratic future for the country; honouring its commitments along with China and other powers to the Paris climate change agreement and adopting renewable energies; and taking advantage of the autonomy of certain American states with significant influence and an environmentalist outlook such as California.

<sup>41</sup> EUROPEAN COUNCIL, «Conclusions», *op. cit.* The European summit of 15 and 16 December stressed the deepening of permanent structured cooperation laid down in the treaties.

<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the European Union's relationship with Russia, see MORALES, Javier (coordinator), «A More European Russia for a More Secure Europe: Proposals for a new European Union strategy towards Russia», Fundación Alternativas, Madrid, DT no. 78/2015, at [http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex\\_documentos\\_archivos/0ee7caef4a6d582452cf3070fcf116c7.pdf](http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex_documentos_archivos/0ee7caef4a6d582452cf3070fcf116c7.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> See EUROPEAN COUNCIL, «Conclusions...». *Op. cit.*

### *China as a rival: The Asian pivot as a showdown*

Henry Kissinger, former secretary of state and national security advisor, has defined relations with China as the United States' most important bilateral relationship for the future.<sup>44</sup> The statements made by Trump, first as candidate and subsequently as president, suggest a continuation with Obama's Asian pivot in the sense of shifting much of the United States' attention and resources to the Pacific with its sights set on China. However, the new focus contains elements that suggest a completely different approach. The previous administration believed that cooperation was possible and desirable in many fields, especially global governance as well as in nuclear non-proliferation, and energy and environmental policy, and Washington acknowledged, implicitly at least, China's status of «global power». With the Trump administration, China would take Russia's place as the major rival, marking a return to the vision underlying the National Security Strategy of 2002,<sup>45</sup> albeit with an essential difference: the reference to democratic opening and political freedoms in China as a requisite for becoming genuine partners is totally absent. According to this new vision, the idea is to neutralise the United States' major medium- and long-term problem: China, the only power capably of vying with it for economic and geopolitical supremacy at some point in the twenty-first century when its economic clout develops into military might and global political influence.<sup>46</sup>

What is more, in the case of the Trump doctrine, the method of approaching China and the Pacific is via a grand bargain based on establishing red lines in two issues which are now lumped together and in the past were handled separately when dealing with Beijing. One is the economy (now monetary policy to reduce the US's trade deficit) and the other is security (now the regional conflict over the South China Sea). These two issues are mutually conditioning as parts of the same deal.<sup>47</sup> It is possible to speculate on the possible results of these negotiations, which are bound to take place at some point during Trump's term in office.

One outcome would be mutual concessions, a deal whereby Washington would strictly respect China's role of regional power and would discreetly withdraw from the region or, at least, would refrain from strengthening

<sup>44</sup> GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, *op cit.*

<sup>45</sup> THE WHITE HOUSE, «The National Security Strategy», Washington, 2002. The strategy stated that «The United States relationship with China is an important part of our strategy to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region....The democratic development of China is crucial to that future ... China is following an outdated path that, in the end, will hamper its own pursuit of national greatness. In time, China will find that social and political freedom is the only source of that greatness».

<sup>46</sup> BREMMER, Ian, *op cit.*

<sup>47</sup> WRIGHT, Thomas, «The dangerous side to the art of the deal», The Brookings Institution, 19 January 2017, at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/01/19/the-dangerous-side-to-the-art-of-the-deal/>.

its political influence and presence in Asia; it would likewise refrain from significantly question the status of Taiwan – a crucial matter of state for Beijing – by stepping back in this regard. In exchange for all this, Washington would obtain advantages in bilateral trade relations: greater receptivity of the Chinese economy to investment and trade, which would help American companies gain access to China's protected market in sectors such as construction and energy, and Chinese investment in US infrastructure. In addition, Beijing would adjust the renminbi more closely to the dollar, causing its currency to rise – something that China has been doing for some time.

A second, highly negative result would be large-scale confrontation in both areas, economic and geostrategic-security: an open trade war and a military race to fill gaps resulting from failed negotiations.<sup>48</sup> It is not known how China would react were the US administration to behave aggressively at the start of Trump's term. So far, the initial reactions have fluctuated between warnings of possible conflict over the South China Sea and defence of the multilateral liberal order in trade and investment, rejecting protectionism and favouring international cooperation, such as the attitude displayed by President Xi Jing Ping at the Davos forum in January 2017 in what appeared to be a role reversal between Beijing and Washington.<sup>49</sup> Above all, there is a prevailing attitude of prudence among the Chinese authorities to prevent an escalation of provocations that would distract it from its medium- and long-term «grand strategy» of sustainable domestic growth of a large middle class, overseas expansion of its markets and business conglomerates, strengthening its currency as a global currency and gradually boosting its military capabilities.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For an overview of the various options, see «How Should Trump Deal with China, and How Should China Deal with Trump», A ChinaFile Conversation, 9 November 2016, at <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/how-should-trump-deal-china-and-how-should-china-deal-trump>; BROWNE, Andrew, «In Trump Win, China Hopes for US Retreat», The Wall Street Journal, 9 November 2016, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-trump-win-china-hopes-for-u-s-retreat-1478688565>; PALMER, James, «China Just Won the US election», Foreign Policy, 9 November 2016, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/09/china-just-won-the-u-s-election-trump-victory/>. For a geostrategic overview of Asia, see LÓPEZ-NADAL, Juan Manuel, «Grandes dinámicas y geopolíticas en Asia y el Indo-Pacífico», *El orden mundial*, 25 November 2016, at <http://elordenmundial.com/2016/11/25/grandes-dinamicas-asia-indo-pacifico/>.

<sup>49</sup> See GOODMAN, Peter, «In Era of Trump, China's President Champions Economic Globalisation», *The New York Times*, 17 January 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/business/dealbook/world-economic-forum-davos-china-xi-globalization.html>. Nevertheless, the idea of a «liberal» China opposed to a protectionist and authoritarian United States does not hold water. In the domestic sphere, their institutions and political system are still hugely different; in the global sphere, both need to make an effort to reduce asymmetries and reform the international institutions.

<sup>50</sup> See Henry Kissinger, in GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, «The lessons...». *Op. cit.*; KISSINGER, Henry, *On China*, Penguin, London, 2012.

However, the question arises of the possible consequences of President Trump going ahead with what he has promised. The strategy that seems to be taking shape towards China and towards the Pacific in general is fraught with risks for both powers as well as serious contradictions, regardless of whether a final agreement is reached. First of all, in this respect it is necessary to foresee the minimum consequentialist considerations the new US government should be aware of in the event that a favourable bilateral deal is not reached. China's reprisals would considerably damage its economy: China is too large an opponent to have to grapple with in a trade war. In the field of security, in a scenario of confrontation over the South China Sea, an accident could trigger a regional escalation beyond control; on the other hand, open rivalry with China could increase the risk of the United States clashing with North Korea, which has so far been kept in check by Beijing. Secondly, partial or full withdrawal of America's military presence from its traditional post-war allies, Japan and South Korea – if they fail to meet the conditions required by Washington – could spark major tension and drive their governments away from Washington's orbit. Thirdly, Trump's simultaneous scrapping of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without offering an alternative will entail a loss of influence vis-à-vis its Pacific partners, among them Vietnam and Singapore, which will find themselves deprived of an important trade ally. Withdrawal from the TPP would mark a break with the logic of all previous US administrations since the 1990s, from Clinton, G. Bush and G. W. Bush to Obama and his Asian pivot. They all shared the essential idea that the best way to treat China is to involve it in the international liberal economic regime and get it to respect the laws, never envisaging that the United States would renege on those very rules. In this regard, for Obama the TPP amounted not so much as to aiming to isolate China as to pressuring it into yielding to the American liberal model in trade, investment, public sector and intellectual property.<sup>51</sup> Now the unilateral scrapping of the TPP has left a gap that China could take advantage of now that it has its own transcontinental project, One Belt, One Road.

All in all, the combination of withdrawal from the TPP and withdrawal from the US security – and accordingly nuclear – umbrella in the region could trigger effects beyond the United States' control, or a bandwagoning of small states toward China's commercial and strategic orbit; or even an escalation in those countries' confrontation with Beijing, leading to an arms and possibly a nuclear race; or new alliances such as a rapprochement between Russia

<sup>51</sup> See CARTER, Ash, «The Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Security. Building a Principled Security Network», *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2016, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-17/rebalance-and-asia-pacific-security>. There is no measurable empirical evidence to support the idea that job losses in the United States are directly linked to the value of the yuan (RMB), and it has been refuted by various authors. For example, KRUMAN, Paul, «Trump, Trade and Workers», *The New York Times*, 4 July 2016, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/opinion/trump-trade-and-workers.html>.

and Japan – the United States' main ally in the Pacific, a rival of China and involved in disputes with it over issues such as the Senkaku islands – to keep China in check; or even a Russian-Japanese agreement on the Kuril islands as a statement of both countries' strategic autonomy with respect to both Beijing and Washington. Finally, the clearly nationalistic leanings of the leaders of the five major powers with conflicting interests in the area – Trump, Xi Jinping, Shinzo Abe, Narendra Modi and Vladimir Putin<sup>52</sup> – mean that additional tensions can be expected if the negotiations fail. In any case, the most likely result would always be regional destabilisation.

Finally, it is worth asking ourselves about the real prospects of such a strategic shift towards China and the Pacific materialising. Firstly, it is necessary to bear in mind domestic factors on both sides. In the case of the United States, such a strategy will have to overcome institutional barriers: the unilateral imposition of tariffs on Chinese imports (the threat is 45 percent) would come up against considerable opposition from Republican and Democrats in both Houses, as well as from the business community. In the case of China, there is a timing factor: the direction to be taken by the political and economic reforms will not be decided on until the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress in the autumn of 2017, and any agreement involving key decisions will have to take place after that date. The Trump administration can therefore be expected to adopt a maximalist position as a negotiating strategy and not put its threats into practice for several months at least. We can thus expect a long stage in which they sound each other out and define positions, and this could lead to less confrontational options. For example, a trade agreement with China that is more favourable than the current one but does not abandon the liberal trade regime, thus avoiding a trade war that would be damaging to both and focusing on other even more important issues for the United States such as industrial espionage and cybersecurity – possibly without completely abandoning the rhetoric on human rights.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, mutual understanding should prevail – a long-term strategic vision acceptable to both parties. The United States needs China to guarantee world stability, which is a crucial issue for the United States. With respect to the Pacific countries, adjustments to the security and trade regimes would have to be made gradually, offering acceptable alternatives.

### *The Middle East: A new regional headache*

President Trump's previous statements and the different visions represented by his cabinet members such as secretary of state Rex Tillerson, defence

<sup>52</sup> LÓPEZ-NADAL, *op cit.*

<sup>53</sup> See NATHAN, Andrew, in *TheChinaFile*, *op cit.* What seems certain is that, whatever strategy is chosen and how it progresses, during Trump's term demands for protecting human rights and political freedoms in China will either be pushed into the background or be used by Washington as a bargaining chip for other interests.

secretary James Mattis and national security advisor Michael Flynn paint a very confusing picture of the new administration's true intentions in the Middle East. The messages issued by Trump so far do not even allow us to speak of a master «plan» for the region. Here we will simply point out a few unrelated elements of what could amount to a strategic shift.

The starting situation is characterised by America's loss of influence and presence in the Arab world and the Middle East. This is due in part to decisions made by the Obama administration: his lack of resolve when it came to supporting the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Syria aroused mistrust among these country's governments and societies, albeit for opposite reasons. And in part because the turmoil of the past few years has rendered some traditional alliances and arrangements meaningless. Today the difficulty lies in the fact that it is hard to please all the allies and all the new regional actors, and it will be even harder to prevent uncontrollable developments if it withdraws from the region in both diplomatic and military terms. On the one hand, it seems necessary to find a new balance between the Sunni and Shia worlds and regional peace, along the lines of Obama's shift towards a greater equilibrium between Saudi Arabia and Iran. On the other hand, it seems clear that the United States has lost a certain amount of control over its Sunni allies involved in the proxy war in Syria, such as Riyadh, Amman, Ankara and the Arab Emirates. In particular, relations with Saudi Arabia have been complicated by matters ranging from its past support for Wahhabism and sponsorship of jihadist terrorism to its human rights violations and the bloody war in Yemen.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the United States' prospects of energy self-sufficiency have radically changed its approach to the area. The United States has also lost influence over Tel Aviv since Obama confronted Netanyahu's government about its policy of settlements on the West Bank, causing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to become even more deeply entrenched. During the last part of Obama's term, his administration put pressure on Israel at the United Nations Security Council using legal means, by abstaining for the first time ever from voting on a resolution (2334 condemning the settlements). The option Trump has chosen, far removed from the multilateral and legal channels, is to force fresh negotiations between the two parties by moving the American embassy to Jerusalem as part of a mission led by Jared Kushner, his son-in-law. A «Jerusalem first» negotiating strategy would be aimed primarily at achieving an agreement for the shared sovereignty of Jerusalem and then negotiating the rest to define the terms

---

<sup>54</sup> In September 2016, Barack Obama vetoed a bill allowing families of the victims of 9/11 to sue the Saudi Arabian government for alleged participation in the attacks. Fourteen of the nineteen terrorists who hijacked four commercial planes were Saudis. For a domestic and external overview, see DOMÍNGUEZ DE OLAZÁBAL, Itxaso, «Arabia Saudí: un gigante con pies de petróleo. Dinámicas internas y retos regionales», DT no. 83/2017, at [http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex\\_documentos\\_archivos/3aa40362d449336dd663d7559d7aed9d.pdf](http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex_documentos_archivos/3aa40362d449336dd663d7559d7aed9d.pdf).



of the agreement between the two state-territories with respect to settlers, refugees and security. Nevertheless, such a strategy poses a few risks and contraindications, as the unilateral moving of the US embassy to Jerusalem would evidently give Jerusalem an upper hand in the negotiations over the Palestinian side, which is badly weakened and suffering from internal rifts. A unilateral imposition of this kind could trigger a reaction from the Palestinians and exacerbate the conflict.<sup>55</sup> Should the negotiations fail, the United States would have created a new problem where previously there was an impasse.

Iran is another central factor in this seemingly unsolvable equation. During the election campaign, Trump had criticised the nuclear pact led by the Obama administration, supposedly because it did not guarantee Tehran's compliance and because it handed out a blank cheque to a theocratic and meddling regime. Trump had promised different things during the campaign, ranging from completely dismantling it to renegotiating it when he was in the White House to get a much better deal. But a confrontational attitude towards the ayatollahs' regime could prove fruitless and even counterproductive to the United States' interests. On the one hand, the new «entente» with Putin's Russia will force Washington to seek the collaboration of Tehran – the best ally of Moscow, Syria's President Assad and Hezbollah in Lebanon – if the United States intends to settle the entrenched Syrian and Iraq conflicts and, more generally, maintain the regional balance between Sunni and Shia. The best solution seems to be to attempt to reach a compromise with the so-called «axis of resistance» led by the Islamic Republic.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, a unilateral withdrawal by the United States from the P5+1 agreement (JCPOA) would damage the more moderate sector of the regime headed by President Rouhani and would favour the most radical conservative wing. What is more, it is a United Nations-monitored agreement that offers guarantees of security, to the extent that even Israel's military and diplomatic sectors are in favour of maintaining it. Another aspect to be considered is the US business community's opposition to possible sanctions on American companies that have dealings with the Islamic Republic, as this would cause them to lose market opportunities to European, Russian or Chinese competitors. Lastly, since the JCPOA takes the form of an executive agreement and not a formal treaty, the president does not require the Senate's permission to withdraw the United States from it. Washington could aspire to renegotiate the treaty only if Iran were to repeatedly violate the technical conditions established in order to enrich uranium. Otherwise, the United States could come up against

<sup>55</sup> INDYK, Martin S., «President Trump's options for Israeli-Palestinian dealmaking», 1 December 2016, at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/president-trumps-options-for-israeli-palestinian-dealmaking/>, and «Could an Embassy in Jerusalem Bring Us Closer to Peace?» *The New York Times*, 4 January 2017, at [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/opinion/the-jerusalem-first-option.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/opinion/the-jerusalem-first-option.html?_r=1).

<sup>56</sup> MOHSENI, Payam, and KALOUT, Hussein, «Iran's Axis of Resistance Rises. How It's Forging a New Middle East», *Foreign Affairs*, 24 January 2017.

the total opposition not only of the Iranians but also of the Europeans, Russia and China, which would respect the terms of the agreement regardless of whether the United States withdrew.<sup>57</sup> In short, the new US president will need to consider what relationship he wants to have with Iran and what balances cannot be upset to avoid damaging the United States' interests.<sup>58</sup>

If any, the overarching strategy for the region would be to strive to wipe out ISIS (the caliphate) and avoid greater destabilisation in the region. It should be borne in mind that de-territorialisation following the conquest of ISIS's strongholds – Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria – could speed up the Islamic State's mutation into a transnational organisation that aspires to carry out sporadic attacks that are global in scope. This would in turn force the United States to strengthen its intelligence and collaborative ties with Russia and Europe. In the framework of a grand bargain with Russia, it would be assured of the collaboration of Moscow – which is not interested either in involvement alone on the ground – possibly in exchange for some advantage related to Ukraine, Crimea and the sanctions. The defeat of ISIS is related in turn to the future of Syria, where the situation is extremely complex. The new Trump administration will have to make its primary objective compatible with stabilising the Arab country. But stabilising Syria can hardly be carried out without a national agreement on political transition – democratisation, constitutional reform, territorial decentralisation – along the lines proposed at the successive Geneva summits (I and II) and in the various resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which enjoy the European Union's support.<sup>59</sup> An agreement between the two powers on a future without Assad is required, though it is not a priority at present. Nevertheless, any successful resumption of the Geneva negotiations will not depend solely on Washington and Moscow but will require the participation of the parties involved,<sup>60</sup> especially the collaboration of President Erdogan's Turkey as a NATO member and a key player in solving regional conflicts.

### *New tension with Mexico and Latin America*

The policy pursued by Obama's government with respect to Latin America in general and a few countries in particular could undergo major changes.

<sup>57</sup> VAEZ, Ali, «Trump's Iran Deal Options. Why Renegotiation Is Better Than Repudiation», *Foreign Affairs*, 23 January 2017.

<sup>58</sup> SOLANA, Javier, «Trump, Irán y la estabilidad», *El País*, 19 January 2017, at [http://elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/16/opinion/1484595424\\_375276.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/16/opinion/1484595424_375276.html).

<sup>59</sup> EUROPEAN COUNCIL, «Conclusions», *op. cit.* UNSC Resolution 2254 is particularly comprehensive with respect to the terms of political transition.

<sup>60</sup> See GALBRAITH, Peter W. «How the War Ends in Syria», *The New York Times*, 6 December 2016, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/opinion/how-the-war-ends-in-syria.html>; «Siria: una posible salida al conflicto», Fundación Alternativas, Memorando OPEX no. 197/2015, at [http://www.fundacionalalternativas.org/public/storage/opex\\_documentos\\_archivos/0dcaa28eb4418f8cf64b2340cd8d8b1b.pdf](http://www.fundacionalalternativas.org/public/storage/opex_documentos_archivos/0dcaa28eb4418f8cf64b2340cd8d8b1b.pdf).

The strategic value the region holds for the United States decreased some time ago owing to the absence of threats. Under Obama the country had witnessed an opening up towards the region based on equality and respect. With the advent of the new Trump administration there is still no strategy, but the combination of economic protectionism, anti-migration policies – which affect not only Mexico but other Central American, Caribbean and Southern Cone countries – and confrontational rhetoric could have a highly negative impact. The region's economies would be badly damaged and a pattern of protectionism and tense political relations would take hold.<sup>61</sup> The verbal escalation that ended with the cancellation of Mexican president Peña Nieto's visit to the White House only a few days after the new administration came to power could be the first in a long line of showdowns with other governments in the region.

The country that stands to lose the most from this shift would be the neighbouring Mexico, which has been symbolically punished with «paying for» the construction of a wall at the border and on which the combined effect of highly restrictive trade and migratory policies could have devastating social and economic effects: firstly, the United States' establishment of tariffs on Mexican imports (Trump has threatened 35 percent); secondly, a drop in remittances sent by Mexican workers in the United States; thirdly, the mass return of jobless unauthorised immigrants; and fourthly, job losses in both Mexico and the United States and a fall in investment flows as a result of the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States and Mexico,<sup>62</sup> which Trump describes as «the single worst trade deal». But the United States stands to lose too, because supply chains are interdependent and high tariffs would make products more expensive for consumers and also because approximately five million jobs in the United States depend directly on trade with the country's southern neighbour.<sup>63</sup> Another country that would be affected by the United States' protectionist policies is Brazil, with which trade relations have been strained owing to cotton and ethanol subsidies. And the same is true of Cuba, where the process of opening can be expected to slow down considerably and the US will increase its demands for political change; and also Venezuela, the biggest source of tension, where developments could tempt Washington to step in.

---

<sup>61</sup> We cannot rule out the possibility of Trump's reaction sparking populist responses in Latin America, for example López Obrador in Mexico with a view to the presidential elections of 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Revising or modifying already established treaties like NAFTA would be complex, as it requires the approval of Congress, where there are clashing opinions among the Republican ranks.

<sup>63</sup> See SHIFTER, Michael, and RADERSTORF, Ben, «By escalating tensions with Mexico, Trump is playing with fire», *New York Daily News*, 26 January 2017, at <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/escalating-tensions-mexico-donald-trump-playing-article-1.2956705>.

In the field of security, tensions with Washington could resurface over drug and arms trafficking policies owing to the president's repressive approach and retrograde stances towards these issues. In addition, a policy of mass deportations could trigger very serious humanitarian or migratory crises with refugees and immigrants from Central America and Mexico and fuel the growth of mafias and people trafficking.

This aggressive approach towards its southern neighbours could have two results. One, the most likely, is greater fragmentation, already worsened by a downward economic cycle and election turmoil in Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico. But we should not rule out the possibility of Trump's migratory and trade policies sparking a chain reaction in Latin America that could reinforce a few specific elements of regional integration: in CELAC, the Pacific Alliance, Mercosur and UNASUR, all this could translate into a strengthening of security or intraregional trade.<sup>64</sup> The possibility of a domino effect of this kind in the region should not be dismissed. If this were the case, Latin America would go from being a strategically insignificant region for Washington to a source of specific tensions or diplomatic crises. America's loss of prestige and influence in the region could be seized upon by other actors with a growing presence in trade and investment, such as China and Europe. Even so, the quarrel with Mexico and the tense political climate are not expected to trigger any major crises. Unless a black swan emerges in the region (sudden chaos, coups d'état, external meddling), the Trump administration does not seem willing to invest significant political capital and resources in a region that poses no crucial threats.

### Conclusions

The transition from the Obama administration to Trump's presidency is a time of profound changes of all kinds in the United States. With respect to foreign policy, Obama introduced a different vision of US leadership in the twenty-first century to reposition the United States in the world and attempted to take a prudent approach to many changes and upheavals ranging from the Arab Springs to the Ukrainian crisis and South China Sea conflict, combating nuclear proliferation, jihadist terrorism and climate change, and, at the end of his term in office, ushering in new regional opportunities with Cuba and Iran. His pragmatic, non-interventionist, multilateral approach in various contexts and areas gradually shaped an «Obama doctrine» in foreign and security policy, giving rise to a «small grand strategy» very different to the «grand strategies» of the past. As a result, at the start of the new Trump administration, the United States enjoyed a relatively stable position compared to the rest of the major powers.

---

<sup>64</sup> See GUÉHENNO, Jean-Marie, *op. cit.*

Paradoxically, the powerful internal populist strains that developed during Obama's term as a result of the disgruntlement of part of the middle classes have led an outsider to the White House, and populism has ended up invading foreign policy, breaking decades-old bipartisan agreements and calling into question traditional liberal values and institutions. The transition to the new administration has been a sharp turn – possibly unprecedented in its radicalness. The new administration is diametrically opposite in its political principles, agenda and, consequently, its strategy, which is taking shape as the «Trump doctrine». The White House's first measures point to the end of a foreign policy and security model of the past seven decades – that of free trade and promoting western democracy – and its replacement with «America first», a protectionist economic principle with certain isolationist geostrategic traits. This principle as a guideline for US action unmistakably marks a 180-degree strategic shift with respect to the country's traditional allies in Europe (NATO) and the Pacific (Japan and South Korea), relations with Russia and China, and a clearly reactive approach to world governance in trade, terrorism, migration and climate change.

Nevertheless, in order to understand how such a shift has come about, it is necessary to recognise a certain continuity with the previous administration, namely the United States' decision to stop imposing its own values on other parts of the world<sup>65</sup> and, accordingly, show greater prudence in deploying troops on the ground, using instead elite forces and drones (practiced by Obama in Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia). Trump's version of this retrenchment is not so much about practising isolationism as establishing a new «world carve-up» based on grand bargains with other major powers, chiefly Russia and China, and eventually with European countries, other regional powers and emerging economies. This web of agreements would amount to a «better deal» for the United States and would entail less interventionism and greater burden sharing in security matters.

At the beginning of 2017 it is too soon to know whether the new administration will steer the United States towards partial withdrawal from the world (disengagement, retrenchment) in which it would influence events in varying degrees from behind the scenes, as the case may be (leading from behind, offshore balancing), or whether, on the contrary, owing to the constraints of globalisations, «America first» will evolve in practice into a new, more modest version of US exceptionalism linked to a more ambitious strategic vision. In other words, it is too soon to know if it will materialise into a clean break with the previous order. For the time being, in the short term, it has sparked a very high degree of uncertainty and revealed a certain strategic vacuum left by Obama in several areas. Whatever the case, it seems clear that Trump's protectionist and reactionary policies are pointing in the direction

---

<sup>65</sup> President Obama himself stated he had not done what was expected of the United States in Syria. See GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, «The Obama doctrine...», *op. cit.*

of de-globalisation and a more fragmented world, and this could spark many tensions with other governments and societies and lead to setbacks in regional integration processes underway in Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific. It also seems clear that the tremor with its epicentre in Washington will give major impetus to populist movements in Europe; the European Union will risk losing even greater significance, being left at the mercy of the United States' trade agreements with Russia and China; and the clash with the neighbouring Mexico will damage not only the two countries themselves but also Latin America. Another obvious conclusion to be drawn is that for a long time the United States will no longer be the official guarantor of democracy and human rights (meaning in practice less military interventionism and a *realpolitik* with consequences, for example Assad's Syria). On the contrary, it will tend to improve talks with governments with few internal counterweights, with the exception of the United Kingdom and other populist governments in Europe. To put it in a similar way to Lord Ismay, former NATO secretary general, it could be said that Trump intends «to keep the Americans and the Russians up, the British around, the Chinese out, and the Europeans down».<sup>66</sup> But the political effects could prove very different to his expectations. The European Union can avert such a situation if it reacts by deepening integration in defence and security matters and social and economic pillars; Germany could play a key role in leading such a task in the coming years.

Nevertheless, the very fact that principles and strategies are being questioned entails at least one potentially positive aspect: the White House's new approach could open up new future prospects as well as unblock a few dialogues in many directions.<sup>67</sup> A few examples are the United States' decision not to conduct «imperial wars», a better understanding with Russia and progress in pacifying conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, and a revision of the future mega-regional trade agreements (having rejected the TPP and TTIP) to achieve greater social protection. These could lead to others: for Europe, the United States' withdrawal from Latin America and the Pacific could bring opportunities for a greater political and business presence, and a weaker NATO could stimulate greater integration in defence and security matters and, subsequently, greater European autonomy.

It remains to be seen whether President Trump will manage to implement his programme and what kind of resistance his initiatives will come up against at home and abroad. We can therefore expect a turbulent period of adjustments and readjustments at least until the midterm congressional elections in November 2018. We will witness a preventive repositioning of other actors, who will redefine their relationship with the United States

<sup>66</sup> The phrase attributed to him regarding the purpose of the Alliance is «To keep the Americans *in*, the Russians *out*, and the Germans *down*».

<sup>67</sup> Henry Kissinger suggests the possibility of positive progress in these negotiations. See GOLDBERG, J., *op. cit.*

and weigh up options and possible responses. We will possibly enter into a phase of ground testing, bluff calling and negotiations, of instability and uncertainty. While governments carefully assess the response best suited to their interests, terrorist organisations could attack the United States to trick it into overreacting. This phase could drag on for months or even years before giving way to one of greater stability. At any rate, at the threshold of a strategic about-turn, there is little we can do but note the contradictions and paradoxes of the Trump doctrine – a superpower that aims to withdraw from a globalised world – and ask if there really is a strategy behind it all, or at least something resembling a coherent plan, not for global good but for the United States' own interests.

## Chapter two

### Europe at a Crossroads

Shaun Riordan

#### Abstract

Europe is at a geopolitical crossroads. A series of internal crises have undermined its ability to tackle external geopolitical challenges, especially its ability to develop a coherent or effective Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Although in 2016 Europe managed not to collapse under the strain of the euro crisis or the migration crisis, it suffered the domestic shock of Brexit and the external shock of Trump's election victory. Brexit, a reflection of growing political populism across Europe, has weakened the Union and could serve as a catalyst for further exits. Trump's election victory is threatening to leave Europe isolated. At the same time, the rapprochement between Erdogan and Putin is reducing Europe's influence in the Middle East while maintaining tension at its eastern borders. How Europe manages its relations with Ankara (which is also crucial to handling the migration crisis) and Moscow will be central to its security. 2017 will be the year of elections. The presidential and parliamentary elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany and, possibly, Italy will decide how Europe responds to Brexit, and whether it is capable of adopting a coherent approach to address its challenges, both internal and external. The omens are, at best, mixed.



**Keywords**

Geopolitics, Putin, Brexit, Erdogan, euro, Trump, elections, security, migration.

*«Whenever peace – conceived as the avoidance of war – has been the primary objective of a power or a group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of the most ruthless member of the international community.»*

*Henry Kissinger*

### Introduction

If the world can be described as «VUCA» (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous),<sup>1</sup> the same can be said of the European Union and, indeed, of the rest of the continent. Europe is facing a series of crises that could be existential for the Union. These crises are different but interdependent and interconnected. Together they have created the most dangerous situation Europe has experienced since the start of the Cold War. The European Union's problems can be divided into those that stem from the Union itself and those that stem from Europe's geopolitical environment. These problems, both internal and external, interact and are mutually reinforcing. The European Union's internal crises are leaving it ill equipped to address external challenges. At the same time, geopolitical threats are putting further internal pressure on the Union. 2017 could be the year that decides whether the European project continues in a recognisable form or becomes fragmented and fails.

If 2016 was the year Europe suffered a string of shocks, both internal and external, 2017 will be the year of the elections that decide the consequences of these shocks and whether the European Union, and the European project, are able to survive. The migratory crisis continued in 2016, albeit to a lesser extent. A spate of terrorist attacks has undermined citizens' confidence in their governments and heightened anti-immigration sentiment. Since occupying Crimea, Russia has continued with its aggressive stance, threatening the Baltic republics and Eastern European countries. It has taken advantage of the weakness of western politics to make Vladimir Putin the indispensable arbitrator of the Middle East. Despite geopolitical pressure, the euro zone's economy is still recovering and growing, albeit slowly. This economic recovery largely depends on the ECB's monetary policies and has yet to be felt by EU citizens. The differences between the economic performances of the euro zone countries are still considerable, with growing concern in Germany about the risk of a property bubble. The euro's fundamental problems remain unsolved. Citizens' disgruntlement with the European elites was reflected in Britain's vote to leave the European Union, which could be a catalyst for even more radical changes. The election of Donald Trump as US president raises the possibility that, for the first time since the Second World War, Europe will

<sup>1</sup> HICKS, Judith, and TOWNSEND, Nicholas, *The U.S. Army War College: Military Education in a Democracy*, Temple University Press, 2002.

have to take charge of its own security and defence. The key elections slated for 2017 in France, Germany, the Netherlands and possibly Italy will be a gauge of how far this wave of populism can spread and will condition Brexit negotiations.

To an extent, the European Union's internal crises can be traced back to the very inception of the project. They might be said to be encoded within its very DNA. For example, the debates on whether the European project ought to be an intergovernmental or supranational organisation began with the coal and steel community. The failure of any attempt to create a proper common security and defence policy reflects the priority given to NATO in European foreign policy during the Cold War (and Europe's dependence on the US security umbrella). Britain's ambiguous attitude to Europe can be seen in Winston Churchill's statements of the 1940s, which promote and back the idea of a European Union, but with British support (from outside) rather than participation. The differences between the French and German interpretations of, and ambitions for, the European project reflect the countries' different Second World War traumas. For France, the European project has served to keep German political and military ambitions in check, reaffirming France's international role. For Germany, Europe has been a means of atoning for its shameful history and ensuring its return to the community of nations. If the European project ends up failing, future historians might conclude that it was doomed to do so by its DNA. It may be said that these fundamental problems have been camouflaged when all has been well, but the combination of economic and geopolitical pressure in recent years has caused them to surface. The results of this year's elections will decide how they may influence the future of the continent.

### The European economy

The economies of both the euro zone and the European Union are still recovering after hitting rock bottom in 2012. They are growing, but slowly. The GDP of the euro zone grew by approximately 1.6 percent in 2016 and is expected to grow a further 1.5 percent in 2017.<sup>2</sup> However, this growth has been very uneven. For example, Spain's economy has grown by 2.3 percent, but those of Italy and Finland by barely one percent. The financial markets seem to be reacting to the promise made by the president of the European Central Bank (ECB), Mario Draghi, that he would do whatever was necessary to protect the markets and that that would be sufficient. As a result, the financial markets reacted more calmly to the shocks and surprises of 2016 than in the past. Indeed, they soon bounced back after the Brexit vote and after Trump's election.

---

<sup>2</sup> DG ECFIN, European Commission [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/eu/forecasts/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu/forecasts/index_en.htm).

Nevertheless, the European economy is still beset by serious problems that are undermining the continent's ability to address its geopolitical challenges. Although the economy is still growing and unemployment is decreasing, this is not noticeable to citizens. Both the European Union and the euro zone are growing and creating employment, but these jobs are generally less stable and worse paid than before the crisis of 2008. At the same time, household debt is still high, especially in the Mediterranean countries, and low inflation rates are preventing the pressure of debt on household budgets from easing over time.<sup>3</sup> In addition, German savers are suffering due to low interest rates, while concern about the risk of a property bubble in Germany is mounting.<sup>4</sup> Citizens' worries matter, as they are fuelling the growth of populist parties, be they left-wing as in Italy, Greece and Spain, or right-wing as in Germany and the Netherlands. Concern about loss of savings or the risk of a real-estate bubble in Germany (both of which, according to the Eurosceptic AfD party, are due to the ECB's monetary policies) is curbing the German government's room for manoeuvre, particularly in its relations with the ECB.

A new euro crisis was averted in 2016, but the solutions to nearly all the problems were left for the future. The German bank crisis abated when the United States Department of Justice reduced the fine it was going to impose on Deutsche Bank.<sup>5</sup> However, Deutsche Bank is still regarded as one of the biggest systemic threats to world banking on account of its high debt levels.

At the end of 2016, the Italian government averted a crisis over the collapse of the Banco Monte de Paschi di Siena by creating a 20-billion-euro fund to shore up the Italian banks. However, a few key issues remain unanswered. It is not clear whether this fund was established in accordance with the rules of the ECB or whether the European authorities are willing to allow the Italian banks to be bailed out without punishing minority investors. If ordinary Italians lose their investments during an Italian bank bailout, this could trigger a serious political crisis with implications for the Italian elections likely to take place in the spring. Experts are also questioning whether the fund set up by the Italian government will be sufficient to guarantee the survival of all the Italian banks.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile Greece continues in the grip of perpetual crisis. Although 2016 could be reported as another year in which Europe and the IMF prevented the Greek economy from finally collapsing, the problems are growing. In particular, the gap is widening between the IMF, which insists on a reduction

<sup>3</sup> OECD Data: Household Debt <https://data.oecd.org/hha/household-debt.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-german-housing-boom-is-starting-to-look-like-a-bubble-2016-08-05>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://en.mercopress.com/2016/12/27/deutsche-bank-and-credit-suisse-reach-payment-deals-with-us-authorities-on-sub-prime-scams>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/7df5a074-c92a-11e6-9043-7e34c07b46ef>.

in Greece's debt, and the Europeans, who want to avoid it. This disagreement is going to be a key factor in managing the Greek crisis in 2017.

The fiscal deficits and sovereign debt of countries like France, Italy, Portugal and Spain continue to be very high and these countries seem unlikely to meet the fiscal targets for 2017.<sup>7</sup> They are very vulnerable to any new crisis in the euro zone or external economic shock. The ECB must decide whether to continue with its policy of purchasing bonds and at what level. It has announced it is going to reduce its purchases by about 20 billion euros per month. This has sparked considerable concern in the Mediterranean countries, where both governments and banks have relied heavily on these purchases. However, the German government, worried by the injection of cheap credit into its economy and, above all, by its impact on the property market, wants to reduce bonds purchases at a faster rate. This debate is going to dominate the ECB's council meetings during 2017.

The deepest long-term reforms the euro zone needs, such as fiscal union and bank union, are at a standstill. The problem lies in the radical disagreement between Paris and Berlin. Whereas the French want to share the financial risks, for example by creating Eurobonds but without ceding more sovereignty, the Germans refuse to invest more money without the guarantees offered by sharing further sovereignty. The electoral calendar and pressure from the right, in both France and Germany, make an agreement unlikely in 2017. Although a total collapse of the euro zone is improbable provided that there is willingness to maintain it – this will depend on the presidential and parliamentary elections – the euro looks set to continue stumbling constantly from crisis to crisis.

### **The unsustainable institutional structure**

The euro crisis affects the European strategic landscape in another aspect. The creation of the euro has resulted in an asymmetrical and unsustainable institutional structure. The original theory was that all European Union members would end up adopting the euro. According to the Treaty of Maastricht, the only Union members who could opt out of the euro were Great Britain and Denmark. Other members must adopt it if they meet the economic and financial criteria. The Commission's eurocrats thought that even Britain and Denmark would eventually realise their mistake and come around to adopting it too. Therefore, having a two-speed Europe where some members belonged to the euro zone and others did not was not felt to be important as it was considered a temporary, short-term situation. However, the economic and financial crisis has made it clear that this two-speed Europe is neither provisional nor short term but rather a permanent situation. Most

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=teina225&plugin=1>.

of the Union members that have still not adopted the euro probably never will, either because they do not want to (for example Sweden) or because they will never meet the economic and financial criteria (for example most of the Eastern European countries).

The European Union institutions are not designed for this structural asymmetry. There has already been a conflict between the ECB and the central banks of Denmark and Sweden. When the ECB launched its quantitative easing policy (purchasing bonds to increase the money supply), the Swedish and Danish central banks found themselves forced to slash their negative interest rates to maintain the competitiveness of their economies in relation to the euro zone. A sort of currency war within the European Union ensued. The situation is unsustainable. In the foreseeable future, the European Union is going to be made up of two groups of very different countries: a supranational and highly integrated euro zone (especially if France and Germany manage to reach an agreement on an economic and banking union) and a less integrated peripheral zone. The Union's institutions will have to acknowledge and adapt to this situation in order to avoid further conflicts and internal quarrels. Otherwise, not only will there be more internal conflicts but also opportunities for anyone interested in weakening or even breaking up the European Union.

### The migratory crisis

The other key factor that has spurred the growth of populist political parties in the European Union is the migratory crisis. As many as 1.5 million migrants arrived in the Union in 2015. They triggered a genuine crisis that led the Union to suspend some of the provisions of the Schengen Treaty, close several borders and reintroduce controls at others. A fence was built between Hungary, Serbia and Croatia and armed forces were deployed to control migrants in Macedonia. The European Union gave the rest of the world the impression that it did not know how to handle the crisis. Meanwhile, the number of immigrants who died attempting to cross the Mediterranean, either from Turkey to Greece or from Libya to Italy, continued to grow. Many analysts and commentators blamed Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel for publicly offering to take in Syrian refugees. By the end of 2015 many analysts feared that if the crisis continued in 2016 it could even call the European project into question.

The large number of migrants who found their way into Greece and Italy during the first months of 2016 seemed to fulfil the most negative forecasts. However, the migratory crisis eased considerably in 2016, for several reasons. The closure of the migratory route through the western Balkans not only reduced the number of migrants arriving in the European Union via this route but also deterred many potential migrants. There was also most likely a reduction in the number of Syrian migrants wishing to travel to the European

Union from Turkey. Nevertheless, the most important development was the agreement between the European Union and Turkey to reduce the number of migrants arriving in Greece. Given that many blamed Merkel for her offer to Syrian refugees, it seemed appropriate for her to initiate the talks with the Turkish government. According to the agreement,<sup>8</sup> Turkey would make an effort to stop the migrants from leaving the country and would also return Syrian migrants arriving in Greece illegally. In exchange, the Union would take in one Syrian migrant from the Turkish refugee camps for every one that was returned. The European Union would also pay Turkey three billion euros to subsidise the maintenance of the refugee camps in Turkey.

In a wider political context, the European Union undertook to grant Turkish citizens access to the Schengen Area without visas and to speed up Turkey's European Union accession process. The arrangement was harshly criticised by human rights NGOs. However, it seems to have worked. The number of migrants entering Greece via Turkey has fallen substantially. According to Frontex,<sup>9</sup> the European force that controls the European Union's external borders in the Mediterranean, the number of migrants reaching the European Union by sea fell by two-thirds in 2016 with respect to 2015. Frontex attributes this reduction to the agreement with Turkey. However, the number of migrants arriving in Italy from Libya via the so-called central Mediterranean route has risen by 20 percent, reaching the record number of 181,000 in 2016. This increase in the number of migrants is due to continued political anarchy in Libya and the pressure of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Although the Union managed not to collapse under the burden of the migratory crisis in 2016, the outlook for 2017 continues to be pessimistic. The political chaos in Libya looks set to drag on. Support is waning for the UN's attempts to establish a national unity government. The two rival governments in Tripoli and Tobruk are still at odds with each other. The militia leader Hartar (who still has the support of Egypt and also visited Moscow in 2016) has gained strength, but not enough to take control of the country. All this makes it likely that the flow of migrants across Libya will carry on growing in 2017. More seriously still, it is being questioned whether the agreement with Turkey will continue to be implemented. Although Europe has paid the promised three billion euros, the Turkish government is complaining that the Union has not fulfilled the rest of the conditions of the agreement. The Turks are particularly disgruntled about still not having been granted access to the Schengen area without visas. Given European citizens' concerns about terrorism and migrants and the upcoming 2017 elections in France, Germany, the Netherlands and possibly Italy, Europe seems unlikely to comply with this part of the agreement. The fact that Britain's then prime

<sup>8</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-16-963\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-963_en.htm).

<sup>9</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/>.

minister David Cameron stated during the Brexit referendum campaign that Turkey would never be a European Union member did not help. Although President Erdogan threatened to call off the agreement, the Turks are implementing it. Nevertheless, the threat is hanging over the European Union's head like a sword of Damocles. There is a risk that at any moment now, in 2017, the Turks will denounce the agreement owing to the European Union's failure to comply, and this will open the floodgates of migrants into Greece from Turkey again. It is by no means clear whether the European Union is currently in a better position than it was in 2015 to handle a new migratory crisis.

### Is the terrorist threat exaggerated?

Many people see a link between migration and Islamic terrorism. European governments and citizens alike are concerned about Islamic terrorists entering the European Union as illegal migrants. This concern has sparked growing hostility towards migrants. Islamic terrorism is always named as one of citizens' main concerns in polls. European governments feel compelled to allocate substantial resources to preventing terrorism. However, the evidence suggests that the threat of terrorism is much less serious in Europe today than it was in the 1970s or 1980s.<sup>10</sup> The statistics clearly show that the nationalist and left-wing terrorists of those years (be they ETA, IRA or the Red Brigades) posed a greater threat in terms of both frequency of attacks and number of victims. In 2016 there were only two serious attacks in Europe. In both cases the terrorist used a truck to kill civilians, first in Nice on 14 June, killing 86 people, and later in Berlin on 19 December, when 12 people died. The use of trucks instead of arms or explosives in these attacks could signify a reduction in the terrorist capabilities of the Islamic groups in Europe in 2016 compared to 2015. In the two main attacks and the other minor attacks perpetrated in 2016, an individual used elementary technology to kill civilians. Comparison with the more sophisticated attacks carried out in 2015 on Bataclan and Brussels airport is striking. Instead of teams of terrorists trained and prepared in Syria and Iraq, the so-called Islamic State seems to be relying more on individuals, «lone wolves», with limited (if any) direct links to the terrorist group. This may amount to a change in strategy or tactics. But it may also reflect the success of the European security forces at breaking down the terrorists' logistic and support networks and, accordingly, their capabilities.

This does not mean to say that Islamic terrorism is going to disappear from Europe. The military failures of the self-styled Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria could encourage many of the radicalised citizens who have been fighting in those countries to return to Europe. They can conceal themselves

---

<sup>10</sup> Global Risk Insights: <http://globalriskinsights.com/2016/03/19640/>.



in the mass influxes of illegal migrants. The Islamic State could react to military defeat by launching more terrorist attacks in Europe. It is possible that the Islamic State has gained access to chemical or biological weapons in Syria and could use them in «dirty» attacks in Europe.

Surveillance continues to be essential. However, the threat might be exaggerated. Fewer than 100 people died in terrorist attacks in Europe in 2016. In most of the attacks nobody or only the terrorist died. The diversion of resources, especially military, to counterterrorism means that fewer resources are available to address the rest of the European Union's strategic challenges. The deployment of the French army, for example, in counterterrorism tasks in France's streets and on beaches, not only reduces the number of military available for other tasks but also their battle readiness. Limitations on the number of available European military, doubts about the reliability of the United States under President Trump and Russia's aggressiveness under President Putin could force the European governments to reconsider this diversion of resources in 2017 in order to re-establish the balance between counterterrorism and expenditure on other geopolitical challenges.

### Turkey, an ally or a rival?

Compared to the European Union, Turkey does have a serious terrorist problem, which is worsening. As explained previously, Turkey plays a key role in the European strategy for handling the migratory crisis. However, relations between Europe and Turkey deteriorated throughout 2016 and could go from bad to worse in 2017. Ankara's rapprochement with Moscow is complicating NATO's future precisely when NATO is more important than ever to the security of a Europe trapped between presidents Trump and Putin. For these reasons Turkey is a key to Europe's strategic outlook. However, it is difficult to see how the European Union can repair its relations with Ankara while Erdogan is president.

Relations between the European Union and Turkey have always been fragile and vulnerable to geopolitical shocks, partly because they have been based on deceit. The European Union has publicly stated that Turkey can join the Union provided it meets the essential membership requisites. However, it has been clear for a long time that it will never be allowed to join. The amendment made to the French constitution whereby any new European Union candidate must be approved in a referendum leaves the decision up to French voters. Given France's current political situation, it is hard to imagine people voting in favour of Turkish membership. Nor are the other Union members keen to take in the Turks. Indeed – and here lies the irony – the only member state that had previously expressed any enthusiasm about the prospect of Turkish membership is Britain, which has just voted to exit the Union. Opposition to Turkey's accession had never been openly expressed before. The European Commission had established a number of

criteria and prerequisites, confident that Turkey would never meet them. In fact, the current Turkish government has surprised the Commission with all the criteria it has met. Although the Turkish government is frustrated by Europe's reluctance to let it join and knows it might well never join, it has gone along with Europe in keeping up the pretence. The process has run into difficulties with an increasingly authoritarian Turkish government, but relations between Europe and Turkey have reached their current crisis due to a combination of the rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow, the Brexit referendum and the failed coup of July 2016.

Although the start of 2016 saw Turkey at odds with Russia after shooting down a Russian fighter jet in Turkish airspace, Erdogan seems to have changed his geopolitical tune at the beginning of the summer. Having lost confidence in the United States' reliability as an ally in the Middle East and irked by Europeans' constant criticism of his form of government, he made overtures to Moscow, apologising for downing the Russian plane. This rapprochement was speeded up by the Brexit referendum and the failed coup. As commented earlier, during the Brexit campaign Cameron felt compelled to state that Turkey could never join the European Union. Although the European Union and the Turkish government were both aware of this, it was the first time a European leader had actually said so publicly – and that leader happened to be the head of the government traditionally most in favour of Turkish accession. It is one thing to know something unofficially but quite another to have it splashed all over the headlines of Britain's yellow press. The Turkish government's annoyance was inevitable.

The failed coup d'état on 15 July changed the pace of Turkish politics and hastened the deterioration of relations between Europe and Turkey. President Erdogan noted that the European leaders and President Obama hesitated to congratulate him on crushing the coup whereas President Putin was quick to do so. After the coup Erdogan set about brutally purging the army and the government. He took the opportunity to cleanse the Turkish state of Gulenists, dismissing and arresting not just military and politicians but also judges, university lecturers, doctors, teachers and journalists. This internal crackdown inevitably prompted European governments and institutions to denounce his human rights abuses. Erdogan paid no heed to the denunciations and intensified his clampdown. He also set about reforming the Turkish constitution to reinforce the post of president and threatened to bring back the death penalty (which the Turkish parliament had abolished in order to join the European Union). After resuming the internal struggle against the Kurdish separatists of the PKK and breaking off relations with the so-called Islamic State in Syria, Turkey suffered a spate of terrorist attacks perpetrated by both Kurds and Islamists. These attacks have intensified both its feeling of geopolitical isolation and its need to find a reliable partner.

President Erdogan seems to think that his loyal geopolitical partner is President Putin. For Erdogan, Putin is a reliable collaborator in the Middle

East and, unlike President Obama, militarily effective in Syria and not overly concerned about human rights abuses or his growing authoritarianism. Russia also offers the possibility of geostrategic collaboration in the Caucasus and Central Asia. So far it is not clear how far this rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow might go. It seems that Erdogan has already drastically changed his policy towards Syria. Instead of collaborating with the United States against Assad's regime, he is now collaborating with the Russians on stabilising the country.

The first results have been a truce imposed by Russians and Turks and negotiations on the country's future sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran in Kazakhstan. But this has serious implications for the future of NATO and European security. In Ukraine, Eastern Europe and the Baltic republics, NATO is at odds with Russia. Yet Turkey, a NATO member, is collaborating with Russia to solve the Middle East's problems. At a time when President Trump is questioning the value of NATO to the United States and stressing that European partners must contribute more to its defence budgets, Turkey's attitude and actions are calling the alliance's future into question.

Europe needs to improve its relations with Turkey, both to maintain the agreement on the migratory crisis and to reinforce its security during the era of presidents Trump and Putin. However, it is hard to see how it can while President Erdogan remains in power and is cracking down on his opponents at home. Once again, the Union's electoral calendar in 2017, which is further fuelling xenophobic and anti-Turkish sentiment among the Union's citizens, is complicating the Union's geostrategy.

### **Russia, the awakening of the «bear»**

Russia continues to be the European Union's biggest geopolitical threat in 2017. In 2016 the focus of Russian foreign policy shifted to Syria. President Putin has taken advantage of European and American lack of coherence and commitment in Syria to involve himself in the crisis. Within a short time, he has managed to ensure the survival of Assad's regime, become the indispensable man in the region and strike up a close relationship with both Turkey and Iran.

Russia, Turkey and Iran presided over the Syrian peace negotiations in Kazakhstan, while the United States and the European Union were left on the side-lines (the Russians invited the Americans to attend, but as observers). The influence of both Europe and the United States in the whole of the Middle East has thus been reduced. However, the greatest threat Russia poses to Europe is at the Union's eastern borders. Russia continues to occupy Crimea, which is destabilising Ukraine, and has stepped up its military flights probing European airspace. The number of cyberattacks has also risen, especially in the Baltic republics, and they appear to have been authorised by the Russian

government. At the end of 2016 Europe renewed its economic sanctions on Russia over the occupation of Crimea. However, it is not clear what the purpose of these sanctions is. Europe is neither willing nor militarily able to drive the Russians out of Crimea, or its militiamen out of eastern Ukraine. However, nor is it in Europe's interests to keep up the sanctions until Russia collapses politically or economically. The European countries' different opinions on Russia have begun to emerge – the Eastern European countries in particular need to juggle their economic interests with the risks of a clash with Moscow (and the few possibilities of any real support from the rest).

European governments increasingly fear a «hybrid war» between Russia and the European Union. This growing concern partly reflects the accusations of Russian meddling in the presidential elections in the United States in support of Trump's candidature. This is not the place to debate on whether the concept of hybrid war is valid or whether the Russians have adopted the «Gerasimov doctrine» as a new strategic doctrine.<sup>11</sup> It is sufficient to note that this expression was coined after Russia's intervention in Georgia and Ukraine to describe the use of a combination of conventional and non-conventional, military and non-military tools to further Russia's strategic aims (the Russians, even General Gerasimov himself, claim that this is simply a response to the use of conventional and non-conventional tools by the United States and European Union in the Maidan demonstrations in 2014 to overthrow the government of Yanukovich, whom Russia considered the democratically chosen president of Ukraine). In the current context, concern about Russia's «hybrid war» relates to a series of coordinated non-military actions designed to undermine the European Union's coherence and change Europe's policy towards Russia. Whereas the short-term goal is to put an end to the economic sanctions against Russia, in the medium and long terms it also seeks to weaken the European Union. There is evidence of a Russian strategy of meddling with European internal politics. The activities and instruments the Russians are using as part of this strategy include taking part in online debates and newspapers' comment sections, subsidising Eurosceptic and right-wing parties (for example UKIP in Britain and the National Front in France), and subsidising seminars and academic lectures and cyberattacks. Many of these activities are not sinister in themselves and might be called public diplomacy in another context.<sup>12</sup> However, in this case it is their combination with other more sinister activities (such as cyberattacks) as part of a broader strategy that makes the difference. The goal is not so much to convince European observers that Russia is right but rather to undermine European citizens' confidence in all the European Union narratives. It is more important to weaken the credibility of European narratives than to prove that Russia's is right. For example, in the case of the MH17 civil aircraft downed

<sup>11</sup> GALEOTTI, Mark, «Hybrid War or Gibrinaya Voina», Mayak Intelligence, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> RIORDAN, Shaun, «Shai Masot Has Serious Implications for Diplomacy USC», 2017, at <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/shai-masot-has-serious-implications-diplomacy>.

in Ukraine in 2014, Moscow promoted its own version not to be convincing but to cast doubts on the official western version. Russia's capabilities in this type of cyber warfare have reached a point where European observers are often unable to distinguish between someone offering an alternative analysis of the situation and a Russian propagandist. The focus of European governments' current concerns is that the Russians could use this broad array of tools, including cyberattacks, to influence the decisive elections in Europe in 2017, especially in France and Germany.<sup>13</sup>

This Russian strategy of misleading information and confusion has already chalked up a few successes. Estonia's new prime minister, Juri Ratis, leader of the Centre Party, which relies on the support of the Russian community, is likely to adopt a less hostile attitude to the Russians than his predecessor. The recently elected president of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, is openly pro-Russian. The Bulgarian prime minister reacted to his election by resigning and triggering parliamentary elections that could result in an equally pro-Russian government. Even before Radev's election, the Bulgarian government was attempting to repair its relations with Moscow, resuming talks on the South Stream gas pipeline (despite the European Commission's opposition). For countries like Bulgaria, the rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow increasingly appears to be converting the Black Sea into a Russian pond. The responses of the European Union and NATO seem inappropriate and unconvincing. Therefore, it is not surprising that Moldavia's new president, Igor Dodon, has undertaken to scrap the association treaty with the European Union, once again giving priority to closer relations with Moscow.

Moscow's influence can even be seen in the Western European countries. According to the polls, the candidates with the most possibilities of making it to the second round, François Fillon and Marine Le Pen, are pro-Russian. Even Britons' pro-Brexit vote can be viewed as a success for the Russians (they have subsidised the anti-European UKIP party) as it marks the departure from the European Union of one of the staunchest opponents of Putin's Russia. With such internal divides and disagreements, Europe will find it very difficult to maintain a united stance towards Russia in 2017. A lot will depend on Trump's performance in the White House and the results of the European elections. But it at least seems possible that the regime of economic sanctions on Russia is beginning to collapse, and this would amount to a major victory for Putin.

### **Brexit: A catalyst of the fragmentation of the European Union?**

The biggest internal strategic shock the European Union suffered in 2016 was when British citizens voted to leave the Union in the 23 June referendum.

---

<sup>13</sup> LARRABEE, F., «Stephen et al Russia and the West after the Ukrainian Crisis», Rand, 2017, at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1305.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1305.html).

This is the first time a member state has filed for divorce and the referendum result dealt a harsh blow to the Union's morale. An intense debate ensued in both Britain and the rest of Europe on what this decision means and why the British decided that their future lay outside the Union. The referendum was called by the then prime minister David Cameron to shore up his party and government vis-à-vis the threats of the Eurosceptic UKIP and disgruntlement of right-wing members of his own party. When Cameron promised to call a referendum on Britain's exit from the Union he did not expect to win the 2015 elections with an absolute majority. He thought he would have to team up with the Liberal Democrats to form another coalition governments. As the liberals are very pro-Europe and strongly opposed to the idea of a referendum, Cameron believed he could avoid the need to call the referendum, blaming the liberals. When, much to his surprise, he secured an absolute majority, he had no choice but to keep his promise and go ahead with the referendum.

The clear vote to leave the European Union was not just a rejection of Europe but also of Cameron's government and the political elite who have dominated European politics for the past 30 years. The same phenomenon led to President Trump's election victory in the United States and is garnering increased support for populist parties in the rest of Europe. But it also reflects an ambiguity about Europe that has always been present in British politics and public opinion. Britons, especially the English, have never regarded themselves as European. For the English, Europe has always been «over there». British foreign policy has always oscillated between full involvement in European affairs and «splendid isolation». However, the default situation is what might be defined as an off-shore balancer, a strategy in which a major power uses regional powers to stem the emergence of potentially hostile powers. It seems that Theresa May's government wishes to return to the default situation.<sup>14</sup>

The main problem triggered by Britain's decision to exit the European Union was uncertainty. Neither the British government, nor the European governments and institutions had bargained on the result of the referendum. Therefore, nobody had a strategy or clear idea of how to respond (not even the British politicians who had led the Brexit campaign). Prime Minister Cameron, who had promised to implement the decision, immediately resigned, adding to the uncertainty. Both the president of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, and the still president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, insisted that Britain had to trigger article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty immediately, until his legal advisors informed him that this decision could only be made by the British government. The choice of Theresa May as Cameron's successor merely led to the unenlightening statement that «Brexit means Brexit». Apart from that, the uncertainty continued during the autumn of 2016, sparking

---

<sup>14</sup> MEARSHEIMER, John, «The Tragedy of Great Power Politics WW», Norton & Company, 2014.

concern among major companies and financial markets alike. However, the disastrous consequences economists had predicted for the British economy if Britons voted to leave did not materialise. Britain's economic fundamentals continued to be robust, though the value of the pound dropped by between 15 and 20 percent against the dollar and the euro.

The speech delivered by Theresa May on 17 January 2017 at last shed some light on what Britain's intentions were at least.<sup>15</sup> She made it clear that the British government's priorities were to regain control of Britain's borders and shed the yoke of the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. British parliament, not the European Commission, would be sovereign again in Britain. Therefore, Britain would fully withdraw from the single market and customs union. On the basis of this full withdrawal from the European Union, Britain would negotiate new relations with Europe in trade, defence, security and foreign policy. Although the British government wants agreements that maximise the possibility of trade in goods and services between Britain and the rest of Europe, Theresa May made it clear that she preferred no agreement at all to a bad agreement. She attempted to hold the European Commission responsible for the success or failure of the negotiations. Meanwhile, Britain would be free to initiate talks with non-European countries on possible bilateral free trade agreements. She also confirmed that she would trigger article 50, and that the exit process would begin at the end of March 2017.

May's speech announcing this hard Brexit was generally well accepted by other European leaders on account of her clear and realistic stance, and because she accepted that Britain could not remain in the single market without respecting the European agreements on migration. But at the same time, the majority stressed that Britain could not be allowed to emerge as the winner, and that it should fare worse out than in. This statement reflected the concern that Britain's exit could encourage other countries to leave and eventually trigger the break-up of the European Union.

May's confidence in a hard Brexit is also a reflection of several factors which have reinforced her position. The election of Trump as president of the United States and his offer of a bilateral free trade deal improve Britain's economic prospects. The admission by Barnier, the Commission's main negotiator that several European countries would have to maintain access to the London banks to fund their sovereign debts has reinforced the City's position. The opposition of the small countries has reduced the risk of punishment negotiations. Indeed, at the beginning of 2017 things were looking their brightest on all sides since the referendum.

Like everything else, it will largely depend on the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2017. However, May's speech makes it much

---

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/17/theresa-mays-brexite-speech-full/>.

easier to assess the strategic implications of Brexit for Europe. On the one hand, May's decision to go for a hard Brexit has implications for Britain's constitutional stability and security. Its impact on Scotland has been widely discussed. The Scots voted to remain in the European Union by a clear majority. The Scottish prime minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has threatened to hold a new referendum on Scottish independence if Scotland is made to withdraw from the single market. But this could be tricky. It is unclear how the British government would react or what it could do if the Scots were to call a referendum without permission from London. On the other hand, Nicola Sturgeon has made it very clear that she would only call a referendum if a vote in favour of independence were guaranteed.

All the polls indicate that if a referendum were held on Scottish independence now, the result would be the same as in 1994: 55 percent against. Nor is it clear how much support Scotland would have in Europe. Although it would earn many sympathies, Europe would be cautious so as not to complicate the negotiations with Britain, and Spain would be concerned about the implications for Catalonia and the Basque Country. The consequences in Northern Ireland could be even more serious. The most important element of the peace process for the Republicans was the concept of progress towards the reunification of Ireland. Even if not immediate, it would be possible in the future, if 50 percent of the population of Northern Ireland plus one is in favour. Meanwhile, the withdrawal of all border controls between the two Irelands makes this future seem more possible every day. A hard Brexit could entail re-establishing the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The European Union would no longer function as the framework for settling conflicts as it is now. It would be a harsh psychological blow to the Republic, which would view it as a major step backwards. The rise in dissident Republican terrorism in recent months and the political crisis in Belfast following the collapse of the Ulster government (with new elections in April) makes it an even more sensitive issue.

Mrs May seems to realise this, because she has proposed a bilateral agreement with Dublin to avoid re-establishing the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. But this could be difficult to fit in with the European rules if Northern Ireland does not belong to the single market. Nor would the European Commission accept the precedent created, whereby Britain negotiates bilateral agreements with member states outside the community framework (in contrast, such a precedent would delight the British and possibly a few of the Eastern European members of the Union too).

Ironically, the implications for Europe could be more serious. The European Union will lose 18 percent of its GDP (and might need to renegotiate some of its international trade agreements). It will lose importance and influence in international institutions and negotiations: for example, in the WTO and in negotiations on climate change. It will lose a permanent member of the Security Council. Germany's relative economic weight in the Union will



grow. However, given the hostile and unstable geopolitical environment, the most important implications could be for defence and security. Europe's military capabilities are limited and have been dwindling since the end of the Cold War because European governments have attempted to make the most of the peace dividend. German military forces cannot be deployed in combat overseas owing to the constraints laid down in Germany's Basic Law (constitution). At any rate, they have lessened considerably since the Cold War, as the German government has reduced its defence budgets. 2017 has witnessed a change in the trend: the budget has increased by nearly 2.5 billion euros to 36.61 billion.<sup>16</sup>

Of the other European armies, only those of Britain and France, the European nuclear powers, would be capable of deploying overseas. Therefore, Britain's exit has very serious implications for European defence. It is not just a question of losing Britain's armies but also its logistic capabilities to support overseas deployments.

Europe is also losing British institutional collaboration on intelligence matters. Apart from having one of the few global intelligence services in Europe (both Humint and Sigint), Britain is also part of «Five Eyes», a very close intelligence-sharing alliance between the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Britain. Not that Britain shares Five Eyes information or reports with its European partners. However, its analyses, which it does share, draw on these reports. Europe thus benefits from Britain's membership of Five Eyes.

Evidently, British troops are not going to cease to defend the West, including Europe, and nor are its intelligence services. Britain will continue to be an important member of NATO. However, it will no longer be part of the European defence and intelligence communities. A few analysts have stated that Britain's absence from the formal European intelligence-sharing structures is less important because the significant sharing is done bilaterally given the huge differences in the European intelligence services in terms of reputation and reliability.

This is true to an extent. However, depending solely on bilateral relations makes exchanges less automatic and increases the risk of important information slipping through the gaps in these bilateral relations. Britain's absence from the European defence community will increase the burden on the smaller European countries at times of economic crisis. But more importantly – and ironically – still, Europe's reliance on NATO and the United States' security umbrella will increase when they are being questioned the most.

The European leaders' immediate reaction to Brexit – the proposal to take advantage of Britain's absence to boost Europe's military capabilities –

---

<sup>16</sup> STERN, Johannes, «The 2017 German budget: billion for the military and war», WWSWS, 28 November 2016, at <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/11/28/germ-n28.html>.

shows little historical memory. The same proposal was made in 1998 at St Malo by the then Prime Minister Blair and President Chirac. More importantly, it is unrealistic for the abovementioned reasons. Europe without Britain loses real military capabilities and, at times of austerity, it is difficult to see how it would be willing or able to do anything about it. Britain has reacted to the Russian threat by deploying military forces in Poland and in the Baltic republics, but in the framework of NATO and with bilateral agreements. So far there has been no European response.

If Europe wants to create a defence capability that is independent from NATO (in view of the problems with Turkey and with Trump in the White House, there may well be good reason to do so), it will have to do so in such a way that it includes European countries that are not EU members: Norway and Iceland as well as Britain. That is why it is so important that May stated in her speech that Britain wants to carry on collaborating with Europe as closely as possible in areas such as defence, security and counterterrorism. Mutual interests and needs in these areas could facilitate a more pragmatic, if not friendly, divorce.

### **Donald Trump: «America first»**

If Brexit was the greatest external strategic blow to the European Union in 2016, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States was a geopolitical earthquake. It was partly a question of style. The European political elite, who had invested heavily in Hillary Clinton, were appalled by Trump's vulgarity. But it was also one of substance. There is no Trump doctrine in foreign policy (though nor was there an Obama doctrine apart from «Don't do stupid shit!») and, at the time of writing this chapter, in mid-January, it was still not clear what he will do. However, what appear to be a few core elements of his world vision have emerged. These include contempt for international organisations; a preference for bilateral trade deals (instead of multilateral agreements); Middle East interests limited to defending Israel and crushing the self-styled Islamic State; the need to improve relations with Russia and lift the economic sanctions; the need to challenge China (both to re-establish the balance in bilateral trade and to limit its military ambitions); insistence that the allies, especially in NATO, pay more for defence; and the conviction that the European Union is damaging to American interests. All these factors are cause for great concern to Europeans.

Trump's comments on Europe have been few but far from flattering. He does not share the vision of the East Coast political class that the European Union is key to maintaining peace and stability on the continent. He has enthusiastically welcomed Britain's departure and even received Nigel Farage, the former leader of the Eurosceptic UKIP, at his New York office immediately after being elected (Farage was the first foreign politician he received as president elect). And he has offered to negotiate a bilateral free trade agreement with

Britain as a priority of his administration. Obama's outgoing ambassador to the European Union has accused Trump of wanting to break up the Union. Trump himself, in a speech harshly attacking Germany's Chancellor Merkel, stated that without Britain the European Union is no more than a vehicle for Germany's economic interests and that is how he treats it. Trump's advisers have denied that he wishes to actively promote the Union's breakup or that he considers such a breakup to be favourable to the United States' interests. However, they also admit that Trump will welcome and support any member state that follows Britain's example.

Trump's preference for bilateral trade agreements could also damage Europe's economic interests. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) was already in danger before Trump's election. Government ministers of both Germany and France had already declared it to be dead (for different reasons). But with Trump as president there is no chance of resuscitating it. His team has made it clear that he prefers bilateral trade agreements. Two of his first executive orders were to revise the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to scrap the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). In bilateral agreements, Trump's primary objective is to promote and protect the United States' trade and industrial interests. In the absence of the TTIP, and with the WTO stuck in a rut, Europe will have no choice but to negotiate a bilateral agreement with the United States. Trump (unlike Obama) has already said that the British take priority. He has also threatened to impose tariffs on German car manufacturers. If Trump is determined, and it seems he is, to return to a protectionist and mercantilist world, Europeans may stand more to lose than others.

Trump's election also poses serious geopolitical problems to the European Union. So far Europe has relied on NATO for its security. In recent years most European countries have preferred to clash with Russia and establish good economic and trade relations with China. Whereas Europe views Russia as a geopolitical threat, it sees China as an opportunity to improve its economic performance. Trump takes exactly the opposite stance, and this is jeopardising Europe's strategy. Trump regards China as the biggest threat to the American economy and a military threat in the South China Sea. At the same time, he views Putin's Russia as a possible ally. Europeans probably find a rapprochement between Washington and Moscow less worrying than a clash with China.

Some European countries are already thinking about lifting the economic sanctions on Russia and the presidential elections in France could strengthen this tendency. What matters to Europeans is that closer relations with Moscow can achieve credible guarantees for the security of their eastern borders and for stabilising Ukraine. A trade war (or worse still, a war proper) between the United States and China could prove much costlier for Europe. All Europeans have invested heavily in their trade and economic relations with China. Many depend on Chinese financial investments. However, it is hard to see how all

this could be maintained in the event of a serious clash between Washington and Beijing. Europeans could agree to making peace with Putin. But a conflict with China would endanger Europe's fragile economic recovery.

Nor do Europeans find Trump's Middle East priorities reassuring. Although they share the aim of putting an end to the so-called Islamic State, they are concerned about the consequences in terms of the risk of more terrorist attacks in Europe. Trump's support for Netanyahu's hard line in Israel contrasts with Europe's efforts to reach an agreement with the Palestinians. Given that the Europeans (unlike the Americans) still depend on Gulf oil, any American withdrawal from this area would endanger the European Union's energy security.

The main concern could be the implications of collaboration between Moscow and Washington in the Middle East. Russia has already taken advantage of the weakness of the West's policy and strategy in Syria to reinforce its own position in the region. Russia is also very active in Algeria. The political anarchy in Libya, which neither Americans nor Europeans seem willing or able to resolve, is another opportunity for Putin.

The Russian president has already made overtures to Sisi's Egypt. Haftar, the militia leader supported by Egypt, has been to Moscow. This, coupled with the current good relations between Putin and Erdogan, poses the risk that not only the Black Sea but also the southern and eastern Mediterranean may become Russian ponds. For the Europeans, the worst scenario that could result from Trump's election would be an isolated and weakened Europe at the mercy of President Putin.

### 2017: The year of crucial elections

Save for the inevitable emergence of black swans, the events that will most determine Europe's strategic outlook in 2017 are the parliamentary and presidential elections. These elections will decide not only on the policies Europe can adopt to address its internal and geopolitical challenges but also on the continuation of the European project laid down in the Lisbon Treaty.

The first parliamentary elections will take place in the Netherlands in March. In January Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) was topping all the polls. It is an anti-Islam, anti-migration and Eurosceptic party. It has already won a referendum in the Netherlands to block European aid to Ukraine (though the turnout was very low). It has no chance of winning an absolute majority and few possibilities of becoming part of a coalition government. So far the other political parties have made it clear that Geert Wilders and his party are unacceptable and they are not prepared to help them govern. However, a coalition of the other political parties to keep Wilders out could be counterproductive. It would reinforce the message that he heads a movement against a political elite that always joins forces to protect its privileges. This

message proved to be very popular and effective with Dutch voters, for example, when Wilders was convicted for his anti-Islamic comments. Even if Wilders remains in the opposition, as the leader of the largest party in parliament he will exert major influence on the government's discourse. While he might not decide on the government's policies, he will be able to considerably limit its room for manoeuvre.

The presidential elections in France in May could be even more crucial for Europe's future. They are also much more difficult to predict. As of the start of the year, the polls indicated that the central-right candidate François Fillon and extreme right-wing candidate Marine Le Pen would go through to the second round. Conventional wisdom states that the second round will produce the same result as in 1992, when the left-wing voters joined forces with the centre-right voters to give President Chirac a crushing victory over Le Pen's father with 80 percent of the vote. The polls seem to confirm this interpretation, though with Le Pen losing by a much smaller margin than her father.

However, there is reason to question both conventional wisdom and opinion polls. Marine Le Pen has renewed the National Front's programme and image. She has presented it as the defender of the Republic's values: both the traditional values of the secular state and those of the social model. This has enabled her to attract traditional left-wing working-class voters who feel disappointed and neglected, as well as more traditional right-wing FN voters. The fact that disgruntled working-class voters do not usually take part in opinion polls leads to distorted results.

A victory for Le Pen would, of course, change all this; it would be a more powerful earthquake than Trump's election. It would question the European Union's future in the very short term. But even if the forecasts come true and Fillon wins the election, the European political landscape would also change slightly. Fillon, as we have seen, like Le Pen, is pro-Russian and is in favour of lifting the economic sanctions.

Le Pen's success at reaching the second round of the presidential elections could limit her room for manoeuvre, especially if the National Front enjoys similar success in the parliamentary elections. The wildcard in the French presidential elections is Macron, the young economist who has established his own political movement. He is offering a progressive alternative to the traditional French elite, just as Le Pen provides a right-wing alternative. Many commentators think that these elections are too early for Macron, but support for him was growing and it was considered possible that he could reach the second round instead of Fillon or even Le Pen. This would be the best prospect for continuity in French and European foreign policy.

The September elections in Germany will also be crucial to the European Union's future. At first sight, they are less complicated than those of France and the result is less difficult to predict. The CDU (the Christian Democrats)

led by Angela Merkel, with its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, is almost certain to win again. But they will not secure an absolute majority and will have to form a coalition. The most interest results will be those of the Eurosceptic anti-migration party *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD). According to the polls, this party will win between 10 and 15 percent of the vote and will be represented in parliament for the first time. However, new terrorist attacks in Germany or a resurgence of the migratory crisis could improve its results. In theory, AfD ought to be in a good position to decide who governs, but Merkel has said she does not wish to form a government with that party. This means that she would have to form another major coalition with the socialists. But CSU has stated it does not want to be part of a coalition with the socialists. Therefore, it would be a weaker coalition government than the present one and would be harshly criticised by the right, both the CSU and AfD. The other possibility would be a left-wing coalition of socialists, former communists and ecologists. Whatever the case, the most likely result will be a weaker government ill-equipped to play the leadership role Europe requires of Germany.

It is also possible that there will be parliamentary elections in Italy in the spring. Prime Minister Renzi resigned after losing a referendum on constitutional change. The Italian president had to agree with Renzi's successor whether to call new elections or whether the provisional government can remain in power. The greatest danger in Italy is of the country becoming gripped by a pincer formed by left-wing (Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement) and right-wing Eurosceptics (the Northern League). Given their ideological differences, it is hard to see how the Italian Eurosceptics could form a government. The greatest risk is of it failing to form a government strong or stable enough to handle the next stages of the Italian bank crisis, with consequences extending beyond Italy into the Euro Zone.

### The crossroads

Europe is not going to break up in 2017 (unless Le Pen wins the presidential elections in France), but it will become increasingly weaker and less influential. The European Union has traditionally avoided geopolitical reflection and analysis. The word *geopolitik* has a bad reputation in Europe owing to its associations with writers like Carl Haushöfer, of the Nazi period. Europe has preferred normative diplomacy and the European Union sees itself as a model of international collaboration and the rule of law. The European Union has sought to promote an international system based on norms more than on power balancing. This is embodied by the concept of postmodern state, the European state which no longer solves problems using force and is willing to share its sovereignty in the interest of a higher good.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> COOPER, Robert, *The Breaking of Nations*, Atlantic Books, 2007.

Therefore, foreign policy depends more on soft power than hard power. This ideology allowed European governments to reduce their defence spending and allocate more resources to social and welfare policies. This was always wishful thinking. Europe was only able to trim its defence spending because of the American security umbrella. So-called normative diplomacy relied on the appeal of the European model. With the euro crisis and Brexit, this appeal has been questioned. With the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, the American security umbrella is also being questioned. However, the European Union is currently witnessing the most dangerous and less stable geopolitical environment since the end of the Second World War and start of the Cold War.

Some analysts have stated that the election of President Trump and the announcement of his nationalistic «America first» might force the Europe to start functioning. But there are major differences between the various member states with respect to institution building and Europe's external strategy.

For every European leader who states that what Europe needs is more Europe, there is another who stresses the need for a more flexible and more intergovernmental structure. The electoral calendar is further complicating the process. It is difficult to see how the European Union can make key decisions on its institution building or external strategy before the autumn, when all the new governments are in place. The issues are too profound for provisional solutions, and governments with elections coming up will be neither willing nor able to commit themselves during the pre-election campaign. But the autumn of 2017 could be too late. By then President Trump could already have triggered a realignment in global geopolitics, leaving the European Union out. Trump is already talking about a new relationship between the United States and post-Brexit Britain, which could influence the Brexit negotiations. The next step will be relations with Putin and China.

Even if the European Union manages to avoid collapsing in 2017, it could find its international influence undermined in an increasingly dangerous and unstable world. Europe needs to rediscover its capacity for geopolitical thought, create a coherent common external strategy and develop means of promoting its influence in the world. Both its internal problems and the international environment make this a very difficult task.

## Chapter three

### The Middle East in 2016: Trends and Prospects for 2017

José María Martínez Ferrer

#### Abstract

The Middle East has experienced a great deal of turmoil in 2016. Since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, which rocked the traditional United States-dominated status quo of the post-Cold War period, the nations of the Middle East have been heading towards an unknown destination that is still remote. Some factors to be considered are the structural weaknesses of Arab states; regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia; the divide between Shia and Sunni Muslims (reinforced and amplified by the rivalry between the abovementioned regional powers); the changing balance of power between the still dominant but declining hegemon, the United States, and its rival Putin's Russia, with the «known unknown» of the future Trump's Middle East policies; and the economy, still heavily reliant on oil and gas. The chapter goes on to examine the main facts and trends of 2016 and the outlook for 2017 from the perspective of some of the most significant Middle East countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey). Finally, some general conclusions are offered.

#### Keywords

Middle East, crisis, Arab spring, people's revolt, repression, Arab state, reform, Kurds, Islamism, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Islam, sectarianism, Sunni,



Shia, regional power, United States, Russia, economy, oil, Islamic State, Daesh, theocracy, Iraq, nation-building, Syria, civil war, Turkey, coup d'état, authoritarianism.

## Introduction

Since the spate of popular uprisings known as the «Arab Spring» inflamed the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, creating havoc with the established political order, the area has not ceased to experience upheaval. For most scholars, the «Arab Spring» marks a turning point, the end of an era and the beginning of another. Anyone who believes that the current status quo will continue is deeply mistaken. The Arab world is changing, and fast, though we do not yet know for certain in what direction it is heading.<sup>1</sup>

Continuing the trend begun in 2011, 2016 was another year of transition in which the many existing crises continued to develop and hardly any of them ended, not even provisionally; on the contrary, the tendency over the course of the year has been for the various conflicts to worsen in the sense that they have become more endemic and difficult to deal with. At the start of 2017, the Middle East continues to be one of the most conflictive areas in the world, with states that are generally unstable and several wars that have been dragging on for years (chiefly in Syria, Iraq and Yemen). This has dashed a whole generation of achievements in the field of development<sup>2</sup> and has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths<sup>3</sup> and millions of refugees and displaced people.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ÁLVAREZ-OSSORIO, Ignacio, «Más allá de la Primavera Árabe», blog *Próximo Oriente*, 7 March 2016, available at <http://proximooriente.blogspot.com.es/2016/03/mas-alla-de-la-primavera-arabe.html>. Consulted on 15 August 2016.

<sup>2</sup> International Monetary Fund, *The economic impact of conflicts and the refugee crisis in the Middle East and North Africa*, 16 September 2016, available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1608.pdf>. Accessed 2 October 2016.

<sup>3</sup> In April 2016 the UN updated its estimates to 400,000 deaths in the five years the Syrian civil war has lasted. HUDSON, John, «UN envoy revises Syria death toll to 400.000», *Foreign Policy*, 22 April 2016, available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/22/un-envoy-revises-syria-death-toll-to-400000/>. Accessed on 15 September 2016. The death toll in Yemen is in the region of 10,000: GOBARI, Mohammed, «UN says 10,000 killed in Yemen war, far more than other estimates», Reuters, 30 August 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-toll-idUSKCN11516W>. Accessed 20 September 2016.

<sup>4</sup> According to the UN agencies UNOCHA and UNHCR, the main conflicts in the Middle East have generated a total of 5.3 million refugees and 12.6 million internally displaced people. The country from which the highest number of the world's refugees come from is Syria, with 4.8 million refugees and 6.3 million internally displaced people. Turkey has taken in 2.7 million Syrian refugees; Lebanon 1.1 million; Jordan 664,000; Iraq 225,000; and Egypt 115,000. The war in Yemen has generated 180,000 refugees and 2.2 million internally displaced people. As well as taking in nearly a quarter of a million Syria refugees, Iraq has generated 277,000 refugees of its own, and internally displaced people reached 4.1 million. A less known case is Iran, which has so far taken in some 979,000 refugees, 95 percent of whom come from Afghanistan.



Image 1. The Middle East. Source: United Nations

### **Regional perspective. The deep-seated causes of Middle East instability**

Before studying the vicissitudes of the various Middle East conflicts in 2016, it seems appropriate to illustrate the context in which they have emerged by examining a few common features: structural weakness of the Arab states, rivalry between regional powers, the internal rift in Islam between Sunnis and Shias; and shifting relative influence of the superpowers and economic factors in the Middle East.

#### ***Structural weakness of the nation states in the Arab world and lack of governance***

Arab nation states generally display serious structural weaknesses. The difficulty of being inclusive and performing their function of redistributing wealth has led to the growing discredit of the governing elites.<sup>5</sup> There is usually

<sup>5</sup> COFFMAN WITTES, Tamara, *Real Security: The interdependence of governance and stability in the Arab World*, Brookings Institution, November 2016, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/politics-governance-and-state-society-relations/>. Accessed 1 December 2016. DESSI, Andrea, *Reordering the Middle East: Peoples, borders and states in flux*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 11 July 2016, available at <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1611.pdf>. Accessed 15 September 2016. A classic study is MARTÍN MUÑOZ, Gema, *El Estado árabe: crisis de legitimidad y contestación islámica*, Bellaterra, 1999.

an authoritarian central power with few legal or institutional constraints and elites who account for a disproportionate percentage of national income. The lack of channels for expressing disconformity and calling for rights often leads claims to be expressed in the form of violence, and the ensuing government crackdown in turn fuels a spiral of dissatisfaction and violence, as occurred with the «Arab Spring».<sup>6</sup>

The political system, with the usual safeguard of a highly developed security apparatus, is based on a «social contract» whereby traditionally, in exchange for citizens' passive acquiescence, a corporatist and excessively large state with an inefficient state-centred economy provides the population not only with security and order but above all with material well-being. Therefore, stability has been greater in states with surplus economic resources, chiefly from oil revenues, such as the countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).<sup>7</sup>

In states that do not enjoy abundant oil reserves and where the economic crisis is endemic (Egypt, for example), while the ruling class attempts to reduce traditional consumption subsidies as they are unsustainable in the long run, jobless young people without prospects who have not emigrated to Europe or the Gulf states scrape a living and are a breeding ground for extremist protest movements. These non-state actors often create parallel welfare systems and have even supplanted traditional state functions wholly or partially. This environment of progressive radicalisation is leading religious arguments to become mixed up with social justice, making for an explosive cocktail, and in many cases even traditional «political Islam» opposed in varying degrees to the established power (represented by movements such as the Muslim Brothers) has been overwhelmed by extreme jihadist groups that use violent methods. The various countries have handled the variants of the so-called «political Islam» very differently, taking approaches that range from full acceptance to mere tolerance, co-opting or repression and this is generally one of the unresolved issues in the Middle Eastern nations.<sup>8</sup>

To this should be added the «original sin» of most of the Middle Eastern states: they are relatively recent political constructions that date back no further than to the dismantling of the Turkish empire after the First World

---

<sup>6</sup> Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), *The Arab Thermidor: The resurgence of the security state*, POMEPS studies no. 11, London School of Economics, Middle East Centre, 27 February 2015, available at [http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/POMEPS\\_Studies\\_11\\_Thermidor\\_Web.pdf](http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/POMEPS_Studies_11_Thermidor_Web.pdf). Accessed 15 September 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

<sup>8</sup> To cite two extreme examples, in Turkey the modern Islamism of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party has held power democratically and governed the country without interruption since 2003. In contrast, in Egypt the Muslim Brothers were ousted from power in July 2013 to which they acceded following the presidential elections in 2012 through a military coup following the controversial term of President Mohammed Morsi, who is now serving a prison sentence together with thousands of his followers.

War. This relative immaturity makes the current turmoil an inevitable part of an internal nation building process that is still unfinished.

Apart from Israel, Iran and Turkey,<sup>9</sup> practically all the states in the area basically define themselves as «Arab» and share the same language and culture. However, the cohesion of many of the «Arab» states of the Middle East, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, is complicated by the fact that they are home to different cultural or religious communities (Sunni, Shia, Kurd, Druze, Christian, Turkmen, etc.) whose official recognition and degree of identification with the nation-state varies.<sup>10</sup> A further factor is the survival of tribal structures with their own hierarchies and administrations that are informal but no less real in many countries in the area. This contributes to greater fragmentation of the political and social structures.<sup>11</sup>

A particularly significant problem is that posed by one of the largest «stateless nations», the Kurds, whose identifying features, unusually for the Middle East, are not religious but cultural.<sup>12</sup> A vague «Kurdistan» encompasses part of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran; for those countries, the Kurdish issue is «existential», particularly for Turkey and Iraq which have large Kurdish populations. It is interesting that the circumstances of the Kurdish community differ considerably from country to country in aspects such as relations with the central power, access to economic resources and even relations with other Kurds living in neighbouring states; sometimes there are even notable internal divisions among Kurds living in the same country.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Two of the major regional powers which, although Muslim, have a centuries-old culture that is clearly different from Arab culture.

<sup>10</sup> See the monographic issue on *Minorías y fronteras en el mundo árabe*, Afkar/Ideas, no. 52, Estudios de Política Exterior, winter 2016-17.

<sup>11</sup> LIU, Ted, «Etnias y tribalismo en las transiciones árabes», Policy brief no. 86, Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), November 2012, available at [http://fride.org/descarga/PB\\_86\\_Etnias\\_y\\_tribalismo\\_en\\_transiciones\\_arabes.pdf](http://fride.org/descarga/PB_86_Etnias_y_tribalismo_en_transiciones_arabes.pdf). Accessed 14 November 2016.

<sup>12</sup> It is reckoned that there are some 40 million Kurds: 22.5 million in Turkey, 19 percent of the total Turkish population; 10 million in Iran, 10 percent of the Iranian population; 4.5 million in Iraq, between 15 and 20 percent of the total in Iraq; some 3 million in Syria, equivalent to 9 percent; 500,000 in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and some 2 million in various European countries. ESTÉVEZ, Juan Amancio, «La cuestión kurda a raíz del conflicto con Daesh en Siria e Irak», Grupo de Estudios de Seguridad Internacional (GESI), 22 September 2015, available at <http://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es/content/la-cuesti%C3%B3n-kurda-ra%C3%ADz-del-conflicto-con-daesh-en-siria-e-irak>. Accessed 8 September 2016.

<sup>13</sup> To cite only a few examples, the Kurds in Iraq enjoy an autonomous regional government recognised by the central government of Baghdad and have abundant oil resources; even so, there are significant internal divisions in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish party of Iraq, Masoud Barzani's KDP, is the most pro-independence and is on good terms with Turkey, unlike its rival party, Jalal Talabani's PUK. The Turkish Kurds have a pan-Kurdish vision that Iran or Iraq lack and are divided between the PKK's terrorist movement, which is at odds with the

In any case, it can be concluded that despite the many imperfections of the Middle Eastern nation-states, the fact is that there is currently no organisational concept of a replacement, as secular pan-Arabism (of the sort attempted by Nasser in the 1960s), pan-Islamism (which Erdogan promoted from Turkey years ago) or sectarianism, either Sunni-based (promoted by the Caliphate of Daesh/Islamic State) or Shia-based, are at least as problematic if not more so.

### *Rivalry between regional powers versus internal division in Islam between Sunnis and Shias*

The «regional order» in the Middle East can currently be considered to be structured around five medium-sized powers: Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, which, after the «Arab spring» and weakening of American dominance in the area, have constituted a highly volatile «competitive multipolarity»<sup>14</sup> characterised by temporary short-term alignments of these powers in alliances that change in relation to specific issues, with a «zero-sum game» mentality that is not very conducive to agreements.<sup>15</sup>

It has been pointed out that until very recently the relationship between all the regional powers was governed by the post-Cold-War scheme of Pax Americana, with a status quo that left Iran, Iraq and Syria on the side-lines and diluted the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the epicentre of violence.<sup>16</sup> This regional order, which was consolidated after the United States won the Gulf War in 1991, began to crumble after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and, as can be seen in the following section, is currently being reshaped after the United States clearly expressed its unwillingness to shoulder the burden of continuing to be a hegemonic power and guarantor of the system.

---

Turkish government, and the possibilists of Selahattin Demirtas's modern left-wing party HDP, which emphasises its progressive component more than its ethnic Kurd nature and is attempting to take part in the state institutions. HILTERMAN Joost, «The Kurds: A divided future?», *The New York Review of Books*, 19 May 2016, available at <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/05/19/kurds-syria-iraq-divided-future/>. Accessed 2 October 2016.

<sup>14</sup> As Kristina Kausch puts it in KAUSCH, Kristina, «Competitive multipolarity in the Middle East», Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 10 September 2014, available at <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1410.pdf>. Accessed 4 October 2016.

<sup>15</sup> MALMVG, Helle; QUERO, Jordi, and Soler Eduard, «The contemporary regional order», in MENARA (Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture), Project, Methodology and Concept Papers, no. 1, *Reconceptualizing orders in the MENA region*, 24 November 2016, pp. 33-55, available at [http://www.menaraproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/menara\\_cp\\_1-2.pdf](http://www.menaraproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/menara_cp_1-2.pdf). Accessed 9 December 2016. See also BUZAN, Barry, and WAEVER, Ole, *Regions and Powers, The structure of international security*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 187-218.

<sup>16</sup> At any rate, the Palestinian cause has continued to resonate symbolically among ordinary Arab citizens in contrast to the accommodating attitude of the United States' allied elites.

A central feature of the current geopolitical makeup of the Middle East is the strategic competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which reached an extreme in 2016 and has polarised the action of other minor actors.<sup>17</sup> The cause of Saudi Arabia's new assertiveness has been the United States' perceived attitude of appeasement and naivete towards Iran's growing aggressiveness during the eight years of the Obama administration, which culminated in the nuclear agreement of July 2015.<sup>18</sup> After powerlessly witnessing America pull out of Iraq and perceiving it to be moving closer to Iraq and uninterested in Iranian expansionism in Syria and Yemen, and the consolidation of the prominent position of Hezbollah, Iran's faithful ally in Lebanon, following the ascent to the throne of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz in January 2015, the new Saudi Arabian leaders decided to directly defy the ayatollahs' regime without taking the United States into account.

Saudi Arabia surprised the world with its military intervention in Yemen in March 2015 at the helm of an ad hoc international coalition<sup>19</sup> to halt the expansion of the Houthi Shia minority, which it considered (without reservations) a puppet in Iran's hands. Over the course of 2016 a veritable «cold war» was waged between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which have broken off diplomatic relations and have been involved in many episodes of diplomatic and political stand-offs in various fields, even mutual recriminations, as a result of which Iranians were unable to go on their pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj).<sup>20</sup> The countries accuse each other of being behind Daesh/Islamic

<sup>17</sup> On the roots and expressions of rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia see MABÓN, Simón, «Arabia Saudí, Irán y la geopolítica cambiante de Oriente Medio», *Estudios de Política Exterior, Afkar/Ideas* no. 46, summer 2015, *Guerra Fría en Oriente Medio*, available at <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/afkar-ideas/arabia-saudi-iran-y-la-geopolitica-cambiante-de-oriente-medio/>. Accessed 18 October 2016. SUSER Asher, «Iran and the Arabs: the historical shift in the balance of power», Institute for National Security Studies (Israel), INSS, *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 18, no. 3, October 2015, available at [http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18\\_3ENG%20\(4\)\\_Susser.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_3ENG%20(4)_Susser.pdf). Accessed 21 October 2016. ORTEGA, Andrés, «Arabia Saudí contra Irán: la verdadera rivalidad en Oriente Medio», 12 January 2016, Real Instituto Elcano, available at <http://www.blog.rielcano.org/arabia-saudi-iran-la-verdadera-rivalidad-oriente-medio/>. Accessed 25 October 2016. Also YOUNG, Michael, «Turban versus Crown», *Diwan*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 7 October 2016, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/64748>. Accessed 22 October 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Riyadh regards the Obama administration's analysis of the Middle East as «wrong, short-sighted and risky», though it is aware that US support continues to be essential in the short and medium term. SAGER, Abdulaziz, «Evolving Saudi-US ties», Arab News, 17 April 2016, available at <http://www.arabnews.com/columns/news/911451>. Accessed 14 October 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Including all the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (except Oman), Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Sudan. The United States, which does not appear to have been previously consulted, and the United Kingdom have also contributed by indirectly supporting the Saudi operation.

<sup>20</sup> The initial sparks flew in January 2016, when the Shia minority cleric Nimr al-Nimr was executed by the Saudi authorities, triggering rioting in Iran that led protesters to attack and

State and al-Qaeda, of carrying out cyberattacks and spying on each other, as well as of stirring up the ethnic and religious minorities in their rival's territory (Shia in Saudi Arabia and Arab and Kurd in Iran). Similarly, whereas Riyadh denounces Tehran's support for the war crimes of the dictator Assad in Syria against his own population, the Iranians reproach the Saudis for the humanitarian disaster triggered by their military intervention in Yemen and criticise their half-heartedness towards Israel. This escalation has sparked fears that it may turn into an armed conflict, though it seems that the rivals, which share the same concern about their own internal stability, are settling for playing out their rivalry in third countries through pawns acting on their behalf or for exchanging harsh declarations, at least for the time being.

Added to the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the rift between Sunnis and Shias within Islam.<sup>21</sup> The majority Muslim religion could have been a unifying factor in the Middle East, but regional rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran has reinforced the divide in Islam between Sunnis and Shias, which dates from the eighth century. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran, aspiring to head Sunni and Shia Islam respectively,<sup>22</sup> have promoted this sectarian divide both directly and indirectly, with considerable success. Not only have the conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen and the sectarian violence of Daesh/ Islamic State widened the gap between Sunni and Shia, but this divide (which has been managed peacefully in certain periods and countries) has also been used for spurious purposes by other national and local actors to shore up their own powerful position.<sup>23</sup> Once set in motion, this sectarian dynamic

---

set fire to the Saudi embassy in Tehran and the consulate in Mashhad. Diplomatic relations between the countries were subsequently broken off (and other allies of Saudi Arabia soon followed suit).

<sup>21</sup> Actually this is a highly simplified view, as Islam encompasses other schools of thought and Sunni and Shia are subdivided in turn into other groups, making for greater complexity. See Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), *The Sunni-Shia divide*, February 2016, available at [http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!/?cid=otr-marketing\\_url-sunni\\_shia\\_infoguide](http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!/?cid=otr-marketing_url-sunni_shia_infoguide). Accessed 24 September 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, whereas Iran is clearly and indisputably the leader of the «Shia crescent», politically the self-styled «axis of resistance to the West and Israel», encompassing Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon and with close relations with Iraq and the Houthis Shia group in Yemen, Saudi Arabia has not achieved the primacy it seeks in the Sunni world owing to Sunni nations like Egypt and Turkey which have their own regional ambitions.

<sup>23</sup> ABDÖ, Genevieve, «The new Sectarianism: Arab uprisings and the birth of the Sunni-Shia divide», The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, Analysis paper no. 29, April 2013, Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/sunni-shia-abdo.pdf>. Accessed 25 August 2016; ÁLVAREZ-OSSORIO, Ignacio, «La fractura suní-chíi en Oriente Medio», *esglobal*, 24 February 2015, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/la-fractura-suni-chii-en-oriente-medio/>. Accessed 29 August 2016. Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), *The Gulf escalating sectarianism*, POMEPS briefings no. 28, 5 January 2016, available at <https://pomeps.org/2016/01/05/brief-28-the-gulfs-escalating-sectarianism/>. Accessed 11 October 2016; VAKIL, Sanam, «The Saudi-Iran stand-off is not really sectarian», Chatham House, *Expert comment*, 12 January 2016, available at <https://>



in both Iraq and Syria has fed back into itself to the point of creating cohesive blocs that are incompatible with each other.

It should be noted that although the Sunni Muslim population is numerically much larger than its Shia counterpart (85 as opposed to 15 percent), this overall proportion takes very different forms in each of the Middle Eastern countries and this conditions the politics and attitudes of each state.

Country	Iran	Bahrein	Iraq	Lebanon	Syria	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Egypt
<b>Muslims as a percentage of the total population</b>	99	70	99	61	93	93	98	95
<b>Percentage of Shia Muslims</b>	90-95	65-75	45-55	45-55	15-20	10-15	10-15	1

Table 1. Muslims as a percentage of the population and the proportion of Shia Muslims in various Middle Eastern countries. Source: Pew Research Center<sup>24</sup>.

### *Changes in the relative influence of the superpowers in the Middle East*

The general trend in globalisation and the end of the American «unipolar moment» that emerged after the Cold War has questioned the traditional relationship of dependence between the United States and its «client» states in the Middle East, leading to a new, increasingly multipolar and competitive regional order in which the major powers are finding it harder to make their own policies prevail and, in addition, since 2015 the regional dynamics have also been altered by Russia's new assertive role.<sup>25</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States had maintained its monopoly on political and military interventionism in the area that was clearly established in the first Gulf War of 1991 and overwhelmingly demonstrated by the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Arab elites' attitude to American predominance was generally one of acceptance, as despite the occasional rhetoric (especially for domestic consumption) on western interventionism, they were all aware that it both guaranteed the status quo and effectively

[www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/saudi-iran-standoff-not-really-sectarian](http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/saudi-iran-standoff-not-really-sectarian). Accessed 5 September 2016.

<sup>24</sup> LIPKA, Michael, «The Sunni-Shia divide: Where they live, what they believe and how they view each other», Pew Research Center, *Fact Tank*, 18 June 2014, available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/18/the-sunni-shia-divide-where-they-live-what-they-believe-and-how-they-view-each-other/>. Accessed 20 August 2016.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between the global and specific Middle East dynamics, see MORILLAS, Pol; RÓZSA, Erszébet N., and SZALAI, Mate, «Global Dynamics in the MENA region», in MENARA, *Reconceptualizing orders in the MENA región, op. cit.*, pp. 68-87.

kept the Iranian threat in check. Nevertheless, the Sunni Arab rulers began to change their views when the United States «abandoned» Iraq in 2010, leaving the power in the hands of Shia leaders close to Tehran, and when Washington subsequently adopted an impassive attitude to the overthrow of old and faithful allies such as Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with the turmoil sparked by the «Arab Springs», the United States found it difficult to strike a balance between its pro-democracy discourse and the realpolitik deriving from safeguarding its national interests in the short term. In particular, still smarting from the effects of the economic crisis of 2008, having learned its lesson from the unpopular, long drawn-out campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and the undesired collateral effects of the intervention in Libya in 2011 and less reliant on the flows of Middle East oil owing to the development of fracking technology, the Obama administration explicitly announced that it was intending to reduce its influence in the Middle East in order to «pivot» to East Asia and the Pacific; this highlighted the crisis of the US-sponsored regional status quo.<sup>27</sup> It thus left the stage free for increasingly assertive regional actors like Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, at odds with each other.

But the final coup de grace dealt to the wavering «old order» in the Middle East came in the autumn of 2015 when, surprisingly, Putin's Russia seized the chance to return to the centre stage of international politics and once again show itself to be a «constructive» and indispensable superpower in the Middle East, attempting to push its defiance of the international order committed in Ukraine in 2014 into the background. For this purpose, Russia intervened militarily in Syria in defence of Bashar al-Assad's weakened regime, projecting and sustaining its military power with impressive effectiveness and engaging in an intense warfare that the United States was not willing to emulate. The Russian president's skilful combination of political, diplomatic and military action succeeded in decisively changing the course of the Syrian war, and likewise earned Moscow a prominence it had not enjoyed in the area since the Cold War days. After toying with the idea of cooperating with the United States in Syria throughout 2016, at the same time maintaining close coordination with Iran on the Syrian battlefield (not without mistrust) and having made an about-turn in Russian-Turkish relations,<sup>28</sup> Putin left Washington completely out of the picture in Aleppo and in the subsequent ceasefire in December 2016, making the United States

<sup>26</sup> LYNCH, Marc, «The New Arab Wars», Public Affairs, New York, 2016, pp. 189-201.

<sup>27</sup> GOLDBERG, Jeffrey, «The Obama Doctrine», *The Atlantic*, April 2016, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>. Accessed 18 August 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Following the serious crisis triggered by Turkey's downing of a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 in November 2015, followed by the imposition of strict trade sanctions by Moscow. Nevertheless, the end of this bilateral crisis at the initiative of Ankara can only be understood in the light of the group of factors of Turkey's political situation, as will be seen later.

appear powerless to change the events on the ground.<sup>29</sup> Russia, in contrast to the West, has proven it has clear objectives in Syria that are in line with its national interests and has focused all its actions on achieving them; it has returned to the Middle East and is there to stay, as became clear following the conclusion of the agreement with the Syrian government to boost the capacity of the existing naval base at Tartus.<sup>30</sup>

Moscow enjoyed almost all-round success in 2016,<sup>31</sup> though its recently attained privileged position could start to show its limitations in 2017. It is too soon to estimate the relevance to the Middle East of Trump's and Putin's supposed readiness to collaborate, though Moscow is realistic enough to know that it cannot totally dispense with the United States' approval. In addition, it is not clear how much longer Putin can (or is willing to) sustain his burdensome political and military intervention in an area that is not so vital to Russian interests as the Black Sea or Ukraine. Another unknown quantity is how long Russian-Iranian strategic coordination can be kept up,<sup>32</sup> as Tehran has its own regional agenda which does not match Russia's, or what the future holds in store for the Russian entente with Turkey, a power which, despite its recent circumstantial rapprochement with Moscow, has traditionally been hostile to Russia and whose international track record seems rather erratic. All this leads us to the conclusion that it is not clear whether Russia is able or even willing to attempt to take on the hegemonic role previously enjoyed by the United States in the region, though it certainly aspires to increase its political weight both in the Middle East and globally.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> KOZHANOV, Nicolay, «Russia's military intervention in Syria makes it a key regional player», *Expert Comment*, Chatham House, 2 October 2015, available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russias-military-intervention-syria-makes-it-key-regional-player>. Accessed 8 October 2016. KILCULLEN, David, «Blood year. The Islamic State and the failures of the War on Terror», Hurst and Company, London, 2016, pp. 185-97.

<sup>30</sup> OSBORN, Andrew, «Russia to build permanent Syrian naval base, eyes other outposts», *World News*, Reuters, 10 October 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-tartus-idUSKCN12A0W6>. Accessed 15 October 2016. On the political dimensions of Russia's new role in the Middle East, see GUL, Mohamed Zahed, «Russia's new openness in the Middle East», *Middle East Monitor*, 6 January 2017, available at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170106-russias-new-openness-in-the-middle-east/>. Accessed 6 January 2017.

<sup>31</sup> SUCHKOV, Maxim A., «Here's why Russia gives itself high marks for 2016», *Al Monitor*, 2 January 2017, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/russia-agenda-middle-east-foreign-policy-syria.html>. Accessed 3 January 2017.

<sup>32</sup> TRENIN, Dmitri, *Russia and Iran: historic mistrust and contemporary partnership*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 18 August 2016, available at <http://carnegie.ru/2016/08/18/russia-and-iran-historic-mistrust-and-contemporary-partnership-pub-64365>. Accessed 20 December 2016.

<sup>33</sup> See the useful reminder of the factors that limit a hypothetical regional leadership of Russia in the Middle East in CAMMACK, Perry, and SOKOLOVSKY, Richard, «Not so fast», *Diwan*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 3 January 2017, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/66574?lang=en>. Accessed 6 January 2017.

The United States has deliberately focused exclusively on the «war on Daesh/Islamic State» in both Syria and Iraq from the minimalist perspective of counterterrorism,<sup>34</sup> ignoring the effects of the rest of the conflicts that are being waged simultaneously. It seems that Washington, reluctant to commit to a permanent or long-term intervention in the Middle East, has taken for granted that it is incapable of decisively influencing the many local actors, at least those with clashing interests.<sup>35</sup> Given the complexity of the regional context, it does not appear that the recovery of the territory of the «caliphate» of Daesh/Islamic State by the disjointed International Coalition led by the United States and its local allies will be sufficient to re-establish Middle Eastern stability; indeed, there are not even any guarantees that Iraq will finally be stabilised, but the United States appears resigned to this prospect. Viewed from Washington's perspective, shoring up the regional order as it existed before 2011, even if a feasible mission (and it is not clear whether it is), would require an investment of political, military and economic resources that it not prepared to carry out in a region that is no longer regarded as such a priority for America's global interests. The United States thus appears to have limited itself to a strategy of minimal involvement and damage management, and has no intention of recovering its previous absolute hegemony. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that even though its influence is evidently waning, the United States continues to be the main international actor in the Middle East, well ahead of the rest of its competitors, including Russia.

The impact of the possible changes the Trump administration will bring in 2017 is difficult to predict. The Middle East does not appear to be one of the priorities of the new White House tenant, whose vision of international politics is strongly focused on a narrow definition of American national interests and opposed to taking on additional commitments. Together with Trump's general idea that greater cooperation with Russia is possible (compared to a foreseeable trade dispute with China), only three specific issues seem to have deserved his attention in the Middle East: eliminating Daesh/Islamic State and counterterrorism; strengthening ties with Israel; and keeping Iran in check, even questioning the nuclear deal. This indicates that America can be expected to be selective in the region as a whole, paying attention to only the three abovementioned objectives.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, by not considering

<sup>34</sup> See GIL GUERRERO, Javier, «Operación Inherent Resolve: una campaña de bajo coste, baja intensidad y baja participación», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE), 13 May 2016, available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2016/DIEEO47-2016\\_Inherent\\_Resolve\\_JavierGilGuerrero.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEO47-2016_Inherent_Resolve_JavierGilGuerrero.pdf). Accessed 15 September 2016.

<sup>35</sup> See the perceptive analysis by KNIGHTS, Michael, «Time to focus on the wars within the war against the Islamic State, *War on the rocks*», 21 December 2015, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2015/12/time-to-focus-on-the-wars-within-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/>. Accessed 20 September 2016.

<sup>36</sup> GARCÍA ENCINA, Carlota, «Estados Unidos 2016: Trump y la política exterior», Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 78/2016, 4 November 2016, available at

the Middle East to be a priority area (compared to China/East Asia and the domestic dimension), Trump is unwittingly adopting the same stance as Obama, though only time will tell whether events in the unforeseeable Middle East will (again) force a begrudging United States into greater involvement than it wishes for.<sup>37</sup>

### *Economic factors*

Part of the endemic economic crisis that has had so many negative consequences on the Middle East is due to exceptionally low oil prices since the end of 2014, which have played havoc with budget balancing in states that rely excessively on this resource.<sup>38</sup> Following months of intense negotiations, at their Vienna meeting in November the oil exporters' organisation (OPEC) agreed to cut production (an agreement subsequently adopted by non-OPEC countries like Russia), resulting in a moderate hike in crude oil prices. Despite the initially clashing opinions of various players (particularly arch rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran), a mutually beneficial agreement was finally reached – unusually for the Middle East – that has enabled the oil-producing countries to draw up better budgets for 2017.<sup>39</sup>

---

[http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/ari78-2016-garciaencina-eeuu-2016-trump-politica-exterior](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari78-2016-garciaencina-eeuu-2016-trump-politica-exterior) Accessed 11 November 2016. DOMÍNGUEZ DE OLAZABAL, Itxaso, «Trump en Oriente Medio: Manual de uso», *Esglobal*, 18 November 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/trump-oriente-medio-manual-uso/>. Accessed 20 November 2016. GHITIS, Frida, «Arab rulers are happy to see Obama go but uncertain about Trump», *World Politics Review*, 1 December 2016, available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/20569/arab-rulers-are-happy-to-see-obama-go-but-uncertain-about-trump>. Accessed 7 December 2016.

<sup>37</sup> As occurred with Obama in 2014 in view of the rise of Daesh/Islamic State, which forced him to postpone his announced and never implemented «pivot» to the Pacific.

<sup>38</sup> Oil sales account for between 50 and 60 percent of Middle Eastern oil producing countries' GDP, depending on the country.

<sup>39</sup> Beginning in late 2014, as a result of falling demand and excess production, the price per barrel of crude oil fell from about 100-20 dollars to under 45, and had plummeted to 26 by January 2016. Following the OPEC's agreement to reduce crude oil production, the cost of a Brent barrel rose to 55 dollars on 5 December after increasing by 8 percent in a matter of days, and was expected to increase moderately. European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) Science for Policy Report, *Impact of low oil prices on oil exporting countries*, 12 May 2016, available at [http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC101562/jrc101562\\_impact%20of%20low%20oil%20prices%2020160512.pdf](http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC101562/jrc101562_impact%20of%20low%20oil%20prices%2020160512.pdf). Accessed 15 October 2016. RAZZOUK, Nayla; RASCOUET, Angelina, and MOTEVAALI, Goldar, «OPEC confounds skeptics, agrees to first oil cuts in 8 years», *Markets*, Bloomberg, 30 November 2016, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-30/opec-said-to-agree-oil-production-cuts-as-saudis-soften-on-iran>. Accessed 2 December 2016. The OPEC agreement was reached when Saudi Arabia agreed to cut its production while allowing Iran to increase its own output slightly to bring it up to levels recorded before the international sanctions were imposed (2012-15). Middle East Institute, «Monday briefing, OPEC deal: a win for Iran», 5 December 2016, available at <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/monday-briefing-opec-deal-win-iran>. Accessed 10 December 2016.

The crisis in the price of hydrocarbons, and in some cases the realisation that oil and gas reserves – which vary widely from country to country – are limited, has driven the main producing countries, chiefly the Gulf states, to draw up plans to make their economies more open, sustainable, diversified and competitive, with a smaller public sector, fewer subsidies, and less reliance on oil.<sup>40</sup> Saudi Arabia blazed the trail with its «Vision 2030», but other Gulf states are already heading in the same direction. Nevertheless, opinions are divided as to their ability (and even if they are truly willing) to modify the existing economic systems owing to the implications, which range from a possible disturbance of social peace in times of crisis with unpopular reforms to the impact on the power distribution in each state, as the interests of the oligarchic groups would be affected.<sup>41</sup>

The situation of the countries that do not produce crude oil is more delicate and some are already gripped by social and economic crisis. Their economic difficulties are normally related to an increase in political and social unrest, and trigger widespread discontent and undermine the existing order, which feeds back into the cycle. A particularly prominent case is Egypt, which after embarking on major infrastructure projects has yet to reap any benefits; indeed, the International Monetary Fund has had to inject liquidity into the country's floundering economy.<sup>42</sup>

An encouraging sign is the recently discovered gas fields in the west Mediterranean, which have not yet begun to be fully exploited. The beneficiaries, in varying degrees, could be all the coastal states (so far Egypt, Israel and Cyprus, but they could also eventually include Lebanon, Syria and even the Palestinian Authority). The economic opportunities have influenced the resumption of negotiations on the reunification of Cyprus, which could

---

<sup>40</sup> In the case of Saudi Arabia, oil accounts for 75 percent of government revenues and half of GDP, and two-thirds of Saudis work in the public sector. LARSON, Alan, and PENCE, Constance Anne, «Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Ambitions to modernize and diversify the economy», *Global Policy Watch*, 6 June 2016, available at <https://www.globalpolicywatch.com/2016/06/saudi-arabias-vision-2030-ambitions-to-modernize-and-diversify-the-economy/>. Accessed 20 August 2016.

<sup>41</sup> On Saudi Arabia's «Vision 2030», see the Saudi government's official website at <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en>. Accessed 20 September 2016. KINNINMONT, Jane, «Saudi Arabia faces its future in vision 2030 Reform Plan», Chatham House, 29 April 2016, available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/saudi-arabia-faces-its-future-vision-2030-reform-plan>. Accessed 25 September 2016. A sceptical view is expressed in CALABRO, Philip, «Saudi Arabia's post oil plan enters slippery slope», *Al Monitor*, 27 May 2016, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/saudi-arabia-love-oil-aramco-ipo.html>. Accessed 21 August 2016.

<sup>42</sup> ELMESHAD, Mohamed, «Egypt's ad hoc economy», *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 July 2016, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64140>. Accessed 19 September 2016. NÚÑEZ VILLAYERDE, Jesús A., «El FMI cree en Egipto, ¿alguien más?», *Blog*, Real Instituto Elcano, 14 November 2016, available at <http://www.blog.rielcano.org/el-fmi-cree-en-egipto-alguien-mas/>. Accessed 21 November 2016.

be brought to fruition in 2017.<sup>43</sup> They have also helped maintain strategic harmony between Egypt and Israel and have been one of the factors that are expressly recognised in the reconciliation between Turkey and Israel in June 2016.<sup>44</sup>



Image 2. Gas and oil pipeline infrastructure in the Middle East. Source: Wikimedia

## The Middle East countries in 2016

Having examined the outlook and regional factors, we will go on to briefly analyse the situation and developments of 2016 in some of the countries in the areas which have undergone more significant changes during the year: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

### *Saudi Arabia: a year of internal reforms and dynamic external relations with little to show for it*

After abandoning years of cautious and conciliatory diplomacy, in 2016 Saudi Arabia continued its recent regional assertiveness begun the previous year,

<sup>43</sup> STEFANINI, Sara, «Cyprus, the endgame», *Politico*, 9 January 2017, available at <http://www.politico.eu/article/cyprus-news-standoff-talks-reunification-turkey-greece-anastasiades/>. Accessed 10 January 2017.

<sup>44</sup> US Congressional Research Center, *Natural Gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 15 August 2016, available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44591.pdf>. Accessed 18 November 2016.



with an aggressive foreign policy, directly opposed to Iran, to fill the gap left by what Riyadh perceives as weak US political and military leadership. Meanwhile, the Saudi kingdom is attempting to weather the economic storm unleashed by low hydrocarbon prices, is preparing its economic future with a view to 2030 in an era without oil, and is not relaxing its tight grip on domestic politics, with the two candidates in line to succeed King Salman competing discreetly for greater shares of power and influence.<sup>45</sup>

King Salman's monarchy, exercising its traditional economic soft power (for example, over Egypt and Lebanon) and even, as a novelty, employing its military capabilities on a mass scale in Yemen, intends to become the leader of the Sunni community (and of the Arab world in general) vis-à-vis the Shia-Persian threat of Iran, which is openly intervening in Syria and more discreetly in Iraq and Yemen. Nevertheless, Riyadh is enjoying only relative success in its attempt to lead the Arab world, for although in general the Gulf Cooperation Council has remained relatively united following the Saudi initiatives, the same is not true of the very diverse Arab community, particularly countries like Lebanon and Iraq, for reasons related to the confessional structure of their population and domestic policy interests. Despite the large amount of economic aid it has received from the Gulf in recent years, Egypt has openly shown its diplomatic independence from Riyadh. Ambitious Saudi projects such as the international Islamic military alliance against terrorism have clearly revealed the limits of Riyadh's leadership.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, the Saudi monarchy has maintained its indispensable but ambivalent relationship with the United States, which has been damaged by frequent discrepancies.<sup>47</sup> With respect to the new Trump administration, Saudi

---

<sup>45</sup> ECHAGUE, Ana, «Arabia Saudi se planta», *Estudios de Política Exterior, Afkar/Ideas* no. 49, Spring 2016, available at <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/afkar-ideas/arabia-saudi-se-planta/>. Accessed 15 September 2016. GRESH, Alain, «L'Arabie saoudite dans les sables mouvants du Proche Orient», *Orient XXI*, 5 January 2017, available at <http://orientxxi.info/magazine/entre-guerre-du-yemen-et-guerre-de-succession,1642>. Accessed 8 January 2017.

<sup>46</sup> JENKINS, Brian Michael, «A Saudi-led military Alliance to fight terrorism, Welcome muscle in the fight against terrorism, desert mirage or bad idea?» Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California, United States, 2016, available at [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE189/RAND\\_PE189.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE189/RAND_PE189.pdf). Accessed 8 October 2016.

<sup>47</sup> For example, in July 2016 US Congress declassified a report on the supposed Saudi links to the terrorists responsible for 11/9 and, subsequently, Congress passed the *Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA)*, which allows foreign officials who supported terrorism to be brought to justice in the United States. This aroused discontent in Riyadh, at which the act was presumed to be directed. The Saudi-led Coalition's indiscriminate strikes in Yemen have likewise questioned US military support for Riyadh. SCIUTTO, Jim; BROWNE, Ryan, and WALSH, Deirdre, «Congress releases secret '28 pages' on alleged Saudi 11-S ties», *CNN*, 16 July 2016, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/15/politics/congress-releases-28-pages-saudis-9-11/>. Accessed 11 October 2016. FEIERSTEIN, Gerald M., «JASTA adds strain on US-Saudi relations», *Middle East Institute*, 2 November 2016, available at <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/jasta-adds-strain-us-saudi-relations>.



Arabia seems reassured by its considerably hostile attitude to Iran, though it is wary of its intense pro-Israeli, its lukewarm vision of the future of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and the intended entente cordiale with Russia.<sup>48</sup>

Despite its intense international political and military activity, Riyadh cannot be said to have reaped positive results in 2016. In Yemen, it was unable to bring its military intervention to a decisive conclusion and it does not look set to end in the short term, and nor did it manage to prevent the modest but damaging Houthi attacks on its own territory. The long-drawn-out deadlock in the Yemeni conflict has led to the appearance of the first cracks in the Saudi-led international coalition, which has also been harshly criticised by the international community for its indiscriminate bombings. Added to its loss of influence in Egypt and Lebanon, following the fall of Aleppo and the serious defeats suffered by the opposition, as of the end of 2016 Saudi Arabia's objectives in Syria seem more distant possibilities than ever.<sup>49</sup>

While maintaining its iron-fisted grip on domestic affairs and keeping jihadist terrorism at bay, Saudi Arabia with its «Vision 2030» envisages an ambitious, efficient and sustainable economic future not reliant on oil, with a thriving private sector and a small public sector (the opposite of what it currently has), while in the short term it is making adjustments to the new market situation with lower crude oil prices. Analysts have pointed out that these deep economic transformations are not being accompanied by basic changes in the current political and social framework and this could be the Achilles' heel of the technocratic reform under way.<sup>50</sup> Over the course of 2016 the Saudi government showed its determination to implement the project despite the unpopular measures it entails, cancelling or delaying projects, cutting subsidies, toughening working conditions in the public sector and carrying out much talked-about dismissals of economic chiefs. Until the advantages promised in «Vision 2030» materialise in the long term, and unless the price

---

Accessed 10 November 2016. STEWART, Phil, and STROBEL, Warren, «US to halt some arms sales to Saudi, citing civilian deaths in Yemen campaign», Reuters, 13 December 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-arabia-yemen-exclusive-idUSKBN1421UK>. Accessed 15 December 2016.

<sup>48</sup> RIEDEL, Bruce, «Saudi Arabia contemplates Trump», *Al Monitor*, 22 November 2016, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/saudi-arabia-surprise-trump-obama-relations.html>. Accessed 28 November 2016.

<sup>49</sup> AL-RASHEED, Madawi, «2017: A Saudi existential crisis», *Middle East Eye*, 3 January 2017, available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/2017-saudi-existential-crisis-185025494>. Accessed 4 January 2017.

<sup>50</sup> ECHAGUE, Ana, «El Plan saudí 2030, ¿será esta la buena?», *Esglobal*, 20 September 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/el-plan-saudi-vision-2030-sera-esta-la-buena/>. Accessed 20 October 2016. REED, Matthew M., «Saudi Vision 2030: Winners and losers», *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for international peace, 2 August 2016, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64227>. Accessed 25 August 2016; and NÚÑEZ VILLLAVERDE, Jesús A., «Arabia Saudí y la caducidad de su modelo», *Esglobal*, 17 October 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/arabia-saudi-la-caducidad-modelo/>. Accessed 30 October 2016.

of oil rises significantly again, for the time being all that it has to show for its efforts is the inevitable cuts.<sup>51</sup> Driven by the pressing need to increase its oil revenues, Riyadh has had to vary its policy of the past two years of not limiting crude oil production after experiencing its harmful effects, even though this has also favoured rivals like Iran. In the social field, despite signs of opening, the house of Saud's alliance with the extreme Wahhabi Islam remains as strong as even, and this will make it difficult to implement some of the opening measures laid down in «Vision 2030».

Lastly, it has been pointed out that Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign policy cannot be fully understood without bearing in mind the discreet rivalry between the two candidate princes in line to inherit the throne of 80-year-old King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz, who are attempting to establish their own profile: 57-year-old Muhammad bin Nayef, the designated heir, first deputy prime minister and minister of the interior, a representative of traditional Saudi order; and the second heir, 31-year-old dynamic Salman bin Muhammad, the current monarch's son, second deputy prime minister, defence minister and president of the Economic Affairs and Development Council, the main promotor of «Vision 2030» but also of the intervention in Yemen.<sup>52</sup>

### *Iran: unfulfilled economic promises, a year of external successes and an uncertain outlook for 2017*

Iran is currently at an expansive foreign-policy phase after reaping major successes in Syria in 2016 and enjoying a certain advantage over its competitor, Saudi Arabia, in Lebanon and Yemen. However its economy has yet to take off, even following the partial lifting of the international sanctions in January 2016 after the implementation of the nuclear deal (also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) of July 2015, and this has dashed people's expectations.<sup>53</sup> Added to this, there is a deep divide between the reformists and the conservatives (also called «principlists»), which will

<sup>51</sup> TOUBI, Habib, «Saudi Arabia cuts public service bonuses, ministers salaries», Gulf News, 10 September 2016, available at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-cuts-public-sector-bonuses-ministers-salaries-1.1902575>. Accessed 21 September 2016. Agencies, «Saudi labour minister replaced, councils reshuffled», Al Jazeera, 3 December 2016, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/saudi-arabia-labour-minister-161203043749992.html>. Accessed 7 December 2016.

<sup>52</sup> MAZETTI, Mark, and HUBBARD, Ben, «Rise of Saudi prince shatters decades of royal tradition», *The New York Times*, 15 October 2016, available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/rise-of-saudi-prince-shatters-decades-of-royal-tradition.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/rise-of-saudi-prince-shatters-decades-of-royal-tradition.html?_r=0). Accessed 2 December 2016.

<sup>53</sup> For an Iranian view of the JCPOA and its perspectives, see MUSAVIAN, Seyed Hossein, «Irán en la agenda internacional: perspectivas de future», *Anuario Internacional CIDOB* 2015, June 2016, available at [http://www.cidob.org/articulos/anuario\\_internacional\\_cidob/2015/iran\\_en\\_la\\_agenda\\_internacional\\_perspectivas\\_de\\_futuro](http://www.cidob.org/articulos/anuario_internacional_cidob/2015/iran_en_la_agenda_internacional_perspectivas_de_futuro). Accessed 28 November 2016.

underpin the presidential elections slated for May 2017, while Iran meditates on the way ahead now that the Trump administration, very hostile to Tehran, is in power in the United States.<sup>54</sup>

In strategic terms, the year could hardly have had a better outcome for Iran. Its most faithful regional ally, Hezbollah, has maintained its clout in Lebanon and is continuing to contribute decisively to their joint success in Syria.<sup>55</sup> In Iraq, Tehran has subtly and pragmatically preserved its influence on the government and on the main Shia political forces, and the militias it supports have been strengthened. With a minimal military investment, the regime of the ayatollahs is proving to be one of the biggest strategic beneficiaries of the foreseeable victory of the government (with the support of the international coalition led by the United States) over Daesh/Islamic State in Mosul.<sup>56</sup> However, Syria was Tehran's most successful theatre of operations in 2016,<sup>57</sup> and it is increasingly close to achieving its goal of an allied regime in Damascus.

Considering the Syrian war to be essential to the survival of their regional influence, Iran and its Shia allies (including Hezbollah and Shia militias of Iraqi and Afghan origin) have powerful ground forces in Syria which have proven to be essential to the tenacious offensive that ended in the capture of Aleppo, complementing the air fire support provided by Russia. In Syria, as a means of ensuring its influence whatever the final outcome may be, Iran has made hefty economic investments in the government-controlled area. In addition, as it is somewhat distrustful of Russia's ultimate aims, Tehran has been developing direct links on the ground with the elements that make up Assad's regime.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, with a very low political and material cost to

<sup>54</sup> For an overview of the situation in Iran in 2016, see «Iranian politics after the nuclear deal. Who's in charge?», *The Economist*, 28 May 2016, available at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21699462-supreme-leader-clipping-wings-reformist-president-whos>. Accessed 14 September 2016. Also SABET Farzan, «The Rouhani presidency at three», Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 August 2016, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64356>. Accessed 12 September 2016.

<sup>55</sup> EINAV, Omer, «From Baadba to al-Qusayr: Hezbollah's victory march», *INSS Insight* no. 870, The Institute for National Security studies (INSS) Israel, 21 November 2016, available at <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=12572>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>56</sup> EISENSTADT, Michael, and KNIGHTS, Michael, «The battle for Mosul and Iran's regional reach», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 5 December 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-battle-for-mosul-and-irans-regional-reach>. Accessed 12 December 2016.

<sup>57</sup> «Aleppo victory bolsters Iran's regional strategy», *TSG Intel brief*, The Soufan Group, 4 January 2017, available at <http://soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-aleppo-victory-bolsters-irans-regional-strategy/>. Accessed 7 January 2017.

<sup>58</sup> RAFIZADEH, Majid, «The implications of the growing Iran-Syria economic relations», *Al Arabiya*, 30 September 2016, available at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2016/09/30/How-Iran-is-gradually-owning-Syria-economically.html>. Accessed 4 October 2016. LUNDL, Aron, «Stand together or fall apart: The Russian-Iranian Alliance in Syria», *Syria in crisis*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 31 May 2016, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/63699>. Accessed 21 September 2016. A particularly

Iran, in Yemen the Houthi Shia seem capable of withstanding indefinitely the military pressure of the Saud-led international coalition.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, the Iranian economy, heavily reliant on oil, has yet to properly bounce back despite specific successes such as increased hydrocarbon production and the OPEC's formal recognition of the increase in Iranian oil production quotas.<sup>60</sup> Following the lifting of some of the international sanctions after the signing of the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA), despite the announcement of some investment agreements with foreign companies, Iran has not achieved the desired full economic integration into the world markets owing to many other impediments and penalisations linked to the system of international (and specifically American) sanctions still in force in relation to Iran's human rights situation, its promotion of terrorism and its development of ballistic missiles.<sup>61</sup> The very structure of Iran's «resistance economy», with a strong state presence, widespread corruption and lack of transparency, as well as many independent economic players such as the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), who own a large conglomerate of economic interests in a host of areas, is not helping.<sup>62</sup> All in all, despite certain early benefits, Iran considers that it has not been sufficiently rewarded for complying with the nuclear deal. Whatever the case, a US congress that is openly hostile to Iran and the election of Trump, with his persistently anti-Iranian rhetoric, do not bode well for a constructive future for the ever- problematic Iran-US relations,<sup>63</sup> regardless of whether the nuclear deal formally remains in force.<sup>64</sup>

---

interesting and up-to-date article is TABRIZI, Anniseh Basiri, and PANTUCCI, Rafaello, «Understanding Iran's role in the Syrian conflict», Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), *Occasional paper*, August 2016, available at [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201608\\_op\\_understanding\\_irans\\_role\\_in\\_the\\_syrian\\_conflict\\_0.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201608_op_understanding_irans_role_in_the_syrian_conflict_0.pdf) Accessed 2 December 2016.

<sup>59</sup> JUNEAU, Thomas, «Iran's policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: a limited return on a modest investment», *International Affairs*, no. 92, May 2016, pp. 647-63.

<sup>60</sup> NAKHLE, Carole, «Iran oil and gas: Promises and pitfalls», *Diwan*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 21 November 2016, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/2016/11/21/iran-oil-and-gas-promises-and-pitfalls-pub-66234>. Accessed 10 December 2016.

<sup>61</sup> FOROOHAR, Fariz, «Nuclear deal promised new investment. Iran's still waiting», Bloomberg, 25 May 2016, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-05-25/nuclear-deal-promised-to-spur-investment-iran-s-still-waiting>. Accessed 14 December 2016.

<sup>62</sup> ZACCARA, Luciano, «Irán: perfil de país. Política interior, economía y sociedad», Anuario Internacional CIDOB 2015, June 2016, available at [http://www.cidob.org/articulos/anuario\\_internacional\\_cidob/2015/iran\\_perfil\\_de\\_pais\\_politica\\_interior\\_economia\\_y\\_sociedad](http://www.cidob.org/articulos/anuario_internacional_cidob/2015/iran_perfil_de_pais_politica_interior_economia_y_sociedad). Accessed 28 November 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Even in a year marked by the successful full implementation of the JCPOA and with a favourably disposed administration like Obama's, the clashes between the United States and Iran have been numerous: mutual accusations of non-compliance with the nuclear deal; Iran's arrest of citizens with dual Iranian-American nationality accused of espionage; frequent hostile manoeuvres between Iranian and American vessels in the Persian Gulf, and many more.

<sup>64</sup> «Implementing the Iran Nuclear Deal: A status report», International Crisis Group, 16 January 2017, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf->

As for domestic affairs, the clerical regime headed by the supreme leader, 77-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with some minor internal opposition,<sup>65</sup> controls Iranian society without much ado, albeit with the concern to improve the economic situation to avoid social protests. Iran is preparing for presidential elections in May 2017, with the reformists and pragmatists united in their support for the candidate for re-election, current President Hassan Rouhani, the main promotor of the nuclear deal and of the policy of closer dealings with the international community.<sup>66</sup> Rouhani's chances of re-election appear to be weakened by the meagre economic results and prospects of an imminent political and diplomatic clash with Trump's United States, but the conservatives or principlists have yet to come up with a strong candidate after the supreme leader vetoed the return to politics of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>67</sup>

Some analysts are questioning the practicality of focusing attention on the election and the divisions between reformists and conservatives/principlists given that in the Iranian regime much of the real power is beyond the reach of the president and parliament anyway, as there are non-elected collegiate councils (the Guardians, Expediency Discernment and National Security) where decisions with far-reaching political consequences are made.<sup>68</sup> They also draw attention to the considerable autonomy of action enjoyed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and, in particular, General Qasem Soleimani's al-Qods force, Iran's main military vehicle for open or covert overseas action.<sup>69</sup> What nobody denies is the total authority of the supreme leader Khamenei over the dispersed and sometimes confusing Iranian power apparatus, which

---

and-arabian-peninsula/iran/173-implementing-iran-nuclear-deal-status-report. Accessed 17 January 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Which includes terrorist movements of the Arab, Kurdish and Baluch minorities, all of which have limited operational capabilities, at least for the time being, and isolated groups in exile that aim to topple the regime, such as the left-wing People's Mujahedin (MEK). Agencies, «Two bombings target Iran's second major oil pipeline», *Asharq al-Awsat*, 4 January 2017, available at <http://english.aawsat.com/2017/01/article55364959/two-bombings-target-irans-second-major-oil-pipeline>. Accessed 5 January 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Pointing out in any case that President Rouhani, although moderate, can hardly be considered ground-breaking and is deeply respectful of the prevailing order in the Iranian theocracy.

<sup>67</sup> SHINE, Sima, and CATRAN, Anna, «The start of the Iranian presidential campaign», Institute for National Security Studies, INSS (Israel), *INSS Insight* no. 871, 24 November 2016, available at <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=12603>. Accessed 9 December 2016. NASSERI Ladane and MOTEVALLI Golnar, «Trump's deal threats hang over Iran's elections», *Bloomberg*, 16 January 2017, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-01-16/reading-trump-in-tehran-deal-threats-hang-over-iran-s-election>. Accessed 17 January 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Including, for example, the powers of the Council of Guardians to veto electoral candidates, which they exercise relatively frequently and with full discretion.

<sup>69</sup> ALFONEH, Ali, «The IRGC morphs into an expeditionary force», *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 12 May 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-irgc-morphs-into-an-expeditionary-force>. Accessed 20 October 2016.

will ensure the overall continuity of Iran's domestic and foreign policies in 2017, regardless of the May election result.<sup>70</sup>

### *Iraq: Ups and downs after Mosul, the light at the end of the tunnel or back to square one?*

The end of the war against Daesh/Islamic State at last seems in sight, though this will no doubt only bring back to centre stage conflicts that have been hibernating and could lead to Iraq's implosion if not properly handled.<sup>71</sup>

In December 2015, the city of Ramadi was won back and six months later, in June, Fallujah was recaptured surprisingly easily and quickly, and the main population centres of the Sunni province of al-Anbar were thus freed. Meanwhile, Daesh/Islamic State concentrated on defending Mosul<sup>72</sup> and, to economise, counterattacked with a series of terrible attacks on the Shia areas of Baghdad, one killing more than 300 people, which placed prime minister Haider al-Abadi's government in a predicament at a politically delicate time.

At last, in October, more than 50,000 combatants including the best units from the Iraqi army, Peshmerga Kurds and militias of different kinds joined forces for the assault on Mosul, where some 5,000-8,000 Daesh/

<sup>70</sup> KHATIB, Lina, «The myth of the hardline-pragmatic division in Iran», Middle East Eye, 28 January 2016, available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/myth-hardline-pragmatic-division-iran-1751861509>. Accessed 14 October 2016. For an opposite view from an author who believes in Rouhani's possibilities of bringing changes to the system, see GERANMAYEH, Ellie, «Iran's evolutionary road to reform», *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 28 July 2016, available at <https://www.thecairoreview.com/tahrir-forum/irans-evolutionary-road-to-reform/>. Accessed 16 October 2016.

<sup>71</sup> JEFFREY, James, «As the ISIS tides recedes», Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 June 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/as-the-isis-tide-recedes>. Accessed 14 September 2016. BAÑOS BAJO, Pedro, «Mosul, la victoria pírrica», *Esglobal*, 28 October 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/mosul-la-victoria-pirrica/>. Accessed 23 November 2016. YAHYA, Maha, «Looking beyond Mosul», *Diwan*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 8 December 2016, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/66373>. Accessed 14 December 2016.

<sup>72</sup> For the total figures for Daesh/Islamic State combatants, see The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters. An assessment of the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq*, updated in December 2015, available at [http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf). Accessed 14 August 2016; TIGHMAN, Andrew, «Why ISIS flow of new recruits has slowed to a trickle», *Military Times*, 26 April 2016, available at <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2016/04/26/why-isis-flow-new-recruits-has-slowed-trickle/83548492/>. Accessed 21 October 2016. COCKBURN, Patrick, *ISIS. El retorno de la yihad*, Ariel, Barcelona, 2015; and, BALANCHE, Fabrice, «Status of the Syrian rebellion: numbers, ideologies and prospects», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 22 November 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/status-of-the-syrian-rebellion-numbers-ideologies-and-prospects>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

Islamic State fighters had had nearly two years to entrench themselves and prepare their defence. The operation required complex military, political and diplomatic preparations to ensure the cooperation of groups belonging to the Kurdish regional government, the discipline of the mainly Shia popular mobilisation forces (PMU or al-Hashd al-Shaabi), and appease Turkey, which has a base in Iraq and wanted the Turkmen militiamen, its local protégés, to play a significant role in the attack.

The attack on Mosul, a city with a population of more than one million, began on 16 October; a corridor to Syria was left open in case Daesh/Islamic State decided to withdraw from the city, but it soon became clear that the jihadist fighters would not retreat and were set on defending Mosul to the grave. The coalition entered the capital of Nineveh province, divided into two by the river Tigris, from the east, with fierce fighting in the city; as well as putting up harsh resistance in the city itself, Daesh/Islamic State responded with terrorist counterattacks in Kirkuk and Bagdad, showing it retains significant terrorist operational capabilities; however, it was not capable of influencing the developments of the Mosul campaign. At the time of writing, government troops had reached the banks of the river Tigris on 18 January, overcoming the tenacious resistance of Daesh/Islamic State, which uses all kinds of weapons and tactics, even employing civilians as human shields. The most difficult part remains: fighting in the historical part of western Mosul, but there seems to be no doubt that Iraq will win, although the cost in terms of both time and casualties will be high.<sup>73</sup>

Whereas the military campaign was carefully planned, it is not certain whether there are sufficient planning and resources to re-establish the government's authority in the territories formerly occupied by Daesh, either in the province of Al-Anbar, in the west, or in Nineveh, in the north, to earn the support of these provinces' Sunni majority.<sup>74</sup> Another sensitive issue is housing the nearly two million internally displaced people.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Iraq will have to address rebuilding the economy and the infrastructure destroyed in one-third of the country, a task for which its languishing economy is totally unprepared. In addition, the proven resilience of Daesh/Islamic state<sup>76</sup> will

<sup>73</sup> To trace the development of the Mosul campaign, see the periodic reports of the Institute for the Study of War, <http://understandingwar.org/>.

<sup>74</sup> In the case of Nineveh, the situation is more complex owing to the coexistence of many different religious and cultural groups (Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Yazidis, etc.) and the proximity of the borders of Turkey and Iran, which have chosen local allies to favour their own interests.

<sup>75</sup> UNHCR, «Iraq Factsheet», November 2016, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-unhcr-factsheet-november-2016>. Accessed 14 December 2016. The number of displaced people stands at 1,800,000, to which should be added a further 160,000 as a result of the Mosul campaign.

<sup>76</sup> Previously displayed by its predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq, which made a full comeback after being practically destroyed in 2007-10.

make it necessary to keep up counterterrorism efforts for a long time even after its military defeat in both Iraq<sup>77</sup> and the rest of the world.<sup>78</sup>

In Baghdad the perennial political crisis of 2016, with episodes such as the invasion of the Iraqi parliament at the end of April by crowds harangued by the cleric and political leader Moqtada al-Sadr and the successive dismissal of key ministers of Abadi's government by a hostile parliament, provides an unsettling counterpoint to the government's military successes against Daesh/Islamic State. The fragility of the Iraqi government became evident in 2016: moderate, with international support but lacking a sound parliamentary majority in a house that is highly fragmented and clientelist. Internal rifts and the apparent lack of a sense of state among many parties and politicians of the Shia majority contrast with the broad-mindedness and generosity needed to succeed in negotiating the integration of the Kurdish and Sunni minorities with a federal, provincial or unitary model.<sup>79</sup> Prudence is likewise needed to balance Iraqi national independence with the well-established influence of Iran in the country which, although discreet, encompasses a broad variety of political and even military groups (the Shia militias) that ensure its influence.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, Iraq will have to manage the abovementioned processes while maintaining relations with other powers with strong interests in Iraq such as the United States, Turkey and even Saudi Arabia, not to mention the destabilising potential of the Syrian civil

<sup>77</sup> MELLO, Alex, and KNIGHTS, Michael, «Losing Mosul, regenerating in Diyala: How the Islamic State could exploit Iraq's sectarian tinderbox», *CTC Sentinel*, West Point Combating Terrorist Center, 25 October 2016, available at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/losing-mosul-regenerating-in-diyala-how-the-islamic-state-could-exploit-iraqs-sectarian-tinderbox>. Accessed 21 November 2016.

<sup>78</sup> REINARES, Fernando, «De Dabiq a Roma: el Estado Islámico muta y eso concierne a la UE», *Comentario Elcano* 46/2016, Real Instituto Elcano, 10 November 2016, available at <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/ae584f93-7e14-4fa3-98c5-8c24078c6640/Comentario-Reinares-De-Dabiq-a-Roma-Estado-Islamico-muta-y-concierne-UE.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ae584f93-7e14-4fa3-98c5-8c24078c6640>. Accessed 5 December 2016. See also a study on the future of Daesh/Islamic State, its «local franchises» and its sympathisers all over the world; STEWART, Scott, «What happens after the Islamic State loses Mosul», *Stratfor*, 27 October 2016, available at <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/what-happens-after-islamic-state-loses-mosul>. Accessed 4 November 2016.

<sup>79</sup> The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Nathaniael Rabkin, *Iraq's imperiled democracy*, June 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iraqs-imperiled-democracy>, accessed 24 October 2016. *Esglobal*, FANTAPPIE, María, «Irak al borde del caos», 3 June 2016, <https://www.esglobal.org/irak-al-borde-del-caos/>, accessed 23 October 2016.

<sup>80</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, «Iran-Iraq relations following the Nuclear deal», 10 May 2016, <https://epthinktank.eu/2016/05/10/iraq-iran-relations-following-the-nuclear-deal/>, accessed 5 September 2016. On the Shia militias, see *Al Monitor* PECQUET, Julian, «Rise of Iran's backed militias jeopardizes US aid to Iraq», 14 September 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/rise-iran-backed-militias-pmu-iraq-threat-us-aid.html>.



war in which Iranian-sponsored Iraqi Shia militias are already taking part without government authorisation.<sup>81</sup>

The Sunni minority (about 30 percent of the population), highly fragmented and tribal and lacking clear leadership, played a predominant role in the country until the fall of Saddam Hussein, but since 2003 they have not considered the Iraqi state rebuilt following the US invasion to be their own.<sup>82</sup> What is more, they fear sectarian moves from the Shia majority of the kind made between 2010 and 2014 by Nouri al-Maliki's government and are particularly concerned that the powerful Shia armed militias may refuse to demobilise after the war against Daesh/Islamic State ends. A highly controversial issue for the Sunnis is the recent ploy for official recognition (including state funding) of the Shia militias called «popular mobilisation units or forces» (PMU or al-Hashd al-Shaabi), which, despite their undeniable contribution to the defeat of Daesh/Islamic State, continue to be questionable on account of their chain of command, which is separate from the Iraqi armed forces, their close ties with Iran and, above all, their track record of anti-Sunni sectarian violence.<sup>83</sup> It should not be forgotten that unless the political and economic integration of the Sunni minority in Iraq is achieved, Daesh/Islamic State will continue to have at its disposal a fertile ground for changing back into a terrorist/insurgent movement.<sup>84</sup>

Another no less immediate challenge in Iraq is that posed by the Kurdish community. The autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, in some respects as

---

<sup>81</sup> MCDOWALL, Angus, and RASHEED, Ahmed, «Iraqi militia fighters join battle for Syria's Aleppo», Reuters, 8 September 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN11D248>. Accessed 29 September 2016.

<sup>82</sup> HADDAD, Fanar, *Shia-centric state building and Sunni rejection in post-2003 Iraq*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 January 2017, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/07/shia-centric-state-building-and-sunni-rejection-in-post-2003-iraq-pub-62408>. Accessed 9 January 2017.

<sup>83</sup> About 70 different militias have been identified, with numbers that vary between 60,000 and just over 100,000 combatants. Eighty percent of them belong to four militias, which are rivals Rawabet Center (Jordan), *Popular Crowd Forces in Iraq (Al Hashd al-Shaabi). Origin and future survey*, 29 August 2016, available at <http://rawabetcenter.com/en/?p=1037>. Accessed 13 September 2016. CIGAR, Norman, «Iraq's Shia warlords and their militias; political and security challenges and options», US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, June 2015, available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1272.pdf>. Accessed 23 September 2016. PARKER, Ned; DEGHANPISHEK, Babak, and COLES, Isabel, «Special Report: How Iran's military chiefs operate in Iraq», Reuters, 24 February 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-committee-specialreport-idUSKBN0LS0VD20150224>. Accessed 2 October 2016.

<sup>84</sup> MANSOUR, Renad, *The Sunni predicament in Iraq*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 3 March 2016, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/03/03/sunni-predicament-in-iraq-pub-62948>. Accessed 29 September 2016. AL-NIDAWI, Omar, «The state of Sunni discord in Iraq», *Fikra Forum*, The Washington Institute for Middle East Policies, 11 August 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-state-of-sunni-discord-in-iraq>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

well-established as the Iraqi government, has enjoyed wide autonomy since the American occupation and has abundant oil resources as well as its own armed forces, the Peshmerga, whose combative efficiency is well proven. However, Kurdistan is deeply divided between the two main parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by the current regional president, Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani, who is supported by a more recently formed opposition group, the Movement for Change (Gorran). This split has given rise to divergent views on issues that are crucial to the future of the Iraqi Kurds, such as the KDP's aspirations of achieving immediate independence and being on good terms with Turkey – both of which are challenged by the opposition groups PUK and Gorran. Together with the grave economic crisis that has gripped Iraqi Kurdistan, the end of the operations against Daesh/Islamic State will make it necessary to solve the problem of the areas occupied by the Peshmerga beyond the region's original boundaries, which the Iraqi government wants back, including the critical enclave of Kirkuk and its oil wells. Although this is an internal dispute, the neighbouring powers, Turkey and Iran, are keeping a watchful eye on the dispute between Erbil (the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan) and Baghdad to preserve their own strategic interests.<sup>85</sup>

As if this were not enough, the low price of oil (a resource on which Iraq is heavily dependent, as it accounts for nearly all its exports) and the cost of the war against Daesh/Islamic State have accentuated the endemic economic crisis in Iraq with successive cuts in the wages of the predominant public sector and the freezing of all investments not related to military operations.

In July Baghdad had to take out a loan from the International Monetary Fund as «emergency assistance» to shore up its weakened economy.<sup>86</sup> Higher oil prices in 2017 could improve Iraq's economic outlook after it accepted a cut in hydrocarbon production as part of the OPEC agreement in November, but it would still be necessary to permanently settle the dispute on the status of the

<sup>85</sup> ZAMAN, Amberin, «Is the KRG [Kurdish Regional Government] heading for bankruptcy», *Al Monitor*, 20 January 2016, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/turkey-iraq-kurds-cash-crisis-derail-battle-against-isis.html>. Accessed 13 September 2016. SALIH, Mohammed A., «The new politics of Iraqi Kurdistan», *Fikra Forum*, The Washington Institute for Middle East Policies, 16 August 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-new-politics-of-iraqi-kurdistan>. Accessed 24 September 2016. NADER, Alireza; HANAUER, Larry; ALLEN, Brenna, and SCOTTEN, Ali G., «Regional implications of an independent Kurdistan», Rand Corporation, Santa Mónica, California, United States, 14 November 2016, available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1452.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1452.html). Accessed 3 December 2016.

<sup>86</sup> International Monetary Fund, «Iraq gets \$5.34 billion IMF loan to support economic stability», 14 July 2016, available at <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/07/12/14/31/NA071416-Iraq-Gets-IMF-Loan-to-Support-Economic-Stability>. Accessed 25 September 2016.

autonomous Kurdistan region, which controls 12 percent of total production.<sup>87</sup> Whatever the case, Iraq is merely aiming for economic survival in 2017 and is not even dreaming of the reforms the Gulf states are undertaking to achieve diversification, sustainability and economic efficiency.<sup>88</sup> It became clear on several occasions in 2016 that the Iraqi people's patience with the country's political and economic crisis is wearing thin and therefore, with provincial and parliamentary elections on the cards for 2018, it is unlikely that any political force will embark on economic reform programmes that are always unpopular in the short term. Indeed, a much more pressing current concern is not knowing where the huge sum needed to start rebuilding the war-torn areas and resettling displaced people once Mosul is reoccupied will come from.

### *Syria: 2016, a year of decisive changes, but no end in sight*

After six years of war, some 400,000 deaths, 4.8 million refugees and 6.3 million internally displaced people (for a country that had about 23 million inhabitants before the war broke out in 2011), Syria has reached levels of destruction and human suffering not witnessed since the Second World War.

2015 saw a dramatic about-turn in the fortunes of President Bashar al-Assad, who seemed doomed to defeat in the first half of the year following the attack from the opposition simultaneously on several fronts, and was economically drained,<sup>89</sup> with dwindling and demoralised forces. The Syrian regime was saved at the last minute by the arrival of thousands of combatants from Iran (Iranian officers and advisors, Shia Lebanese from Hezbollah, who had been fighting in Syria since the middle of 2013, and «volunteers», chiefly Afghan Iraqis) and spectacular air support provided by a Russian expeditionary contingent deployed in September 2015. With these impressive reinforcements and an injection of morale, the Syrian government managed to turn the situation around in 2016.

Assad's forces and their allies have continued with their tactics of laying siege to various enclaves and cutting off essential supplies, and subsequently negotiating a «reconciliation» that allows the combatants and

<sup>87</sup> KHALIL, Shatha, «Iraq's budget for 2017: Between clear austerity and flagrant deficit», Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies (Jordan), December 2016, available at <http://rawabetcenter.com/en/?p=1379>. Accessed 2 January 2017.

<sup>88</sup> On the influence of the economy on Iraqi politics, see the enlightening article by WAHAB, Bilal, «Rules of the Iraqi game», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 5 January 2017, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rules-of-the-iraqi-game>. Accessed 9 January 2017.

<sup>89</sup> The sorry state of Syria's economy in 2016 is summed up in BUTTER, David, «How to salvage Syria's economy», *Al Jazeera*, 18 March 2016, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/03/salvage-syria-economy-160317092133422.html>. Accessed 16 October 2016.

civilian population who so desire to be evacuated to rebel areas. This has enabled them to seize possession of various key towns and cities in central Syria.<sup>90</sup> But, in particular, Assad's major success in 2016 was to capture the rebel stronghold of eastern Aleppo, which had been reduced to ruins.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, at the moment of the victory in Aleppo, in December 2016 a local offensive launched by Daesh/Islamic State, as timely as ever, managed to snatch from the Syrian army the town of Palmyra/Tadmur, a fact which clearly underlines the limitations of the human and material resources the Syrian government has.<sup>92</sup> Even so, having secured a strong position, in 2017 the regime can continue to seek a military victory – which does not seem impossible after Aleppo – and selectively attack the opposition in various areas while witnessing as a spectator (or providing minimal token support against Daesh/Islamic State) two battles of secondary importance to its interests: the effort of the international coalition led by the United States together with its local Kurdish and Arab allies to win back Raqqa, in eastern Syria, to put an end to the caliphate of Daesh/Islamic State in Syria; and the conflict in the north of the country between the Turkish forces and their local allies who are aiding the opposition, first against Daesh/Islamic State and probably soon afterwards against the rising Syrian Kurds of the PYD/YPG.<sup>93</sup> Although at the beginning of 2017 he is much more reliant than ever on his «patrons» Iran and Russia, Bashar al-Assad approached the new peace talks at Astana (Kazakhstan) and Geneva from an advantageous position.

The Syrian opposition ended 2016 defeated and demoralised and equally disjointed and fragmented, with about 1,500 different groups totalling some 150,000 combatants.<sup>94</sup> The many opposition groups are very divided, with constant alliances and splits, accompanied by frequent internal armed clashes, while the no less fragmented political opposition in exile, out of

<sup>90</sup> See the website of The Syria Institute, devoted solely to the Syrian *Siege Watch*, at <https://siegewatch.org/>.

<sup>91</sup> For a detailed account of operations in Syria, particularly Aleppo, see the website of the Institute for the Study of War, «ISW on Aleppo and the broader war in Syria», <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isw-aleppo-and-broader-war-syria>.

<sup>92</sup> On the government troops and their external supporters, see BALANCHE, Fabrice, «Status of the Syrian rebellion: numbers, ideologies and prospects», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 22 November 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/status-of-the-syrian-rebellion-numbers-ideologies-and-prospects>. Accessed 14 December 2016.

<sup>93</sup> On the possible courses of action of the military forces of Assad's regime in 2017, see SAYIGH, Yezid, «Where next?», *Diwan*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 19 December 2016, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/66481>. Accessed 3 January 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Figures for the beginning of 2016, in LISTER, Charles R., in «The Syrian Jihad: al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the evolution of an insurgency», Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016. CAFARELLA, Jennifer, and CASAGRANDE, Genevieve, «Syrian armed opposition powerbrokers», Institute for the Study of War, 16 March 2016, available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/syrian-armed-opposition-powerbrokers>. Accessed 5 November 2016.

touch with the armed groups, is becoming increasingly insignificant. In the end, after much discussion on representation, the negotiations they took part in during the first half of the year by setting up a «High Negotiations Committee» failed to bear any fruit. On the contrary, the opposition lost large swathes of territory in 2016, especially its main stronghold, Aleppo, whose defence drained the «moderate» opposition of its best forces and caused it to lose several important enclaves under siege in central Syria. In addition, some of its key external «patrons», especially Turkey, are increasingly evidently giving priority to their own national interests and even appear to have given up on it, resigning themselves to the inevitable survival of Assad's regime.<sup>95</sup> Under such conditions a victory over Assad by the badly divided Syrian opposition, which seemed to be within reach in 2015, now looks unfeasible; on the contrary, they are at certain risk of being crushed on the battlefield. As for the future negotiations in 2017, the fragmentation and military weakness of the opposition mean that its representatives will sit down at the negotiating table in clearly disadvantageous conditions.<sup>96</sup>

In addition, al-Qaeda's former Syrian branch, Jabhat al-Nusra, which made the pragmatic move of distancing itself formally from the organisation led by Zawahiri and even changed its name to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham to make itself more acceptable and underline its local nature, seems to have become «normalised» as part of the opposition.<sup>97</sup>

Perhaps the Syrian Kurds are the group who have expanded the most across Syria in 2016, to the detriment of Daesh/Islamic State. Protecting their own interests, they initially remained neutral in the civil war, adopting a policy of «non-aggression» towards Assad's government, with ups and downs. The significant feature of the Kurds is that, thanks to their internal cohesion, discipline and military efficiency, since the battle of Kobane (September 2014 to February 2015) they have become the main ally on the ground of

---

<sup>95</sup> Agencies, «No longer realistic: Turkey admits U-turn on policy to rid Syria of Assad» Middle East Eye, 20 January 2017, available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-confirms-u-turn-policy-rid-syria-assad-165657783>. Accessed 20 January 2017.

<sup>96</sup> General outlook for the Syrian opposition in: Mona Alami, «What's keeping Syria's rebels forces from consolidating their power?», *Al Monitor*, 26 September 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/syria-north-south-opposition-groups.html>. Accessed 2 October 2016. BALANCHE, Fabrice, «Status of the Syrian rebellion: numbers, ideologies and prospects», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *op. cit.*; y LUNDL, Aron, «A turning point in Aleppo», *Diwan*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 1 December 2016, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/66314>. Accessed 14 December 2016.

<sup>97</sup> JENKINS, Brian Michael, «What's in a name? The rebranding of the Nusra front», Rand Corporation, 8 August 2016, available at <http://www.rand.org/blog/2016/08/whats-in-a-name-the-rebranding-of-the-nusra-front.html>. Accessed 17 October 2016. LISTER, Charles, «Profiling Jabhat al-Nusra, The Brookings Project on the US relations with the Islamic World», Analysis paper n.º 24, Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, July 2016, available at [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/iwr\\_20160728\\_profiling\\_nusra.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/iwr_20160728_profiling_nusra.pdf). Accessed 17 September 2016.

the US-led international coalition against Daesh/Islamic State in Syria.<sup>98</sup> The Syrian Kurds have managed to establish a relatively functional autonomous region with territorial continuity called «Rojava» across the north of the country between the border with Iraq and the river Euphrates, which aspires to become a federal entity of the future Syria. However, the other Syrian players, government and opposition who define themselves unquestionably as «Arab» and have a nationalist unitary mentality, even when cooperating with the Kurds, are wary of them.

The Syrian Kurds' main adversary is undoubtedly the neighbouring Turkey, which is bent on waging an all-out war on the Kurdish terrorist group PKK in their own territory. In Ankara's view, the Syrian Kurds – particularly the dominant force, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed faction, the militias known as «Popular Protection Units» (YPG) – are merely an extension of the PKK, with which they share a secular, left-wing and pan-Kurdish ideology. As such, they are a threat to Turkey's national interests, more than Daesh/Islamic State or its old arch enemy since 2011, Assad's regime. The spread of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)<sup>99</sup> to the west of the river Euphrates during the first half of 2016 prompted Turkey to intervene militarily in Syria for the first time since the outbreak of the war. While Aleppo drew its last breaths, Turkey and its local allies belonging to the Syrian opposition started up operation Euphrates Shield to occupy a strip of land west of the river Euphrates with the twofold aim of ousting Daesh/Islamic State from its last point of access to the Syrian-Turkish border and, above all, stemming the Kurds' attempts to extend their autonomous political entity (Rojalva) further along the Turkish border.<sup>100</sup> The fighting is currently centred on the communication hub of al-Bab, some 50 kilometres northeast of Aleppo, which is staunchly defended by Daesh/Islamic State. Sporadic armed clashes have broken out between Turkish and Kurdish troops and, at the time of writing, in January 2017, with al-Bab yet to fall, everything points to a subsequent clash between Turkey and the Kurdish forces west of the Euphrates, which will undoubtedly have repercussions on the Raqqa campaign and force the United States to choose between two allies at odds with each other.

---

<sup>98</sup> CLAWSON, Patrick, ed., «Syrian Kurds as a US ally, Cooperation and complications», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 18 November 2016, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrian-kurds-as-a-u.s.-ally-cooperation-and-complications> Accessed 27 December 2016.

<sup>99</sup> The SDF is a purportedly open and multi-sectarian (to make it seem more acceptable to the other actors) military coalition of the opposition, though it is in fact controlled by the YPG Kurds, who account for the majority of members, though approximately one-third of the contingent is made up of Arab opponents.

<sup>100</sup> For an overview of the complex political and military situation in northern Syria, see KOZAK, Chris, «The competing campaigns against ISIS in northern Syria», Institute for the Study of War, 10 June 2016, available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/competing-campaigns-against-isis-northern-syria>. Accessed 10 October 2016.

To all intents and purposes, Turkey has become another of the belligerents in the complex Syrian civil war and has accompanied this military involvement with a political rapprochement with Russia, which has been influenced by both domestic-policy and external motivations and has not even been clouded by the assassination of the Russian ambassador to Ankara in December. It has thus completed a political U-turn, barely a year after the extremely serious bilateral crisis triggered in November 2015. Turkey, which still holds the key to the communication channels between all the opposition groups in the north; as it exerts significant influence on them, together with Russia it has sponsored the national ceasefire in force since 29 December, as well as the Astana (Kazakhstan) peace talks in January.<sup>101</sup>

As for Daesh/Islamic State, in 2016 it was fiercely attacked and lost some territory, mainly in the north, but it still retains offensive operational capabilities. At the start of 2017 Daesh was defending its northern stronghold of al-Bab against the Turkish Euphrates Shield operation, and in since November its capital, Raqqa, had been menaced by the advance of the SDF with air support from the coalition, though this did not stop it counterattacking the Syrian regime in Palmyra/Tadmur in December, and defeating Assad's troops to reoccupy the city, which it had previously abandoned in March. Although it has lost all its positions at the Turkish border since August, it has undertaken a violent terrorist campaign in reprisal for Turkey's military intervention in Syria.<sup>102</sup> The main threat to Daesh/Islamic State is the coalition's campaign against Raqqa, which looks set to last and, above all, is plagued with uncertainty owing to the hostility between the main allies of the US-led coalition on the ground in Syria, the Turkish and Syrian Kurds.

The pressure on the United States to have something to show for its efforts in Syria by the time of the presidential elections in November prompted the launch of an offensive against Daesh/Islamic State's capital in Syria, Raqqa, chiefly by Kurdish forces fighting in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The advance of the SDF, only one-third of whom are Arabs, with the air

<sup>101</sup> On the strategic opportunity for Turkey in Syria at the end of 2016 following the fall of Aleppo and in the throes of the campaign against Daesh/Islamic State to occupy al-Bab, see TATTERSHALL, Nick, and PAMUK, Humeira, «After Aleppo, a chapter closes on Turkey's ambitions in Syria», Reuters, 15 December 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKBN14422U>. Accessed 18 December 2016. See also GILSINAN, Kathy, «What are Turkey and Russia doing in Syria?» *The Atlantic*, 19 December 2016, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/12/whats-turkey-doing-in-syria/511148/>. Accessed 3 January 2017.

<sup>102</sup> On the changing but very deliberate relationship between Daesh/Islamic State and Turkey, see WOOD, Graeme, 'ISIS ends its separate peace with Turkey', *Defense one*, 3 January 2017, available at <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/01/isis-ends-its-separate-peace-turkey/134280/?oref=d-skybox>. Accessed 5 January 2017. Also BAYRAMOGLU, Ali, «Three reasons the Islamic State is focused on Turkey», *Al Monitor*, 6 January 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/turkey-why-country-becomes-exclusive-target-for-isis.html>. Accessed 8 January 2017.

support and special forces of the international coalition, was stopped only 25 kilometres from Raqqa after progressing without much resistance. It is not expected to muster sufficient Arab forces to be able to launch an attack on the city (politically indispensable as it is a totally Arab nucleus) until a few months' time, during which a lot could happen in Syria.<sup>103</sup>

The United States has always been uncomfortable about the many overlapping conflicts that make up the Syrian crisis. After seeing itself dragged into intervening in Syria as part of its fight against Daesh/Islamic State, the United States would have preferred to concentrate solely on this without having to take sides in the many other disputes. Evidently, this has not been possible and Washington has made intense (and subsequently failed) diplomatic efforts in Syria in 2016, though refusing to back them with military force (unlike Russia). Over the past years the Obama administration has striven fruitlessly to enlist militarily effective allies with minimal political affinities to help fight Daesh. It arrived at the Syrian Kurds almost by a process of elimination, and it is aware of the medium- and long-term political limitations of this group, which is at odds with the rest of the actors, and of the risks this temporary alliance poses, especially in view of Ankara's unequivocal attitude. It remains to be seen what military option President Trump will choose in Syria to give a boost to the campaign against Daesh/Islamic State in Raqqa, which is currently at a standstill, as on the one hand he has given absolute priority to defeating Daesh/Islamic State and a priori does not rule out deploying significant US ground forces, but on the other he has publicly dismissed the idea of supporting the Syrian Arab opposition («we don't know who these people are»). He may, however, be forced to take sides in view of the growing risk of an armed confrontation between Turkey and the Kurds in northern Syria, both of which are US allies.<sup>104</sup>

2016 saw the failure of very intense diplomatic efforts on the part of the UN, Americans and Russians to promote a future transition government, with ceasefires (which never included Daesh/Islamic State or Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, considered to be terrorist groups) that in the end were not respected. The United States and Russia, initially aligned, grew

<sup>103</sup> For a situation report on the campaign as of mid-January 2017, see CASAGRANDE, Genevieve, «The campaign for ar-Raqqah, January 12, 2017», Institute for the Study of War, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com.es/2017/01/the-campaign-for-ar-raqqah-january-12.html>. A critical view of the incoherence of the United States' policy in Syria and its short-sightedness can be found in BARFI, Barak, «Incoherent US policy will doom the Raqqa campaign», *The Cipher brief*, 9 November 2016, available at <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/middle-east/incoherent-us-policy-will-doom-raqqah-campaign-1091>. Accessed 14 December 2016.

<sup>104</sup> STARR, Barbara, «Pentagon readies aggressive ISIS proposals for Trump», CNN Politics, 17 January 2017, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/17/politics/pentagon-options-isis-trump/>. Accessed 18 January 2017. BARFI Barak, «US presidential elections impact on Syrian war», IHS Jane's, 25 November 2016, pp. 1-13.



further and further apart over the course of the year to the point of almost breaking off the talks on Syria and blaming each other for the diplomatic fiasco.

Following the fall of Aleppo,<sup>105</sup> the possible rapport between the new Trump administration and Putin's Russia may help revive the negotiation process, with Washington hypothetically more focused on destroying Daesh as soon as possible and at any (political) price, and therefore more accommodating with respect to Assad's future role. The new year began with new peace talks in Astana (Kazakhstan) sponsored chiefly by Russia and Turkey, and in which the United States has a smaller role for the first time. Later, in February, it was attempted to resume the Geneva talks in the framework of the UN, which Moscow hoped to steer in the direction of its interests, possibly with the support of the new Trump administration.

2017 has thus begun with a new cycle of negotiations, just as 2016 did, but with different players on the Syrian chessboard in very different relative positions to those of a year ago and without solutions having been found to any of the many overlapping disputes that continue to ravage war-torn Syria.

### *Turkey: Hurtling towards the unknown*

Few countries in the region suffered as much and such significant turmoil throughout 2016 as Turkey. The start of the year saw the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) retain the firm grip it has enjoyed on power since 2002, after winning no less than 12 democratic elections in a row. However, little remains of the open and reform-oriented party that successfully combined Islamism and modernity 15 years ago, was at the helm of a steadily growing economy, proclaimed its willingness to enter full talks to put an end to the problem of Kurdish terrorism, pursued a foreign policy of «zero problems with neighbours», and was presented internationally as an example to be followed. Today the AKP is perceived as an increasingly authoritarian, anti-European and anti-Western party that pursues an aggressive foreign policy and is more intent on Islamising society, intolerant towards the opposition and bent on curbing freedom of press and civil rights in favour of order and respect for authority. These characteristics of the AKP had already been glimpsed before the summer of 2016, but they

<sup>105</sup> DEKEL, Udi, «The battle for Aleppo: Implications for the on-going war in Syria», The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 15 December 2016, available at <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=12654>; Accessed 27 December 2016. BONSEY, Noah, «What comes after the bloody battle for Aleppo?», International Crisis Group (ICG), 15 December 2016, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/what-comes-after-bloody-battle-aleppo>. Accessed 19 December 2016.

were accentuated by the failed coup of 15 July, which marked a before and an after in Turkish politics.<sup>106</sup>

The AKP is totally controlled by its charismatic leader and founder, President Erdogan, who was prime minister from 2003 to 2014. After serving the maximum number of terms permitted by the law, he then stood for president, a formally apolitical, representative position with no executive power from which he nevertheless exercises de facto leadership of both the government and his party. The AKP has set itself the main goal of carrying out a constitutional reform tailored to Erdogan in order to position its leader as head of a presidential republic who wields the current powers of president and prime minister (the post would disappear in the reform proposed by the AKP), resulting in a concentration of power that many regard as personalist and hazardous to the country's democratic health. This project would enable Erdogan to stand for president again with new powers in 2019 and, if re-elected, to remain in power until 2029.<sup>107</sup> Possible internal discrepancies within the AKP were settled after the forced resignation of the prime minister and nominal leader of the party, Ahmet Davutoglu, in May, leaving the party fully aligned with Erdogan.

Although the AKP has enjoyed a comfortable majority in parliament since the early elections held in November 2015, it did not secure sufficient votes to approve the constitutional reform by qualified majority, so Erdogan had to co-opt the fourth opposition party, the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), pleasing it by toying with the possibility of bringing back the death penalty and adopting a «neo-Ottoman» foreign policy and a fiercely anti-Kurdish domestic policy strongly contrasting with the stances that had previously characterised the AKP. As a result, when parliament voted on the constitutional reform at the beginning of January 2017, the AKP's votes added to those of the MHP were sufficient to pass the reform, which will subsequently be put to a referendum scheduled for April 2017.

In a Dark Age Turkey inclined to theories of conspiracy, the coup of July 2016, which had a determining impact on political life in Turkey, remains an enigma that has yet to be fully clarified. Although it was staged by military and members of the security forces, it was not a typical Turkish military ploy directed by the leaders and with the unanimous participation of the

<sup>106</sup> AKYOL, Kursat, «15 years of Turkey's AKP: Is it a success story?», *Al Monitor*, 31 August 2016, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/turkey-economy-heading-to-turbulent-times.html>. Accessed 19 September 2016.

<sup>107</sup> See KÖYLÜ, Hilal, «Countdown to a presidential system in Turkey», Deutsche Welle, 2 December 2016, available at <http://www.dw.com/en/countdown-to-a-presidential-system-in-turkey/a-36617844>. Accessed 16 December 2016. WEISE, Zia, «Erdogan, the new Atatürk», *Político*, 28 December 2016, available at <http://www.politico.eu/article/recep-tayyip-erdogan-new-ataturk-turkey-coup-eu/>. Accessed 4 January 2017.

armed forces channelled through the chain of command.<sup>108</sup> To attempt to understand it, we need to go back to AKP's advent to power in 2003, when Erdogan was determined to strip the armed forces of their political prerogatives, as ever since modern Turkey was founded in 1923, the military had attributed themselves the role of ultimate guardians of the law of the republic, entitled to intervene in politics when they deemed necessary. To achieve his end, Erdogan joined forces with a powerful, semi-clandestine Islamist brotherhood called Hizmet (meaning «service»), which was founded and directed by the cleric Fetullah Gülen, in exile in the United States since 1999, with considerable influence in education and the media. Over the decades Hizmet had also aimed subtly to progressively replace secular senior officials with others who subscribed to the ideology of Islam in all areas of state administration.<sup>109</sup> It is considered to have been successful and gradually spread through a number of organisations and government bodies, including the armed forces, the security services, the judiciary, higher education and the media.

Two mega-trials played a crucial role in subjecting the armed forces to civilian power: the so-called Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials of 2012 and 2013, where, using evidence fabricated by prosecutors and police of the Hizmet organisation (known to AKP), hundreds of officers were incriminated. In both cases, after being dealt harsh sentences, most of the suspects were finally absolved years later after the falsification of evidence was recognised, but AKP and Hizmet had achieved their political aim of significantly weakening the secular leadership of the military and civilian authorities and replacing it with officers with Islamic leanings, before the acquittals in 2015 and 2016. By then the Turkish armed forces had not only lost much of their independence vis-à-vis the civilian government but their prestige had been severely dented.

Having rid themselves of their most dangerous secular rivals, Hizmet and AKP engaged in an all-out fight to fill the gap left by the defeated secular leadership. Erdogan attacked the hardcore of Hizmet by attempting to close

---

<sup>108</sup> ARTEAGA, Rafael, *Turquía: ¿golpe militar o levantamiento de militares?*, Real Instituto Elcano, Real Instituto Elcano, Real Instituto Elcano, 18 July 2016, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/comentario-artega-turquia-golpe-militar-o-levantamiento-de-militares](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/comentario-artega-turquia-golpe-militar-o-levantamiento-de-militares).

<sup>109</sup> Regarding Fetullah Gülen's Hizmet network, the government's political interests and secrecy make it difficult to distinguish reality from the most fanciful conspiracy theories, as there are very different accounts. See the organisation's website at: <http://gulenschools.org/gulen-movement>, which speaks exclusively of its teaching work at more than 100 schools. For a «benign» view of the organisation, see VEIGA, Francisco, «Neoliberalismo, tecnocracia e islamismo nacional: el movimiento Gülen», *CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, nos. 93-94, 2011, pp. 219-237; a more critical view is expressed in GINÉS, Ricardo, «¿Cómo funciona el Estado paralelo en Turquía?», *Esglobal*, 17 March 2014, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/como-funciona-el-estado-paralelo-en-turquia/>. Accessed 5 December 2016.

some of the many Gülenist educational centres and Gülen's supporters reacted by accusing several AKP leaders of corruption in several media in December 2013 and subsequently having them arrested on the orders of prosecutors linked to Hizmet. To the amazement of many, Erdogan publicly denounced Gülen as being the head of a «parallel state» and set about removing from their posts the prosecutors, police and judges allegedly linked to Hizmet and closing newspapers he considered hostile. In doing so he began using the government machinery for his own purposes and seriously compromised freedom of expression, taking an increasingly authoritarian stance that dismayed the political opposition and was heavily criticised by the West.<sup>110</sup>

As part of the process of removing senior officials linked to Hizmet from administrative posts, the turn came of the armed forces. The prospect of seeing the Gülenist military officers dismissed seems to be what triggered the 15 July coup, which mobilised the military (and some civilian) supporters of the brotherhood of Fetullah Gülen «against Erdogan's authoritarianism». However, the plan, which had blundering errors, failed and they did not manage to topple the president. Although parliament was bombed by aircraft and helicopters, the Turkish people and all the parties, urged by Erdogan to withstand the coup, together with loyal military and police units, stood up to the attackers and in less than 24 hours the coup had failed, leaving a tragic toll of 265 dead and some 1,400 wounded.<sup>111</sup> Erdogan blamed the uprising on the Gülenists and their «parallel state», which was thereafter branded FETO (Fetullah Gülen Terrorist Organization), and cracked down harshly on it. He likewise became the political victor as he emerged from the coup as a vigorous and popular civil leader. Similarly, the climate created by the coup could not have been timelier and raised Turkish people's awareness of the

<sup>110</sup> WINTER, Chase, «Real and imagined threats: the shared past of AKP and the Gülen movement», Deutsche Welle, 27 July 2016, available at <http://www.dw.com/en/real-and-imagined-threats-the-shared-past-of-akp-and-the-g%C3%BClen-movement/a-19429199>. Accessed 11 October 2016. AKYOL, Mustafá, «What you should know about Turkey's AKP-Gülen conflict», *Al Monitor*, 3 January 2014, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/akp-gulen-conflict-guide.html>. Accessed 1 December 2016.

<sup>111</sup> TOL, Gönül; MAINZER, Matt, and EKMEKCI Zeyneop, «Unpacking Turkey's failed coup: causes and consequences», Middle East Institute, 17 August 2016, available at <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/unpacking-turkey-s-failed-coup-causes-and-consequences>. Accessed 25 August 2016. NÚÑEZ VILLAYERDE, Jesús A., «Turquía ¿golpe de estado o regalo de Alá?», Real Instituto Elcano, 18 July 2016, available at <http://www.blog.riecano.org/turquia-golpe-de-estado-o-regalo-de-ala/>. Accessed 21 August 2016. STEIN, Aaron, «The fallout of the failed coup», *The American Interest*, 16 August 2016, available at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/08/16/the-fallout-of-the-failed-coup/>. Accessed 4 September 2016. Also Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, «Failed Turkish coup: dynamics and implications», 28 July 2016, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2016/07/failed-turkish-coup-dynamics-implications-160728095635056.html>. Accessed 15 September 2016.

need for a «strong civil power» that underpinned Erdogan's project for a presidentialist republic.<sup>112</sup>

In contrast, the already weakened prestige of the armed forces was dealt a lethal blow. The formerly powerful army, a bastion of secularism and Atatürk's legacy of modernisation, has totally disappeared as a political counterweight and is greatly divided, having been weakened by the huge purges that followed the coup, which extended to one-third of all officers and 143 of the 358 generals and admirals.<sup>113</sup> In addition, to use Erdogan's own words, the coup was a «gift from God»<sup>114</sup> that enabled him to declare a state of emergency, which was subsequently extended (and is still in force at the time of writing in January 2017) in order to bolster his powers and undertake a major purge of the civilian and military administration, including the security and intelligence services as well as universities, the judiciary, the media and many companies, which he would otherwise have had difficulty carrying out. The number of people who suffered reprisals is huge,<sup>115</sup> nearly 100,000, and has not ceased to grow during the autumn and winter.

In this repressive climate, following the initial period of unity with all the parties supporting the president, criticisms arose that AKP was abusing its special powers and taking advantage of the coup to purge not only the Gülenists, but anyone else who dared oppose Erdogan's designs.<sup>116</sup> Similarly,

<sup>112</sup> FRIEDMAN, Uri, «Erdogan's final agenda», *The Atlantic*, 19 July 2016, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/turkey-erdogan-coup-future/491696/>. Accessed 6 September 2016.

<sup>113</sup> CAFFARELLA, Jennifer; SERCOMBE, Elizabeth, and VALLEE, Charles, «Partial Assessment of Turkey post-coup attempt military purge», Institute for the Study of War, 30 July 2016, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com.es/2016/07/partial-assessment-of-turkeys-post-coup.html>. Accessed 4 September 2016.

<sup>114</sup> CHAMPION, Marc, «Coup was (gift from God) for Erdogan planning a new Turkey», Bloomberg, 17 July 2016, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-07-17/coup-was-a-gift-from-god-says-erdogan-who-plans-a-new-turkey>. Accessed 2 October 2016.

<sup>115</sup> According to government figures, during the first month after the coup, 76,000 government officials were suspended from employment and 5,000 dismissed; 6,800 academics and clerks were being investigated; and 3,670 judges and prosecutors were also suspended. In addition, 15 universities, 934 schools, 104 foundations, 1,125 associations and as many as 19 trade unions were closed down. CANDAR, Cengiz, «Coup attempt could cost Turkey more than military might», *Al Monitor*, 17 August 2016, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/turkey-coup-democracy-or-dismantling-military.html>. Accessed 7 September 2016. The figures later increased, with the number of government officials in various fields suspended or dismissed standing at about 100,000 in January. Agencies, «Thousand fired in new wave of Turkey coup purges», Arab News, 7 January 2017, available at <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1035416/middle-east>. Accessed 10 January 2017.

<sup>116</sup> For an overview of Turkey's situation after the coup, see BARKEY, Henri J., «Los estragos de un golpe fallido», *Estudios de Política exterior*, *Afkar/Ideas* no. 51, autumn 2016, <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/afkar-ideas/los-estragos-de-un-golpe-de-estado-fallido/>. Accessed 10 December 2016. GARDNER, David, «After the coup, Turkey

the emergency legislation has enabled the government to impose restrictions on rights and freedoms that are threatening to continue. The intensified hounding of the opposition media, which already existed before the coup, is particularly worrying.<sup>117</sup>

An area in which no progress at all was made in 2016 is the separatist violence of the Turkish Kurds. The Kurds make up 19 percent of Turkey's population and total some 22.5 million, mainly living in southeast Anatolia. Turkey's secular, strongly nationalist state has traditionally chosen to negate the Kurdish identity and favour forced assimilation by attempting to dilute the Kurdish community within a single Turkish national identity and by banning their main distinguishing features. The result is a conflict that has been dragging on since the 1970s and is reckoned to have claimed some 45,000 lives. However, much to the anger of Turkish nationalists and the then influential armed forces, the AKP was initially in favour of attempting to reach a negotiated settlement with the main terrorist group, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Unfortunately, the encouraging peace process the Ankara government negotiated with the Turkish terrorist movement was broken off in June 2015 amid mutual accusations, triggering an escalation of violence that continued in 2016. The PKK's «youth militias» entrenched themselves inside several of the main cities with Kurdish majorities in the autumn of 2015 and the Turkish army and security forces attacked the insurgents to regain control of the urban centres, killing many people and causing huge damage.<sup>118</sup> This phase of rebellion was followed by one of very fierce and increasingly indiscriminate attacks that in turn triggered an escalating government crackdown – facilitated by the state of emergency declared after the July coup – on Kurdish people, organisations and institutions, whether or not they were linked to the PKK, in what appeared to be an endless spiral that fed back into itself.<sup>119</sup>

---

is losing its checks and balances», *Financial Times*, 20 July 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/48da96d6-4dcb-11e6-88c5-db83e98a590a>.

<sup>117</sup> By the middle of August some 130 media had been closed, including 16 TV channels, 45 newspapers, 15 weeklies and 29 publishers. In addition, 90 journalists had been arrested, 49 of whom were being held in custody. CANDAR, Cengiz «Coups attempt could cost Turkey more than military might», *Al Monitor*, *op. cit.* AKYOL, Kürsat, «Turkey: -Worst country- for media freedom in 2016», Deutsche Welle, 27 December 2016, available at <http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-worst-country-for-media-freedom-in-2016/a-36924382>. Accessed 4 January 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Between July 2015 and July 2016 alone more than 1,700 people were killed and 350,000 were displaced. MANDIRACI, Berkat, «Turkey's PKK conflict: the death toll», International Crisis Group (ICG), 20 July 2016, available at <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/2016/07/20/turkey-s-pkk-conflict-the-rising-toll/>. Accessed 11 September 2016.

<sup>119</sup> UNVER, Akin, «Comment: Turkey and the Kurds: Charting the end of a peace process», *Financial Times*, 25 May 2016, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/9f06f0cc-1b85-11e6-b286-cddde55ca122>. Accessed 5 September 2016. AKYOL, Mustafá, «Who killed the Turkey-PKK peace process?», *Al Monitor*, 4 August 2015, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/08/turkey-syria-iraq-pkk-peace-process-who-killed-kurds>.

As for foreign policy, in 2009 and 2010, Turkey had already shifted from its friendly policy of «zero problems with neighbours» to a more assertive and nationalistic policy that has been termed «neo-Ottoman» and is still being pursued today, with variations.<sup>120</sup> This policy led, among other things, to the breaking off of relations with Israel after the incident involving the Turkish vessel *Mavi Marmara* in 2010 on its way to Gaza, and an intense political and diplomatic participation in the Syrian civil war in support of the opposition. The latest expression of this aggressive policy is the crisis with Russia after the Turkish air force downed a Russian fighter plane in November 2015.<sup>121</sup> However, in view of the lack of achievements of this defiant foreign policy (particularly in Syria), which had furthermore plunged Turkey into certain diplomatic isolation, even before the July coup Erdogan was already attempting to settle issues on some of the fronts and resume relations with Russia and Israel.

Where no changes have been made is in Turkey's drifting further apart from the United States and the European Union owing to their repeated criticism of the authoritarian turn Erdogan is taking – which, in contrast, does not worry Russia at all. Disagreements between the West and Turkey continued throughout 2016: the West's support after the coup, which was perceived as late and lukewarm and was further exacerbated by the United States' unwillingness to extradite Gülen, who lives in Pennsylvania; its failure to take a firm stance with respect to the «crimes» of Assad's regime in Syria; the United States' open support for the Syrian Kurds, together with the West's relatively «understanding» attitude towards the PKK's terrorism; Europe's perceived lack of solidarity in its treatment of Syrian refugees and unwillingness to comply with the EU-Turkish agreement of March 2016 to regulate the refugee flow; and Europe's hypocrisy with respect to the stalled negotiations for Turkey's access to the European Union. There have been so many quarrels that, as far as the European Union is concerned, it seems

---

html. Accessed 30 August 2016. DALAY, Galip, «Turkey's Kurdish issue: from peace to low intensity war», Al Jazeera, 21 December 2015, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/12/turkey-kurdish-issue-peace-intensity-war-151221074921873.html>. Accessed 11 September 2016.

<sup>120</sup> The London School of Economics, Middle East Centre, *The AKP and Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East*, April 2016, available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/publications/Collected-Papers/Turkishforeignpolicy.aspx>. Accessed 25 September 2016. SOLER I LECHA, Eduard, «Frentes y aliados en la política exterior turca», Estudios de Política Exterior, *Afkar/Ideas*, autumn 2016, available at <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/afkar-ideas/frentes-y-aliados-en-la-politica-exterior-turca/>. Accessed 14 September 2016.

<sup>121</sup> After its plane was shot down, Russia, Turkey's second largest trading partner, toughened visa requirements, imposed many economic sanctions in the field of energy and tourism, restricted Turkish imports and brought several important infrastructure projects to a standstill. «Turkey-Russia jet downing: Moscow announces sanctions», BBC news, 28 November 2015, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34954575>. Accessed 15 October 2016. Even so, diplomatic relations between the two countries were not broken off.

unlikely that we will see any changes in 2017. The presence of Trump, who will probably be less intrusive with respect to Turkey's domestic policy, could help the United States, but a lot will depend on the decisions America makes over the Syrian war, with the possible extradition of Gülen as a cornerstone of this relationship.<sup>122</sup>

This anti-western diplomatic stance is in keeping with Erdogan's new, more aggressive policy in Syria aimed not against its old arch enemy, Bashar al-Assad's regime – which it now considers an unpleasant but unavoidable reality following the Russian and Iranian military intervention of 2015 – but against the Syrian Kurds of the PYD/YPG, whom it regards, justifiably to an extent, as an extension of the Kurdish terrorist group PKK. This explains Ankara's lack of response to the fall of Aleppo, which came at the same time as Turkey's operation Euphrates Shield against Daesh/Islamic States that is actually designed to stem the expansion of the Syrian Kurds west of the river Euphrates. As a reflection of its rapprochement with Russia, Turkey has also joined Russia in sponsoring the ceasefire now in force, as well as the Astana peace talks in January 2017. Nevertheless, the deployment of significant Turkish military forces on the ground in northern Syria for the first time since the start of the war in 2011, as well as giving rise to a constant stream of casualties, has prompted Daesh/Islamic State to launch a terrorist campaign in Turkey and a clash with the well-organised and militarily efficient Kurdish forces in Syria will be almost inevitable in 2017.<sup>123</sup>

Even so, with a view to the referendum on constitutional reform, the main risk for Erdogan's popularity was probably the apparent end of the economic prosperity Turkey has enjoyed for the past ten years under the AKP. Amid growing political instability and insecurity, which is frightening foreign investors and tourists away from the previously stable country with a greatly depreciated Turkish lira that is curbing ordinary people's purchasing power, its economic indicators plummeted in 2016. The outlook for 2017 is even

<sup>122</sup> YILDIRIM, A. Kadir, «Turkey's impending Eastern turn», Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 August 2016, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64358>. Accessed 13 September 2016. AYDINTASBAS, Asli, «Trouble on the tracks: averting the Turkey-EU train wreck», European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 24 November 2016, available at [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/trouble\\_on\\_the\\_tracks\\_averting\\_the\\_turkey\\_eu\\_train\\_wreck7190](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/trouble_on_the_tracks_averting_the_turkey_eu_train_wreck7190). Accessed 1 December 2016. IDIZ, Semih, «Why Erdogan-Trump honeymoon may be short-lived», *Al Monitor*, 16 November 2016, available at <http://m.almonitor.com/pulse/tr/sites/almonitor/contents/articles/originals/2016/11/turkey-united-states-erdogan-trump-bromance.html>. Accessed 30 November 2016.

<sup>123</sup> IDIZ, Semih, «Turkey faces multiple dilemmas in Syria», *Al Monitor*, 31 May 2016, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/turkey-syria-kurds-face-multiple-dilemmas.html>. Accessed 14 August 2016. BBC News, «Turkey vs Syrian Kurds vs IS», 23 August 2016, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33690060>. Accessed 25 August 2016.



worse, and this has set off the alarm bells of the Turkish government and the Islamic party who runs it.<sup>124</sup>

In short, in April 2017, probably still under the state of emergency, Turkey will put to referendum the process of constitutional reform that could decisively change its political system by strengthening the political hegemony of the AKP and Erdogan. As things stand, unless there are any last-minute economic disasters or unexpected major setbacks in the ever-unpredictable Syrian war, President Erdogan's popularity – more than 60 percent according to the polls – suggests that a majority will vote for the presidentialist system. Nevertheless, the medium- and long-term effects of the Turkish policy of concentrating power in Erdogan are by no means clear; nor does a presidentialist republic alone seem sufficient to solve the serious identity, political, economic and security problems that are assailing Ankara. Meanwhile, with Erdogan at the helm, Turkey is hurtling towards an unknown future.<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusions

Of the «Ten conflicts to watch in 2017» listed in the article by the International Crisis Group think tank, the first three no less are taking place in the Middle East (Syria/Iraq, Turkey and Yemen).<sup>126</sup> Similarly, most of the commentators on the area have not hesitated to predict an even more dramatic outlook for 2017 than in 2016, which was bad enough – the worst in many years.<sup>127</sup> Few Arab states grew stronger in 2016, though Saudi Arabia embarked on an ambitious attempt at economic reform, whose prospects of success are not entirely clear; the tragic attack on Aleppo is a fresh reminder of the Sunni-Shia divide which has heightened sectarian hatred, and the list of mutual

<sup>124</sup> Between 1999 and 2016 Turkey's average GDP growth amounted to 4.67 percent. However, in 2016 it fell to 1.8 percent in the third term, the worst figure since 2009, and the outlook for 2017 is by no means encouraging. Trading Economics, «Turkey GDP annual growth rate 1999-2017», 12 December 2016, available at <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/turkey/gdp-growth-annual>. Accessed 16 December 2016. SONMEZ, Mustafa, «Turkey's AKP scrambles to curb economic woes until referendum», *Al Monitor*, 19 January 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/turkey-akp-scrambles-to-curb-economic-woes-until-referendum.html>. Accessed 20 January 2017.

<sup>125</sup> BAYRAMOGLU, Ali, «Will presidential referendum kill Turkey's democracy?», *Al Monitor*, 23 January 2017, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/turkey-referendum-may-offer-last-chance-salvage.html>. Accessed 24 January 2017.

<sup>126</sup> International Crisis Group, «10 conflicts to watch in 2017», 5 January 2017, available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2017>. Accessed 8 January 2016.

<sup>127</sup> PARSI, Trita, «If you thought 2016 was bad in the Middle East, brace yourself for 2017», *Middle East Eye*, 28 December 2016, available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/if-you-thought-2016-was-bad-middle-east-brace-yourself-2017-750440532>. Accessed 2 January 2017. AL-SHAYJI, Abdullah, «2016 was devastating for order and security», *Gulf News*, 8 January 2017, available at <http://gulfnews.com/opinion/thinkers/2016-was-devastating-for-order-and-security-1.1958549>. Accessed 10 January 2017.

grievances between Saudi Arabia and Iran did not cease to grow in 2016, the year that diplomatic relations were broken off and Iranian pilgrims were unable to visit Mecca.

It is still not clear how Trump's presidency will affect America's waning (but still necessary and predominant) influence in the region. It looks as though the country will strengthen its ties with Israel and will possibly be willing to acknowledge a greater role for Russia in a region where, ultimately, the United States has been trying for years to reduce its involvement in order to focus on what both Obama and Trump view as the country's true priority: China and the Pacific. We may witness a sporadic rise in US counterterrorism military operations to defeat Daesh/Islamic State and are likely to see America take a more assertive stance to the «containment» of Iran, with an increase or at least the maintenance of the sanctions currently in force, irrespective of whether the nuclear deal of July 2015 is formally repealed.

After chalking up many diplomatic successes in 2016, Russia will attempt to strengthen its new position in the Middle East, chiefly to steer the end of the Syrian war in a direction that suits its interests. For talks with so many derivatives, the discreet connivance of the United States will be required (probably in exchange for a more effective Russian contribution to combating the Islamic State/Daesh), as well as a skilled juggling act so as not to upset the delicate balance of Russia's relations with its main ally in Syria, Iran, and Turkey, with which it does not see totally eye-to-eye as regards objectives.

The war in Yemen is no closer to a solution after a year in which the front lines have barely budged, with each side (made up in turn of various actors whose interests do not always converge) reluctant to move from its stronghold and the many negotiations and ceasefires having failed; nevertheless, the first signs of exhaustion shown by one of the parties could prompt some sort of overture.

The Syrian war (or, more appropriately, the «Syrian wars» that are being waged simultaneously in the country) underwent significant changes in 2016, with Assad securing an undeniable and spectacular success winning back Aleppo. Nevertheless, the almost simultaneous loss of Palmyra and the crisis in Deir ez-Zor triggered by Daesh/Islamic State have underlined the fragility of the government side, which was forced to prioritise the use of its highly limited human resources. Turkey's military intervention in the north, where it is fighting Daesh/Islamic State while threatening – and barely concealing it – another US ally (Syria's thriving Kurds), has further complicated the situation. The mainly Kurdish campaign against the capital of Daesh/Islamic State in Syria, Raqqa, with the sponsorship and support of the US-led coalition, began in November 2016 but is currently at a standstill, and it is not clear whether it meets the political and military requirements for the success of the operation. Meanwhile, Syria's Sunni opposition is increasingly

divided, weak and radicalised. Under such conditions, no possibility can be ruled out in Syria in 2017.

Things are looking somewhat brighter for Iraq, where the offensive against Mosul could end in the first quarter of 2017 with the recapture of all the territories occupied by Baghdadi's «caliphate» in 2014. However, after the defeat of the Islamic State/Daesh (which will most likely simply adapt to the situation and go back to being a terrorist and insurgent movement again as it was before 2014), the task will remain of establishing an internal structure for Iraq that takes into account the Shia majority, the Sunni minority and the Kurds, who are all in turn deeply fragmented. On top of these issues is the covert wrestling match between Iran and Turkey (and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia) to maintain their influence in the country, where the political role of the United States is increasingly vague.

Turkey will be another source of concern in 2017. The failed coup has speeded up the pre-existing internal dynamics in which the predominant Islamist party AKP has subordinated everything to the attempt of its leader and president Recep Tayyip Erdogan to amend the constitution to establish a presidential republic in which he wields the power. With the referendum on constitutional change slated for April 2017, despite growing economic difficulties and the fluctuations in the Syrian intervention, it seems likely a priori that Erdogan's wishes will be fulfilled. The state of emergency in force since July and extended for a further term in January 2017 has allowed him to carry out a huge crackdown resulting in dozens of thousands of arrests and reprisals and an iron-fisted control of the media, taking an increasingly authoritarian turn which is aimed not only against the alleged participants in the coup, members of Fetullah Gülen's Hizmet movement, but against the whole opposition. This direction will merely drive Turkey further away from the West and lead it to forge closer ties with Russia, albeit underpinned by a neo-Ottoman nationalistic approach. With the country in the grip of an escalation of savage terrorist attacks and indiscriminate state repression, the possibility of Turkey reaching a negotiated solution to the conflict with the PKK terrorist movement – a possibility briefly glimpsed in the first half of 2015 – seems increasingly distant.

An exception to the rest of the regional crises, the situation in Israel and Palestine has not varied much in 2016, having been ousted from centre stage by the succession of conflicts that have broken out in the Middle East. The current status quo is evidently favourable to Israel, while the Palestinian Authority is being torn apart by its own internal divides, corruption and inefficiency, and the continuing rift between Fatah and Hamas. It seems that the advent of the Trump administration, with its idea of moving the US embassy to Jerusalem and, compared to Obama's stance, apparently more accommodating attitude towards Jewish colonisation of the occupied territories of the West Bank, will be conducive to even greater Israeli intransigence. In 2017 it will be 50 years since the West Bank and Gaza were

occupied following the Six Days' War, and as any international impetus is unlikely, a «two-state» solution (Israel and Palestine) seems increasingly distant.

On the positive side, against all odds, the OPEC reached an agreement in November 2016 to reduce oil production in order to push up prices, on which the budgets of several countries of the regions depend, proving that negotiation and agreement are still possible in the Middle East. Lebanon likewise managed to elect a new president after two years of institutional deadlock and form a national unity government. And the huge potential of the eastern Mediterranean gas reserves could be a spur to reducing the conflict levels and facilitating cooperation between the potential beneficiary countries (Israel/Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria); so far in 2016 it encouraged a rapprochement between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and is among the factors that have prompted a reconciliation (though we will have to wait and see if it lasts) between Turkey and Israel.

In one way or another, developments in the Middle East will continue at a fast past 2017, and even temporary stability remains a distant prospect. It is therefore more than likely that throughout this bumpy process they will continue to make the international headlines.



## Chapter four

### The Sahel: A Permanent Arc of Instability

Ignacio Fuente Cobo

#### Abstract

Throughout 2016, the Sahel continued to be an extraordinarily complex region where extremist organisations carried on interacting with criminal organisations, ethnic militias, armed groups and government authorities in varying degrees and in different ways, creating an environment of insecurity that makes it difficult for governments to control their own territory, while facilitating the spread of the jihadist message and armed insurgency. Although, in recent years, terrorist organisations and criminal groups have been under increasing pressure from military action and more efficient international cooperation, which have resulted in significant material and territorial losses for terrorist groups and a decline in the territories they control, this does not mean to say that jihadist terrorism has ceased to be the main threat to regional security. On the contrary, these groups have shown great resilience in adverse circumstances, being able to survive military attacks by local governments and even external powers to the extent that their operational structures remain active.

#### Keywords

Sahel, AQMI, Boko Haram, Ansar Dine, Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Berkhane.



## Introduction

Since the beginning of the century, jihadist organisations have been establishing themselves and spreading across the Sahel to western Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, leading to a significant worsening of the social, economic and security conditions of already fragile states. The attacks perpetrated by terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and Boko Haram have claimed tens of thousands of lives since being established and have displaced large swathes of the population within and beyond national borders. Boko Haram alone is reckoned to have caused 11,000 deaths in 2015, more than those recorded in Syria and Iraq for the same period.<sup>1</sup> As a result, extremist groups have seized control of large expanses of land, turning them into areas out of bounds to the armed and security forces of the countries in the region.

Although not in a position to militarily challenge the concerted action of the armed forces of the regional governments and external powers, terrorist groups are nonetheless capable of carrying out asymmetrical attacks and of keeping up considerable military activity and a strong presence in the traditional and social media. What is more, the extremist ideologies' proven ability to gain new recruits among Muslim communities with historical grievances and the highly profitable criminal undertakings they control help them recover from military setbacks, while becoming a powerful source of inspiration for other groups who seek to emulate them. Proof of this is the fact that in Mali AQIM and its affiliates are enjoying considerable resonance among the Peul/Fulani communities of livestock farmers whose traditional way of life is being threatened by climate change and competition with farming communities for access to water and grazing land.

In addition to the risk of extremist organisations forging alliances, a serious cause for concern is the possibility of fresh rivalry between them giving rise to spectacular attacks in and outside the region in a race to win potential recruits and secure a greater presence in the international media. In this connection, the attack on the Radisson Blue hotel in Bamako in November 2015 causing 19 deaths, the terrorist attack of February 2016 in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, with a toll of 29 deaths, and the attack on the tourist resort in Ivory Coast killing 16 are examples of this new tendency to carry out attacks with far-reaching international repercussions and a clear strategic impact.

---

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, «Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism», New York, 2015. Available at <http://apo.org.au/resource/global-terrorism-index-2015-measuring-and-understanding-impact-terrorism>. Accessed 19 December 2016.



The consequences of the developments in the Syrian and Iraq wars also remain to be seen. As the two rival groups, Daesh and al-Qaeda, are growing progressively weaker in these countries, their branches in the Sahel are becoming more autonomous. This may encourage either greater collaboration between international groups and their local franchises, or greater competition between these rival organisations. Either outcome is feasible and either will undermine the stability of the region and the international community.

A determining factor when assessing the future security outlook for the region is the situation in Libya. The country appears to have become a rear base and source of support for the groups that were fighting in Syria and Iraq and also a new land of jihad for Daesh, even though this terrorist group had been based in Sirte since the beginning of 2015. Its expulsion from the area of the Gulf of Sidra in December 2016 has paved the way for the remnants of the defeated jihadist groups, together with combatants who manage to survive the fighting in Syria and Iraq, to move to the Sahel, turning it into the next battlefield for international jihadism.

All these circumstances make it necessary to examine the evolution of the extremist groups in the Sahel and the complex political, economic and military game in which they are currently engaged in order to identify their strategies, analyse their ability to withstand adversity and assess their possibilities of surviving the concerted action of regional governments and the international community, which are committed to preventing the centre of gravity of jihadist action from shifting to this troubled region.

### **The Sahel: A context of corruption and fragility**

Although the image we might have of the Sahel region is that of a vast, empty territory not subject to the control of any government, where historically underprivileged communities subsist on the basis of criminal activities and terrorist organisations, the fact is that more than a space without a government it is a complex, diverse environment whose geopolitical forces, economic structures, ethnic and social relations, and trade networks have been evolving and adapting over the centuries. In the Sahel we cannot strictly speak of an absence of state authority but rather of the existence of a sophisticated web of influences and relations that normally operate outside the formal structure of states, whose presence and authority are strongly limited.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office. «Traffickers and Terrorists: Drugs and Violent Jihad in Mali and the Wider Sahel». UK Gov. October 2013. Available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/256619/Oct\\_2013\\_Traffickers\\_and\\_Terrorists.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/256619/Oct_2013_Traffickers_and_Terrorists.pdf). Accessed 12 October 2016.



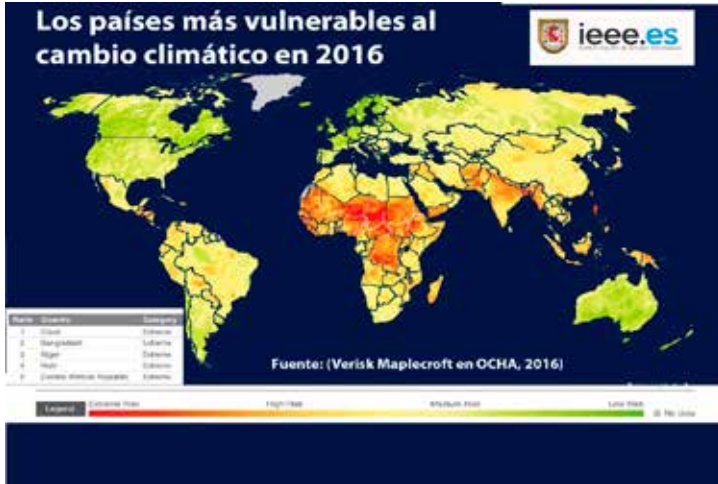
Image 1. The Sahel as a border

This means that the historical communities that inhabit the Sahel are highly sensitive to crises, which are recurrent, and under increasing pressure from shortage of resources, chiefly water. This places them among the most vulnerable in the world. Countries like Niger, Chad and Mali systematically appear at the bottom of international human development rankings in aspects such as health, education and standard of living.<sup>3</sup> To this situation should be added aspects such as climate change and environmental degradation, which have exacerbated the vulnerability of a region where the vast majority of the population relies on agriculture and shepherding to survive. Climate change is a risk multiplier<sup>4</sup> in the Sahel as it reduces the availability of water. Areas suitable for farming have decreased significantly and some wetlands have practically disappeared. For example, Lake Chad has shrunk by 95 percent in the past 50 years.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For example in Nigeria, the most heavily populated country in the region, 38 percent of women and 21 percent of men had not received a regular education. National Population Commission, «Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2013», Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abuja, ICF International, Rockville, Maryland, USA. Junio de 2014. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR293/FR293.pdf>. Accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>4</sup> SÁNCHEZ DE ROJAS DÍAZ, E. «Sahara Sahel 2035: de la ecofrontera a las tres 'tes'». *África: riesgos y oportunidades en el horizonte de 2035*. Monografías 134, Ministerio de la Defensa, 2013. pp. 19-74.

<sup>5</sup> UN Environment Programme, «Vital waters graphic. Lake Chad: almost gone», available at <http://www.unep.org/dewa/vitalwater/article116.html>. Accessed 11 November 2016.



But this does not mean to say that the future of the countries of the Sahel region will necessarily be negative. With the right strategies, efficient use of water and good land management, investments in infrastructure, agriculture and mining, market liberalisation, improvements in education and access to family planning, it would be possible to turn around most of the population's current situation of dire financial straits and lack of opportunities. This does not require major resources: it would be sufficient to manage the existing ones more efficiently and organise the productive, political and social structures better in order to provide incentives for economic development as the basis of social progress.

northern communities. This circumstance is further exacerbated by the fact that the mining industry, the country's main source of income, is located in the south and the national authorities therefore have little incentive to pay attention to or invest in the north, where only 10 percent of the population lives; in addition, northerners' Tuareg descent makes them different from the black population in the south.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the northern Tuaregs have felt discriminated against by the Bamako government since the end of the colonial era and this, despite various attempts at decentralisation, has translated into recurring rebellions in 1962, 1991 and, more recently, in 2012.

Many of Mali's problems are shared by Niger, including a similar geography and north-south divide that dates from before independence and is expressed in a classic clash between the security forces and the Tuaregs living in the north. However, compared to its western neighbour, Niger's situation is much more favourable. This difference can be explained by the higher percentage of Tuaregs living in the country<sup>8</sup> and by the fact that the uranium mines, the country's main source of wealth, are located in Airlit and Agadez in the north. In addition, the central government has been more aware of these factors and has attempted to be more accommodating to the Tuareg communities, as well as maintaining a larger military presence in the north.

Nevertheless, the national governments are only one of the many players in the region, where they interact with a toxic cocktail of armed groups, insurgent movements, ethnic militias, smugglers and traffickers and religious extremists, with whom they maintain relations and compete. The dividing lines between these groups are generally blurred and they often overlap, giving rise to alliances that emerge and fizzle out in keeping with particular interests, people or the political context. Nor are the ethnic groups monolithic or unified. Rivalry between clans and the struggle for pre-eminence among the elites are ills endemic in them all, and all that binds them together is their animosity and resistance to state control.

### **Illegal trafficking, the principal way of life in the region**

The jihadist groups that operate in the Sahel coexist with an extensive transnational criminal network whose earnings have increased massively in the past 15 years. Although the population is very sparse, the region is crossed by many trade routes that connect the main population centres with small desert stations and transit points. Some of the cities that have recently

<sup>7</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. «Mali». The World Factbook. 2015. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>. Accessed 13 October 2016.

<sup>8</sup> OECDE/Sahel West Africa Club. *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel, Geography, Economics and Security*, Paris, 2014.

become famous for their links with organised crime are the major trade hubs connecting western Africa with the Maghreb and the Mediterranean since ancient times.

Similarly, the social, technical and commercial underpinnings of trafficking activities have progressively take shape and grown stronger over the course of many centuries.<sup>9</sup> The borders imposed by the colonial governors and preserved by the new states that emerged from the decolonisation process have little if any impact on trade flows, and they are not recognised as such by much of the population who cross them frequently. The fact is that today the old trade routes that cross the Sahel have become smuggling routes for a roaring trade in all kinds of illegal goods and substances.<sup>10</sup>

For example, cigarettes manufactured in Asia arrive in western Africa and from there are transported to the consumer markets of Libya, Algeria and Europe, where they fetch more than a billion dollars annually.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, automobiles and fuel that are heavily subsidised in Algeria are smuggled into Morocco, Mali and Niger, which are increasingly also receiving household goods from Algeria, although the trade routes with the southern markets have been cut off due to insecurity.

But of all these illegal goods, the most profitable continue to be drugs, chiefly cocaine from Latin America, which generates income of approximately 800 million dollars.<sup>12</sup> Drugs enter Africa via the so-called «Highway 10»<sup>13</sup> which runs along the parallel through countries like Guinea Bissau. In recent years, it has been joined by heroin produced in Afghanistan and Pakistan, cannabis from Morocco and methamphetamines and fake medicines from Asia.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> LACHER, Wolfram, «Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region». Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 September 2012. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/13/organized-crime-and-conflict-in-sahel-sahara-region-pub-49360>. Accessed 18 October 2016.

<sup>10</sup> FITZROY, Dearburn. «Historical commercial relations Sahel». *Encyclopaedia of African History*. Edited by Kevin Shillington. Library of Congress, 2005, pp.1580-90.

<sup>11</sup> *Sahel and West Africa Club*. «Cigarette Trafficking», SWAC no. 15, February 2015. <https://www.oecd.org/swac/maps/15-cigarette-trafficking.pdf>. Accessed 20 October 2016.

<sup>12</sup> UN Radio. «Cocaine Trafficking in West and Central Africa Valued at \$800 Million». 21 February 2012. <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2012/02/cocaine-trafficking-in-west-and-central-africa-valued-at-800-million/>. Accessed 20 October 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Cocaine trafficking reached a peak in 2007 with 47 tonnes and an estimated value of 1.25 billion dollars in the European market, amounting to approximate revenues of 150 million dollars a year for the traffickers. UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Drug Report 2012, New York, 2012. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/WDR\\_2012\\_Spanish\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/WDR_2012_Spanish_web.pdf). Accessed 20 October 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment, UNODC, 2013. <http://www.unodc.org/toc/es/reports/TOCTAWestAfrica.html>. Accessed 22 October 2016.



Image 3. Cocaine trafficking in the Sahel

Another significant problem is arms trafficking, which has become a major source of income and an instability factor. Although not a producer region itself, the Sahel is inundated with light arms from the civil wars of the 1990s or from local arsenals, which are stolen and sold by corrupt civil servants, normally members of the region's security forces and armies.<sup>15</sup> An important reason for the rise in this illegal activity is the sacking of the Libyan arsenals following the fall of Gadhafi in 2011, as a result of which huge amounts of



Image 4. Illegal arms trafficking in the Sahel

<sup>15</sup> UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), «UNODC Study on Firearms. Firearms programme 2015», [https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/UNODC\\_Study\\_on\\_Firearms\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/UNODC_Study_on_Firearms_WEB.pdf). Accessed 22 October 2016.



chiefly light arms have been distributed across the region, including assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-aircraft artillery mounted on light vehicles, explosives and ammunition, as various United Nations Security Council reports have recognised.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, people trafficking has increased exponentially in the past few years as the insecurity and poverty of various African countries and the anarchy in Libya have strengthened the existing routes and opened new ones to Europe. In Niger alone the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) reckons that between 4,000 and 5,000 migrants cross the country every week, providing annual revenues in the region of 150 million dollars.<sup>17</sup> The closure of the eastern routes via Turkey and the Balkans following the December 2015 agreements between Turkey and the European Union on the readmission of immigrants and refugees has revived the central routes to Italy via Libya, Algeria and Tunisia and across the Mediterranean.

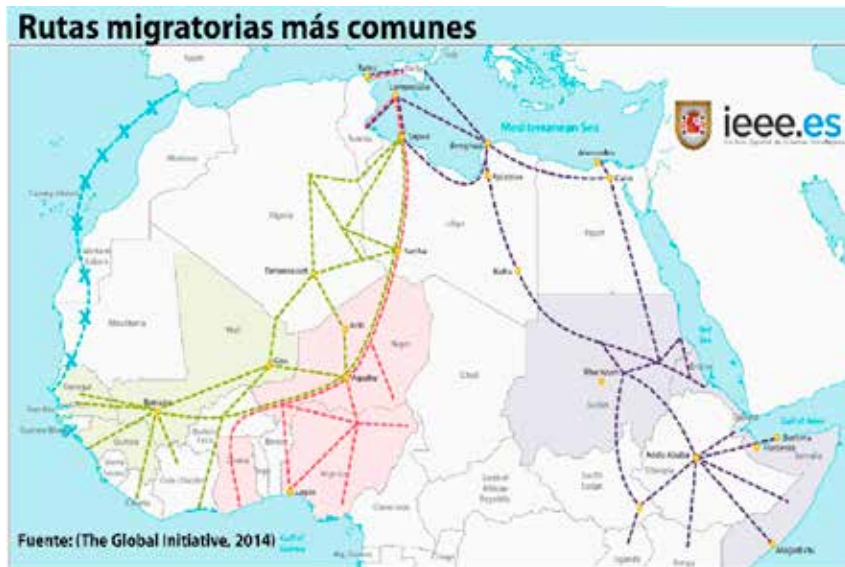


Image 5. Most common migratory routes

Potential migrants without resources are currently piling up in cities of the Sahel such as Gao and Agadez, unable to move forward or return to their places of origin, where they are highly vulnerable to the mafias who exploit

<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that light arms trafficking in Libya is worth some 14-15 million dollars a year and at least 15-30 million dollars counting ammunition (b3).

<sup>17</sup> UNODC, «UNODC Regional Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants 2015-2020», 2015.

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/UNODC\\_Regional\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Combating\\_TIP\\_SOM\\_West\\_and\\_Central\\_Africa\\_2015-2020.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/UNODC_Regional_Strategy_for_Combating_TIP_SOM_West_and_Central_Africa_2015-2020.pdf) Accessed 22 October 2016.

and enslave them, or to being recruited by the criminal jihadist groups whose ranks have been badly depleted by the military setbacks of the past years.<sup>18</sup>

All this illegal trafficking, which has grown in recent years, is a primary source of funding for the jihadist groups, and also provides an ideal breeding ground for their criminal activities. It can therefore be said that the Sahel is a region where jihadist groups and criminal organisations have used cross-border ethnic and family relations to build a hybrid crime structure that is withstanding the test of time and is based on mutual necessity and utility.<sup>19</sup> The traffickers supply the human, logistic and financial resources the terrorist groups need to carry out actions that end up having an impact on regional and global security, while the jihadists provide the criminal organisations with access to political power, as well as military capabilities and media repercussions.

### The action of the jihadist groups

Violent jihadist movements are not a new phenomenon in the Sahel. Ever since Islam reached this part of the world in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, various political and religious leaders have used the message of the most violent jihad to expand their sphere of influence and subjugate their enemies. This language of force as an instrument of reform and religious purification is currently used by the various jihadist groups to capture recruits and subvert the established political order.

Although the vast majority of Muslims who live in the Sahel belong to the Fiqh school of Sunni Maliki Islamic law, which is more moderate than the strict Hanbali School of the Arab peninsula (commonly known in the West as Wahhabi), a significant shift towards a stricter expression of Islam has been witnessed in the Sahel in recent decades. This change has been spurred by substantial financial aid chiefly from the countries of the Persian Gulf, which have encouraged an often intolerant version of Islam and a «narrative of grievance» which ambitious individuals and opportunistic groups have seized upon to recruit followers and overturn the established order.<sup>20</sup> This process has been followed in varying degrees of intensity by all the Islamist groups and cells, franchises of both Daesh and al-Qaeda, despite the significant differences – chiefly in operational strategies – between these two groups which nonetheless share the common aim of spreading Islam across the world.

---

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> FUENTE COBO, Ignacio. «La amenaza híbrida: yihadismo y crimen organizado en el Sahel», Documento de Análisis 57/2014, IEEE, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> HARMON, Stephen A. «Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region», Routledge, London & New York, 2014, pp.158-164.



However, the language and ideology of the violent jihad have not proven sufficient to guarantee the loyalty of these groups' followers for long periods of time. Recruitment strategies include measures such as appealing to ethnic or class sentiments to create a feeling of grievance among the lowest segments of the social pyramid. This is the strategy followed by the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), an al-Qaeda franchise, though in practice its agenda is regional and centred on spreading the jihad in West Africa. This group has taken a pragmatic approach to defending the interests of local communities, seeking to adapt the jihadist rhetoric to their economic concerns. For example, in Timbuktu and Gao, the MUJWA has been proclaiming that taxes and excises of all kinds go against «the will of Allah» and therefore cannot be collected under a government that defines itself as Islamic.<sup>21</sup>

Coercion has also become an important means of forcing young people in particular to join the ranks of the jihadist groups. This policy is being widely practiced by groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, though the recent military setbacks have reduced the number of volunteers prepared to join up.<sup>22</sup>

From the military point of view, it can be said that the situation on the ground for the jihadist groups is much worse than it was a year ago. No jihadist group – not even al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Daesh or Boko Haram – controls large areas of territory; Daesh was the last to lose its territory when Sirte, the emblematic capital of its emirate in Libya, fell to the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) at the beginning of December 2016.<sup>23</sup> This does not mean to say that the terrorist groups have not retained the ability to inflict significant material damage and loss of lives, but it does indicate that none is in a position to effectively stand up to opposing military forces, national or international, or vie with them for control of the territory.

However, their current weakness does not rule out possibility of their recovering from their defeats and re-emerging stronger than in the past, or

<sup>21</sup> This group became known on 12 December 2011 when it claimed responsibility for taking three western aid workers hostage – two Spaniards and one Italian – at the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf (Algeria). JORDAN, Javier. «Los grupos yihadistas en el Sahel, un año después de la operación militar en Malí». *Análisis GES*, I, 5 February 2014. <http://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es/content/los-grupos-yihadistas-en-el-sahel-un-a%C3%B1o-despu%C3%A9s-de-la-operaci%C3%B3n-militar-en-mal%C3%AD>. Accessed 24 October 2016.

<sup>22</sup> DRAKEFORD, Cortney. «Is Boko Haram In Decline? Terrorist Group Might Be Defeated Soon, Nigerian Army Claims», *International Business Time* (IBTime), 21 November 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.com/boko-haram-decline-terrorist-group-might-be-defeated-soon-nigerian-army-claims-2449325>. Accessed 22 October 2016.

<sup>23</sup> *Algerie Press Service*. «Libye: reprise totale de Syrte à l'EI, une occasion pour le GNA d'asseoir son autorité dans le pays», 6 December 2016. <http://www.aps.dz/monde/50084-libye-reprise-totale-de-syrte-à-l-ei,-une-occasion-pour-le-gna-d-asseeoir-son-autorité-dans-le-pays>. Accessed 16 October 2016.

of doing so in new spaces that provide opportunities for jihad as theatres of military operations. Indeed, these terrorist groups are characterised by their resilience and ability to recover from major military setbacks, as we have seen in Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Syria.

### **Boko Haram: Weakened but not defeated**

Boko Haram, a group extraordinarily active in Nigeria and the neighbouring countries in the early part of the present decade, when it murdered 6,500 civilians in 2015 and 11,000 the following year<sup>24</sup> – more than those killed by Daesh in Syria and Iraq during those years – is currently becoming weaker and weaker. It has lost many of its fighters and its main leaders, and thousands of the hostages it had taken have been rescued by the Nigerian authorities. With Lake Chad, the area in which it mainly operates, gripped by a deep food crisis, its logistic situation is disastrous. By the end of 2016 the group no longer had access to the equipment and weapons it relied on in the past, including battle tanks, armoured vehicles and light Toyota vehicles, while the Nigerian air force strikes on its hideouts in the Sambisa forest, its last haven near the border with Cameroon, have weakened it even more if such a thing is possible.<sup>25</sup>

The establishment of the so-called Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in 2011 and 2012, consisting of lightly armed vigilantes entrusted with protecting their own communities, has proved to be an efficient operational structure over the years, mainly in the Nigerian state of Borno.<sup>26</sup> Its 24,000 members have acted as liaisons between the communities and the military forces and are an important source of information on them – a task that much of the population was understandably not willing to perform. Another factor that has helped weaken this terrorist group is the alliance forged at the end of 2014 between the governments of Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon leading to a joint offensive that marked the start of its military decline.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, «Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism», New York. 2015, <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>. Accessed 19 December 2016.

<sup>25</sup> «Scores of Boko Haram terrorists killed as Air force intensifies bombardment of Sambisa Forest. Vanguard», 11 October 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/10/scores-of-boko-haram-terrorists-killed-as-air-force-intensifies-bombardment-of-sambisa-forest/>. Accessed 10 November 2016.

<sup>26</sup> «Nigerian vigilantes, The home guard», *The Economist*, 29 September 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21707958-volunteers-who-helped-beat-back-boko-haram-are-becoming-problem-home>. Accessed 11 November 2016.

<sup>27</sup> «Nigeria, Níger, Chad, Camerún y Benín se unen contra Boko Haram», *Lainformacion.com*, 30 July 2015. [http://www.lainformacion.com/mundo/nigeria-niger-chad-camerun-y-benin-se-unen-contra-boko-haram\\_ZcpQyVS5Wa9CRh9SZ9Hau3/](http://www.lainformacion.com/mundo/nigeria-niger-chad-camerun-y-benin-se-unen-contra-boko-haram_ZcpQyVS5Wa9CRh9SZ9Hau3/). Accessed 25 November 2016.

As a result, Boko Haram has at last had to abandon the territory it previously controlled in inland Nigeria and shift to the swampy areas around Lake Chad and the equatorial forests in the mountains of northern Cameroon. This does not mean to say that the border area between Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad is now fully controlled by the respective governments, but it does indicate that the terrorist group is severely weakened. The current strategy of the countries of the Chad basin (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger) involves gaining control of Sambisa forest as the first stage of an operation designed to form a pincer around the Lake Chad islands, the last stronghold of Boko Haram's main combatants and primarily one of its leaders, Abu al-Mosab Barnawi.<sup>28</sup>

Although Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, stated in a BBC interview in December 2015 that the group had been dismantled as an organised militant force and had lost its ability to launch conventional attacks or engage in direct combat with military forces,<sup>29</sup> Boko Haram is not completely destroyed or inoperative and still has a significant ability to carry out asymmetrical attacks of a certain size. Nevertheless, the fact that the group is increasingly using girls for its suicide attacks is due not only to the fact that they are less likely to draw attention but probably to the growing difficulty of recruiting young men for its cause.

But the group's problems are not only operational. As well as withstanding the military pressure of the forces of Nigeria and other countries in the region, it needs to address the problem of its divided chiefs. There is fierce rivalry between the traditional leadership represented by Abubakar Shekau, until recently a supporter of Daesh, whose bloody methods have been widely questioned by the group's own members, and the faction represented by Mamman Nur, who is closely linked to al-Qaeda. In 2012 Nur established a new branch called Ansaru which presented itself as a «more humane» alternative to Shekau, claiming that it does not attack Muslims and limits its action to government targets and Christians, acting in a more «acceptable» self-defence.<sup>30</sup> Its most spectacular action was the attack on Abuja prison in November 2012 enabling 200 Islamists to escape, followed by a series of hostage takings during 2012 and 2013 that allowed it to become established in its own right.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> «Terrorisme: Boko Haram est-il si proche de sa fin?», *Jeune Afrique*, 30 December 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/388372/politique/terrorisme-boko-haram-proche-de-fin/>. Accessed 22 December 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants «technically defeated», BBC, 24 December 2015. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35173618>. Accessed 15 December 2016.

<sup>30</sup> ZENN, Jacob. «Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria», Combating Terrorism Center, 24 February 2014. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/leadership-analysis-of-boko-haram-and-ansaru-in-nigeria>. Accessed 11 November 2016.

<sup>31</sup> «Prison Breaks Frees 200 Inmates in Central Nigeria», Reuters, 7 December 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-prisonbreak-idUSKBN0JL0I320141207>. Accessed 11 November 2016.

Its relations with Shekau were mainly cooperative until 2016, and it did not oppose Boko Haram's seizure and control of various regional governments. But at some point during the year the groups went their separate ways completely, as a result of which Ansaru made off with hundreds of followers of Boko Haram, including Abu Musab al-Barnawi,<sup>32</sup> the son of the movement's charismatic leader Mohammed Yusuf. In August 2016 Daesh's leadership announced that Barnawi was replacing Shekau as the chief (*wali*) of Boko Haram, and changed its operational strategy in an attempt to improve its public image, rejecting indiscriminate violence and concentrating attacks on Christians and churches.

This group loyal to the Islamic State is currently the more dangerous and better organised of the two factions into which Boko Haram has split. It controls the areas west of Lake Chad, and is pitted against the Nigerian and Chad armies and has been benefiting from a certain calm before the start of the offensive to destroy their supply chain and occupy their bases.

As for Abubakar Shekau, although according to the Nigerian authorities' declarations he is dead,<sup>33</sup> the fact is that 29 December he recorded a video in Sambisa forest announcing not only that he was still alive but that his men had not been «driven out of anywhere»<sup>34</sup> and were still fully operational. Nevertheless, even if this were true, his refusal to remain loyal to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would indicate that Daesh has lost the loyalty of an important part of Boko Haram and, accordingly, some of the most experienced jihadist leaders in Africa. Significant clashes have broken out since August 2016 between the supporters of both factions and the change of rhetoric and goals advocated by the new leader Barnawi would indicate that Daesh seems to be forcing a change of strategy aimed at encouraging a religious struggle in order to win the support of the local communities – something that Shekau's tactics of extreme violence never achieved. What remains to be seen – and this will be difficult – is whether this strategy proves to be overly ambitious given the terrorist group's current situation of weakness, however much rhetoric and propaganda they use.

<sup>32</sup> Whose real name is Habib Yussuf. «Boko Haram in Nigeria: Abu Musab al-Barnawi named as new leader», BBC, 3 August 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36963711>. Accessed 11 November 2016.

<sup>33</sup> SEUN, Opejobi, «Army confirms death of Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau», Daily Post, Nigeria, 1 September 2016, in: <http://dailypost.ng/2016/09/01/army-confirms-death-boko-haram-leader-abubakar-shekau/>. Accessed 15 December 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Boko Haram, «Nous n'avons été chassés de nulle part», Jeune Afrique, 29 December 2016. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/388139/politique/boko-haram-navons-ete-chasses-de-nulle-part-affirme-abubakar-shekau/>. Accessed 21 December 2016.

### AQIM: in the process of recovering?

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) is a jihadist terrorist group that has proven to have an extraordinary ability to survive in difficult circumstances. Its origins can be traced back to the Algerian civil war that ravaged the country after the thwarted electoral process in 1992. The Algerian authorities' intention to prevent the advent to power of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), a political group with Islamist leanings, led a radicalised sector of the population, prominent among whom were the veteran Algerian mujahedeen who had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, to found the takfir Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which can be considered the embryo of AQMI, and initiate an armed struggle against the Algerian government. What ensued was a terrible civil war which claimed more than 100,000 lives in what was known as the «black decade».<sup>35</sup>

In 1997, the GIA changed its name in order to improve its public image, which had been badly dented by the atrocities committed during these years, and became known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The police and military successes of the Algerian authorities and the important demobilisation of the group's affiliates and sympathisers – largely a consequence of the reconciliation policy carried out by President Bouteflika from 1999 – led the group to move its base of operations to the Sahel, where it boosted its resources through a process of hybridisation with organised crime and gained notoriety for actions such as taking western hostages. The capture of 32 Central European tourists in 2003<sup>36</sup> and their eventual liberation following a ransom payment of five million euros marked the start of a vicious circle that was extremely profitable for the jihadists: the more western hostages they took, the more money they demanded, and this in turn spurred further hostage taking, so that ransom payments gradually increased over the years, from 150,000 euros in 2003 to 7.5 million euros in 2014.<sup>37</sup> As a result of these simple and profitable operational tactics, the remnants of the defeated Algerian movement displaced to the Sahel grew into a powerful and well-funded group with minimal risks for its own activists, who were reserved for more impactful

<sup>35</sup> For more about this war, see MARTÍNEZ, Luis, «La guerre civil en Algérie», Karthala, Paris, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> «La opulenta y democrática Europa financia el terror de Al Qaeda y sus filiales con sus rescates millonarios», *El periodista digital*, 3 August 2014. <http://www.periodistadigital.com/mundo/europa/2014/08/03/la-opulenta-y-democratica-europa-financia-el-terror-de-al-qaeda-y-sus-filiales-con-sus-rescates-millonarios.shtml>. Accessed 11 December 2016.

<sup>37</sup> FUENTE COBO, Ignacio, «La amenaza híbrida: yihadismo y crimen organizado en el Sahel», Documento de Análisis. IEEE, 3 December 2014. [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2014/DIEEA57-2014\\_AmenazaHibridaSAHEL\\_IFC.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2014/DIEEA57-2014_AmenazaHibridaSAHEL_IFC.pdf). Accessed 11 November 2016.

actions.<sup>38</sup> This drew the attention of al-Qaeda, whose strategy at the start of the century consisted in spreading through a system of franchises across areas of the Muslim world where the local jihadist groups stood chances of success.

In 2007, the GSPC thus became an al-Qaeda franchise called al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI)<sup>39</sup> under the leadership of Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud, who is better known as Abdelmalek Droukdel, a former Algerian combatant in Afghanistan whose headquarters were based in the Kabylia region in Algeria, but whose operational structures (*katibas*) were active in the Sahel area under the leadership of people like Abu Zeid and Moktar Belmokhtar. Affiliation with al-Qaeda raised the global profile of the new Sahelian franchise, whose leadership continued to be Algerian but whose ranks were swelled by a growing number of Islamist volunteers from Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal. The group expanded into other fields such as drug trafficking, where it established close relations with smuggling networks, charging them a «protection» tax for crossing its area of operations. For this purpose it used opportunistic but effective tactics of teaming up with regional tribes and clans, sharing with them the plentiful proceeds from its criminal activities in which the policy of marrying local women played an important role.

Some of the people who engage in these activities attained considerable fame for extending their illegal activities to all kinds of wares, such as smuggling cigarettes, cars, weapons or people. Prominent among them was the Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar, another Afghanistan veteran whose jihadist activities earned him international fame after he claimed responsibility for the attack on the Tigantourine gas facility in In Amenas in January 2013 in which 39 hostages were killed.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the strategy pursued by AQMI during these years can be described as erratic. The differences between its leaders with respect to ideology, operational tactics, responsibilities, commercial activities and targets undermined the cohesion of this jihadist group and gave rise to various splinter groups fuelled by ethnic and class rivalry. In 2011, misgivings about

<sup>38</sup> SERGE, Daniel, «AQMI: L'Industrie de l'Enlèvement». Fayard, 2012. También FRINTZ, Anna, «Drugs: the new alternative economy of West Africa», *Le Monde Diplomatique*, available at [www.lemondediplo.com](http://www.lemondediplo.com). Accessed 11 November 2016.

<sup>39</sup> ECHEVERRÍA, Carlos. «Al Qaeda en las tierras del Magreb islámico (AQMI) y otros grupos de su entorno: una compleja red de carácter violento», Documento de investigación 02/2013, Colección: grupos militantes de ideología radical y carácter violento región «Mena» y Asia Central no 1, IEEE. [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_investig/DIEEINV02-2013\\_AlQaidaTierrasMagreb\\_RegionMenaxAsiaCentral.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/DIEEINV02-2013_AlQaidaTierrasMagreb_RegionMenaxAsiaCentral.pdf). Accessed 11 November 2016.

<sup>40</sup> «Quién está detrás de la toma de rehenes en Argelia», BBC, 21 January 2013. [http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/01/130121\\_argelia\\_operacion\\_desenlace\\_men](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/01/130121_argelia_operacion_desenlace_men). Accessed 15 November 2016.

Algerian leadership sparked the emergence of the Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) under the direction of Malian and Mauritanian chiefs and with members from a broad range of black Shongai/Peul (Fulani) tribes as well as Arab communities of the Sahel region.<sup>41</sup>

Another jihadist group closely related to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb that emerged during this period was Ansar Dine ('Defenders of the Faith»), which was established by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a former Tuareg leader during the uprisings of the 90s. He made his fortune as an intermediary for the Malian government in the taking of European hostages during the first years of the century and, disillusioned in 2011 by the rejection of his candidature as leader of the nationalist uprising in northern Mali staged by the Azawad Liberation Movement (MNLA), he decided to create his own group based on the Ifora, the main tribe in the southern part of the Tuareg region, and Algerian, Malian and Nigerian volunteers.<sup>42</sup>

A similar case is that of Belmokhtar, whose action in the past years has been characterised by growing autonomy and refusal to submit to the central authority of AQMI and provide information about his accounts. This autonomous manner of acting led him to split from AQMI in 2012 and form his own group, which he called al-Mulathameen («the masked brigade»). This group carried out the attack on the Tigantourine gas facility in In Amenas, which established his reputation as a military leader and jihadist chief.<sup>43</sup> The lack of cohesion of the various jihadist groups operating in the Sahel did not prevent them all – AQIM, MUJAO, Ansar Dine, al-Mulathameen – from viewing the uprising in the Azawad as a strategic opportunity to join forces with the MNLA and put their roots down in Mali with a view to declaring an independent caliphate.

Nevertheless, the heavy losses inflicted by the French anti-jihadist intervention of January 2013 in Mali and the subsequent crackdown of local and international security forces forced these groups to reorganise themselves team up to a considerable extent. Accordingly, in mid-2013, Mokhtar Belmokhtar merged his «brigade» with a faction of the MUHWA, a group which had also been severely weakened, giving rise to a new jihadist

<sup>41</sup> REINARES, Fernando, «Un condominio yihadista en el norte de Mali: ¿cómo ha surgido?, ¿se consolidará?», ARI 52/2012, Real Instituto Elcano, 17 July 2012. [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/terrorismo+internacional/ari52-2012](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/terrorismo+internacional/ari52-2012). Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>42</sup> GURFINKIEL, Michel, «Meet Azawad, Africa's Newest Country», PJ Media, 12 April 2012. <https://pjmedia.com/blog/meet-azawad-africas-newest-country/>. Accessed 15 December 2016.

<sup>43</sup> ROGGIO, Bill, «US adds Belmokhtar's brigades to terrorist lists», *Log War Journal*, 18 December 2013. [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/12/us\\_adds\\_belmokhtars.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/12/us_adds_belmokhtars.php). Accessed 21 November 2106.

group called al-Morabitum («the sentinels»)<sup>44</sup> This group became affiliated with AQMI on 4 December 2015 and claimed responsibility for actions as spectacular as the attack on the Radisson Blu hotel on 20 November 2015 and the taking of hostages.

The fact is that the ambitions of all these groups have greatly surpassed their operational capabilities. The military failure to capture Bamako in January 2013 and the serious losses suffered by these groups, in terms of both men and material, dealt a huge blow to their prestige and greatly reduced their possibilities of operating strategically during the following two years.

The French intervention of January 2013, coupled with the deployment of an African Union peacekeeping force, which ended up handing over in July 2013 to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission (MINUSMA), succeeded in weakening the jihadist groups and pushing them towards their rear bases – located chiefly in the region of Fezzan, in southwest Libya – though it did not manage to eradicate them or render them inoperative. Over the past years both AQMI and the various groups operating in the area have proved to be sufficiently resilient and capable of bouncing back, despite the constant pressure to which they are subjected by the various countries in the region and the international military forces operating there. These means that they have retained their ability to act, even if it is limited.

AQMI is currently headed by the Algerian emir Abdelmalek Droukdel and is organised into two major branches called «emirate of the Maghreb» (also «central emirate») and «emirate of the Sahara», the latter directed since October 2012 by the Algerian Djamel Okasha, alias Abu Yahia al-Humam. Its area is divided into four main *katibas* (or brigades), each with several dozen combatants divided into smaller sections consisting of a few men, and since the end of 2015 al-Morabitum has been its main and most active *katiba*.

As for funding, after the trickle of ransom money dried up following the French intervention of 2013, smuggling various staple goods (foodstuffs, medicines, fuel, etc.) became an important source of income. But their money came above all from private donations from the Middle East. These funds circulated through humanitarian organisations, religious institutions and, more informally, through a chain of Sahelian traders acting as private intermediaries, making them particularly difficult to trace.<sup>45</sup> Lastly, part of the funds came from protecting oil infrastructure in Libya.

<sup>44</sup> ROGGIO, Bill, «Al Qaeda group led by Belmokhtar, MUJAO unite to form al-Murabitoun». *Log War Journal*. 22 August 2013. [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/al-qaeda\\_groups\\_lead\\_by\\_belmokhtar.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/al-qaeda_groups_lead_by_belmokhtar.php). Accessed 21 November 2016.

<sup>45</sup> CELIAN, Macé, «Belmokhtar est certainement aujourd'hui le cadre d'Al Qaeda le plus influent du Sahel», *Estudio del Ifri en Libération*, 6 January 2017. [http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/01/06/belmokhtar-est-certainement-aujourd'hui-le-cadre-d-al-qaeda-le-plus-influent-du-sahel\\_1539522](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/01/06/belmokhtar-est-certainement-aujourd'hui-le-cadre-d-al-qaeda-le-plus-influent-du-sahel_1539522). Accessed 8 January 2017.



## The decline of Daesh

Until the beginning of 2016, the history of Daesh in the Maghreb and the Sahel was paved with military successes and symbolic victories, such as Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance in Nigeria, as well as that of a faction of the al-Morabitum group in Mali led by Adnan Abu Walid Sahraoui, which came to be called Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS),<sup>46</sup> and even a pro-Daesh splinter group, albeit smaller, from the al-Shabab group in Somalia.<sup>47</sup> In Libya, where it initially appeared in the city of Derna in Cyrenaica in October 2014, Daesh even came to control a large strip of coastline along the Gulf of Sidra in February 2015, where it established a provisional emirate based in the city of Sirte until being expelled in December 2016.<sup>48</sup>

In general, Daesh's meteoric rise in Africa beginning in 2014 threatened al-Qaeda's hitherto unquestioned authority over the international jihadist movement, just as it had done in Syria and Iraq. Its efforts were spurred on by the growing popularity of Daesh as a result of its resounding victories in the Middle East and the widespread conviction in Muslim societies that Daesh was more concerned than al-Qaeda about Muslim civilians.

Nevertheless, al-Qaeda coped quite well with withstanding Daesh's efforts to take its place as the leading jihadist organisation in Africa. Daesh's military defeat in Libya at the hands of the Misrata militias, who were loyal to the Government of National Accord (GNA), in December 2016, together with the effectiveness of al-Qaeda's various franchises at foiling Daesh's plans by attacking the deserting factions and executing the supposed sympathisers of this rival group,<sup>49</sup> reinforced al-Qaeda's position and improved its chances of continuing to be the leading group of the international jihadist movement on the continent.

<sup>46</sup> Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who continued to be leader of most of the group, issued a communiqué in May 2015 rejecting Sahraoui's opinion. NANCE, Malcolm, *Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe*, Sky Horse Publishing, New York, 2016, Chapter 5.

<sup>47</sup> This splinter group was led by Mumin, who abandoned the group together with 150 to 200 of his followers in October 2015. In April 2016, another group of jihadist fighters of al-Shabab also left the parent organisations, founding a new group called Jabha East Africa. HANSEN, Stig Jarle. «The Islamic State is losing in Africa», *Foreign Policy*, 13 December 2016.

<sup>48</sup> ALAMILLOS, Alicia, «Fuerzas progubernamentales libias apuran los últimos días de Daesh en Sirte», ABC, 5 December 2016. [http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-milicias-progubernamentales-anuncian-liberacion-total-capital-libia-daesh-201612051453\\_noticia.html](http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-milicias-progubernamentales-anuncian-liberacion-total-capital-libia-daesh-201612051453_noticia.html). Accessed 18 November 2016.

<sup>49</sup> For example, its franchise in Somalia, Jabha East Africa, suffered major losses as a result of the attacks of Al-Shabab, becoming relegated to the Galgala mountains in the semi-arid region of Putland. HANSEN, Stig Jarle, «The Islamic State is losing in Africa», *Foreign Policy*, 13 December 2016. <http://www.stripes.com/the-islamic-state-is-losing-in-africa-1.444216>. Accessed 21 November 2016.

Some of the actions carried out by the franchises of Daesh, such as the short-lived attack of 26 October on the port of Qandala in northern Somalia, which was won back days later by the government forces, can only be explained by the powerlessness of the local police and should be interpreted as a desperate attempt to prove that they still have a certain operational capacity. The same can be said of Boko Haram, which was initially affiliated with Daesh until its leader Abubakar Shekhau decided to challenge this relationship and split off from the group. Also in the Sahel, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the leader of al-Morabitum, has remained loyal to al-Qaeda and has defeated Sahraoui's dissident faction,<sup>50</sup> which nonetheless continued to operate from the Malian cities of Gao and Menaka, where it retains a certain amount of support.<sup>51</sup>

Basically, the most that Daesh would have achieved was to drive a wedge between the various groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, which became entangled in territorial disputes and fights for leadership that weakened them and undermined their operational capacity. As for their territorial control, after being driven out of Libya, the various groups still loyal to Daesh were confined to small peripheral areas of little strategic importance, chiefly in Somalia, from which it would be very difficult to carry out actions with an international impact.

Al-Qaeda's resilience and, consequently, Daesh's inability to supplant it as leader of the jihadist movement in Africa, is largely due to misconceptions – about the regional nature of the various jihadist groups in Africa and about the importance they attach to their operational autonomy. Coupled with this is the fierce resistance of al-Qaeda's various franchises to the change in leadership and the limitations of Daesh, which is incapable of providing sufficient logistic and military support to them.

As a result, the groups which had deserted to join Daesh have lately reversed this process and are returning to an al-Qaeda that appears to have emerged victorious from the bitter dispute of the past few years of rivalry for jihadist leadership. In the end, al-Qaeda reached the Sahel long before Daesh did and will remain long after it has left.

### Local responses to the jihadist threat

Although regional responses to the jihadist threat have intensified in recent years, none of the governments of the region has sufficient military

<sup>50</sup> «Belmojtar rechaza la (baya) de Al Sahraui al Estado Islámico», Europa Press, 18 May 2016. <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-belmojtar-rechaza-baya-saharaui-estado-islamico-20150518000959.html>. Accessed 22 November 2016.

<sup>51</sup> «Attack in Burkina Faso likely to deter investors and indicates new Sahel jihadist hotspot in 2017», IHS. 28 December 2016. [http://janis.ihs.com/IntelligenceWeekly/Display/1792155?from=email&E-Mail=TRUE&utm\\_source=MAINSEARCH&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=clickfull&utm\\_content=190168&utm\\_campaign=170106](http://janis.ihs.com/IntelligenceWeekly/Display/1792155?from=email&E-Mail=TRUE&utm_source=MAINSEARCH&utm_medium=email&utm_term=clickfull&utm_content=190168&utm_campaign=170106). Accessed 29 December 2016.

capabilities and intelligence structures to carry out effective counterterrorist campaigns by itself. Similarly, none, with the exception of Algeria to an extent, has sufficient resources – in terms of quantity or quality – to control its own territory fully and efficiently.

But shortage of resources is only part of the problem and the unequal commitment of the various governments to take serious action to stem this threat is more important. For example, one of the main causes of the rise and survival of Boko Haram during the first years of the decade should be sought in the lack of resolve of Nigeria's president, Goodluck Jonathan, who adopted a policy of denial, playing down the importance of the problem in the northeast of the country until the end of his term.<sup>52</sup> The situation was similar in Mali, where for years the authorities accepted the lack of security in the north provided that the instability did not spread to the south.

Even Chad, a country that has always aspired to become a small regional power and was one of the first countries to join in the French intervention in northern Mali in 2013, regarded Boko Haram as a secondary priority, and attributed the main responsibility to the Nigerian government even though the group has bases in Chad and actively engages in arms trafficking across the country. Only when its own transport routes with Cameroon came under threat and the Nigerian government undertook to fund its participation did the Chadian government agree to take a proactive role in combating terrorism.<sup>53</sup>

Although, in general, the initial response to the threat posed by Boko Haram was chiefly military and, furthermore, greatly limited, uncoordinated and excessively violent against the civilian population,<sup>54</sup> a significant improvement has been witnessed since 2015 in the professionalism and effectiveness of the armed forces of the region's states.

Regional coordination has also improved significantly in critical aspects in order to undermine the jihadist groups' ability to commit actions of a certain scope, such as exchanging intelligence, blocking supply routes and destroying rear guard areas and training bases. The process is not proving to be easy or complete, owing to the substantial differences of all kinds between the various countries, ranging from language barriers (it should be borne in

---

<sup>52</sup> «Goodluck Jonathan: Policies or promises? Nigeria's president promises to tackle corruption and an armed insurgency as he seeks a second term in office», Inside Story, Al Jazeera, 13 November 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2014/11/goodluck-jonathan-policies-promises-20141113182518357174.html>.

<sup>53</sup> «Chad's Fight Against Boko Haram», Vice News, 9 July 2015. <https://news.vice.com/video/chads-fight-against-boko-haram>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>54</sup> For example, in Niger the government gave orders for 25,000 inhabitants of the Diffa region to be evacuated in May 2015; it was carried out without logistic support or means of transport, leading to the death of many civilians. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, «Niger: Diffa, Rapport de situation 16», 2 November 2015. <http://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-diffa-rapport-de-situation-16-2-novembre-2015>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

mind that the working language in Nigeria is English, whereas for most of the Sahelian countries it is French), and the various levels of perception of threat and mistrust between the various actors on the role they should play and the level of commitment they should agree to in solving the problem.

Despite these difficulties, significant progress has been made in the Lake Chad region recently by the governments of Benin, Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad, which in mid-2015 managed to set up a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF). With 8,700 troops and headquartered in Djamena, it has proved fairly effective at combating Boko Haram's terrorist activities<sup>55</sup> by exchanging intelligence and in operational coordination, which has enabled it to achieve tangible results.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Chad's unwillingness to station its military forces along the border with other members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC),<sup>57</sup> coupled with the difficulty of securing sufficient funds for the operations given the low oil prices, are factors to be taken into consideration when assessing the efficiency of the CJTF.

Even so, cooperation improved considerably during 2016, leading to a significant reduction in terrorist activities and Boko Haram's operational capabilities. For example, Nigerian military units have begun carrying out joint patrols with their Cameroonian counterparts under air Chadian air cover,<sup>58</sup> and cooperation between the military forces of Chad and Niger has increased.

Nevertheless, despite the improvement in the situation on the ground, it is too soon to regard Boko Haram as a militarily defeated group and the possibility of a decrease in regional cooperation commitments in the future is a serious threat. Countries like Chad, with bigger military capabilities, are overburdened by their regional responsibilities at a time when insecurity is lurking at all their borders, from the Central African Republic in the south,

<sup>55</sup> «A Regional Multinational Joint Task Force to Combat Boko Haram», Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention. <http://pnpc.net/news/regional-multinational-joint-task-force-combat-boko-haram>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>56</sup> CHUTER, David, and GAUB, Florence, «Understanding African Armies», Report no. 27, 2016. EU Institute for Security Studies. [http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report\\_27\\_African\\_Armies.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report_27_African_Armies.pdf). Accessed 15 December 2016.

<sup>57</sup> The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) was established on 22 May 1964 by the four countries that border on Lake Chad: Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad. The Central African Republic joined the organisation in 1996, Libya was admitted in 2008. Observer status is held by Sudan admitted, Egypt, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. N'Djaména, the capital of Chad, is the seat of the Commission's headquarters. See the website of the *Lake Chad Basin Commission*. <http://www.cbtl.org/en/lake-chad-basin-commission-0>. Accessed on 9 December 2016.

<sup>58</sup> CHRIS, Stein, «Multinational Force Fighting Boko Haram Gets Mixed Results», Extremism Watch, VOA. 15 July 2016. <http://www.voanews.com/a/multinational-force-fighting-boko-haram-gets-mixed-results/3420173.html>. Accessed 9 December 2016.

Darfur in the east and Libya in the north to Lake Chad with Boko Haram in the west.

The other regional power, Nigeria, needs to address serious internal security problems that are not limited to jihadist terrorism. A drought has forced Fulani shepherds to harass the farming communities with which they compete in the Sahel for scant resources, while in the Niger delta the insurgent groups have stepped up their attacks on the oilrigs that are crucial to the economy of a country in full demographic expansion, which depends on these resources for survival. The need to address these problems as priorities may make it difficult to continue chalking up successes against Boko Haram.

To sum up, the survival of this terrorist group will depend on how committed states in the Lake Chad region – especially, Nigeria as a regional power – are to continuing with the campaign of military harassment to prevent it recovering from the recent defeats and from repairing its damaged operational structures. At the same time, it will be necessary to address the deep underlying causes of the conflict, chiefly the Muslims' grievances towards the governments which have traditionally paid very little attention to them and the need to improve the prospects of progress of their impoverished populations. Here economic investments, education, the fight against radicalism, the prosecution of corruption and a better division of national wealth are, as in other places where jihadism is rife, the keys to long-term success.

### **The limits of Algeria's non-intervention policy**

Although Algeria's foreign and defence policy has traditionally been based on the doctrine of respect for states' sovereignty and non-interference in their domestic affairs, aspects enshrined in the constitution of 1976,<sup>59</sup> the growing jihadist threat at its borders has brought about a change of attitude from Algeria with respect to encouraging regional efforts in fighting radicalism. The difficulty of the neighbouring states' controlling large expanses of their sovereign territory has forced Algeria to play a more active role in efforts to reinforce regional security structures.

Algeria is showing a particular interest in the region's stability, as it is a country which, owing to its geographical location, regards the Sahel as a double security belt, both internal and external, that isolates it from a conflictive environment. In this regard Algeria has been particularly active in mediating in regional conflicts, using them as a means of increasing its influence in the Sahel. It has thus traditionally played a prominent role in

---

<sup>59</sup> La «Constitution de la republique algerienne democratique et populaire» is available at [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_125825.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_125825.pdf).

talks aimed at settling the Tuareg rebellions in 1990, 2006 and 2014 and, more recently, has taken part in the United Nations talks on the future of Libya.<sup>60</sup> Specialisation in conflict mediation processes has enabled Algeria to become a dominant actor in the region, without taking on the risks associated with military interventions in other countries.

Algeria's concern with the problems of the Sahel can be explained by the fact that 85 percent of its territory is located in the vast area beyond the Atlas Mountains, which is home to all its gas and oil reserves and less than 10 percent of its population.<sup>61</sup> Even so, it is an underprivileged area where popular demands, spurred by what are perceived as grievances with respect to the north, have been growing in number and intensity since 2013, converting the main population centres of the Sahel into the epicentre of Algerian protests.

The main sources of tension are in the M'zab valley, where clashes have broken out between the Ibadi Mozabites<sup>62</sup> and the majority Maliki Sunni communities in recent years leading to a death toll of several dozen, the plundering of thousands of private businesses and properties and the destruction of historic heritage. Another important source of tension is the Saharan city of In Salah, where there were major rallies against shale gas exploration after the government announced the success of the drillings carried out in December 2014.<sup>63</sup>

In the domestic sphere, the Algerian authorities have attempted to silence the protests through dialogue and administrative reforms – measures which, although positively received by the population, are insufficient as they do not address underlying problems but are purely circumstantial and tactical. In May 2015, the territorial organisation was modified by the creation of ten new districts, each under the authority of a provincial governor, and in February 2016 the constitution was amended to weaken the position of the president who from now on will be elected by deputies. In addition, the state has undertaken to recognise the language of the Berber minority as an official language.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> DAGUZAN, Jean-François, «Chaos en Libye: mais que fait (et que veut) l'Algérie?», *Atlántico*, 31 March 2016. <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/chaos-en-libye-mais-que-fait-et-que-veut-algerie-jean-francois-daguzan-2645385.html#f6wsuKExATX6BQpR.99>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>61</sup> «The World Factbook-Algeria», Central Intelligence Agency, 4 December 2013. <http://www.webcitation.org/6BNNjndve?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cia.gov%2Flibrary%2Fpublications%2Fthe-world-factbook%2Fgeos%2Fag.html>. Accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Ibadi Mozabites are Amazigh followers of the school of Ibadi jurisprudence, a majority only in Oman and Zanzibar but with followers in Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.

<sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group. «Algeria's South. Trouble's Bellwether, Middle East and North Africa», Report no. 171, November 2016.

<sup>64</sup> «Argelia aprueba reformas de la Constitución que apuntan al fin de la era Buteflika», *El Mundo*, 7 February 2016. <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/02/07/56b744efe2704e72038b45a1.html>. Accessed 10 November 2016.

In the field of regional security, Algeria is a model of stability and security in a problematic area, though factors such as falling oil prices in 2016 and the existing uncertainty about who will take President Bouteflika's place could alter the current security situation and trigger another crisis, depending on how the Algerian government manages to handle them.

As for combating jihadism, Algeria's problem is that the security structures it has in place are designed to address an essentially domestic brand of terrorism, as throughout most of its existence as an independent state the threat was internal, such as in the era of the Armed Islamic Group in the 90s or its new version, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, from 1997 onwards. However, Algeria's current security threats are chiefly external, though its effects are in the form of attacks within its territory, and this is forcing Algeria to reorganise its security structures.

After Balmokhtar's group attacked the Tigantourine plant in January 2013 with the aim of destabilising the country's economy, an intense internal debate ensued on whether Algeria should intervene in other neighbouring countries to prevent the jihadist groups that move through them with barely any opposition from acting against its territory or vital interests. As a result of this debate its external borders have been reinforced.<sup>65</sup> For some years the Algerian government has been designing a strategy aimed at insulating its borders from attacks perpetrated by groups located outside them, and has deployed thousands of soldiers along the 5,955 kilometres of borders it shares with Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Libya. It has also set up tracking stations along the southern border and has acquired modern military equipment, including drones and electronic surveillance systems. These measures, although effective, have not prevented the border from continuing to be porous to cross-border illegal trafficking, infiltration and jihadists' attacks on military posts.

Although Algeria pursues a policy of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty, the threats the region is under cannot be overcome without greater military cooperation between Algeria and its neighbouring countries.<sup>66</sup> In this connection, Algeria considers regional cooperation with its neighbours to be crucial, and is becoming a key actor in coordinating a regional response to cross-border terrorism, smuggling and other illegal activities of the armed groups that operate in the Sahel. The flagship initiative of this effort is the «Tamanrasset Plan»,<sup>67</sup> adopted in 2009 by Algeria, Niger,

<sup>65</sup> GHANEM-YAZBECK, Dalia, «Why Algeria Isn't Exporting Jihadists», Carnegie Middle East Center, 11 August 2015. <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/08/11/why-algeria-isn-t-exporting-jihadists-pub-60954>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>66</sup> HELLERSTEIN, «Pushing Algeria to the Limits of Nonintervention», Stratfor, 18.05. <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/pushing-algeria-limits-nonintervention>. Accessed 21 November 2016.

<sup>67</sup> ARIEFF, Alexis, «Algeria and the Crisis in Mali». *Actuelles de l'Ifri*. [https://themoornextdoor.files.wordpress.com/.../ifri\\_actuellesarief](https://themoornextdoor.files.wordpress.com/.../ifri_actuellesarief). Accessed 18 December 2016.

Mali and Mauritania, leading to the creation in 2010 of a General Staff Joint Operations Committee (CEMOC) in Tamanrasset in order to coordinate efforts in combating terrorism, creating joint patrols and cross-border operations and an intelligence cell in Algeria (Unité de Fusion et de Liaison) in which Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad are taking part with the aim of reinforcing and coordinating the exchange of information.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, we should question to what extent the measures taken in connection with the Tamanrasset Plan have aided cooperation on regional security issues, as the effectiveness of the CEMOC and the Joint Intelligence Centre has not been sufficiently proven. Furthermore, the agreement was apparently designed less as a regional response to the terrorist and criminal threats and more as a means of preventing western military intervention, chiefly French, a scenario which Algeria regards as a direct threat to its national sovereignty.<sup>69</sup>

Algeria's lack of interest in initiatives such as that of the African Union in Mali, which entails setting up a regional intervention force, stems from its concern that such a force may become a vehicle for international military deployments with the pretext of helping the local military forces. Algeria's position is opposed to that of Morocco, its neighbour and regional rival, which has taken advantage of Algeria's ambivalence to back Paris, becoming a supporter of military intervention in Mali and a firm ally of the western governments, chiefly France. This very convenient position has enabled Morocco to gain the support of the leading western powers in defending the integration of the Western Sahara into Morocco, to the detriment of the arguments in favour of independence promoted by the Polisario Front and supported by Algeria. At the same time, Morocco – the only African country that does not belong to the African Union – seeks to foster bilateral rapprochements with the countries of the Sahel to avoid becoming isolated in the region, taking advantage of the privileged relations between King Mohammed VI and the leaders of the Sahel countries, as well as so-called «religious diplomacy» as a means of influencing the countries in the region.<sup>70</sup>

All in all, the measures taken by the administration of President Bouteflika during his fourth term have proved useful, albeit insufficient, in addressing the country's domestic problems and stabilising its external borders, as shown by the attack with rockets carried out on 18 March 2016 against

<sup>68</sup> BARRIOS, Cristina, and KOEPF, Tobias, «Re-mapping the Sahel: transnational security challenges and international responses», Report no. 19. EU Institute for Security Studies, 2014. [http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report\\_19\\_Sahel.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report_19_Sahel.pdf). Accessed 10 December 2016.

<sup>69</sup> ZOUBIR, Yahia «The Dialectics of Algeria's Foreign Relations, 1992 to Present», *Algeria in Transition: Reforms and Development Prospect*, Aghrout, A. and Bougherira, R., Eds. New York, 2004.

<sup>70</sup> TADLAOUI, G, «La diplomacia religiosa de Marruecos», *EsGlobal*, 20 May 2015.



the gas installations of British Petroleum (BP) in the province of Salahy. According to the subsequent declarations of AQMI, which claimed responsibility for the attack, it was not only designed to wage «war against the interests of the crusaders»<sup>71</sup> but also to protect the environment by hindering the exploration of shale gas. This indicates that we are facing a new situation in which the jihadist groups operating in the Algerian Sahara are tweaking their tactics, paying greater attention to people's grievances, especially in the south. This serious threat, which the Algerian authorities will have to address in the future, will require them not only to keep up the pressure with counterterrorism efforts at home and to cooperate with the neighbouring countries, but also to cater to the social demands of a large part of the population with a view to improving confidence in the institutions and steering them away from the message of the radicals.

### International cooperation in combating jihadism

In the Sahel region, five countries, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso, established an institutional framework called «G-5 Sahel» in Nouakchott in February 2014.<sup>72</sup> They were driven by their concern about problems such as the insecurity caused by jihadist terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime, in general phenomena resulting from the porousness of borders, and undertook to put together a programme of priority investments with special emphasis on security, infrastructure (transport, energy, telecommunications and water resources), food security and adaptation to climate change. Although militarily speaking the creation of this group can be interpreted as a regional response to the French intervention in operation Barkhane, with which it nonetheless cooperates in joint operations in border areas, the fact is that cooperation is very limited as Algeria is not part of it.<sup>73</sup> In addition, each country's forces are forced to operate within their borders and have no possibility of carrying out cross-border «hot pursuits» and have not even agreed on the need to create joint units or conduct joint patrols.

Nevertheless, as the African Union is the only regional initiative in the Sahel to tackle common security problems, efforts have been made in this framework to broaden the group to include countries like Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Algeria. It is especially significant that no attempt has been made to

<sup>71</sup> AMBROSE, Jillian, «BP gas plant hit in Algerian rocket attack», *The Telegraph*, 18 March 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/03/18/bp-gas-plant-hit-in-algerian-rocket-attack/>. Accessed 28 November 2016.

<sup>72</sup> «Naissance du «G5 du Sahel» pour le développement et la sécurité», RFI Afrique. 17 February 2014. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20140217-naissance-g5-sahel-le-developpement-securite-Burkina-Mali-Mauritanie-Niger-Tchad>. Accessed 25 November 2016.

<sup>73</sup> MANSOUR, Véronique, «Que cache le nouveau G5 du Sahel», Africa Partnership Conference, 19 February 2014. <http://afriqueinside.com/que-cache-le-nouveau-g5-du-sahel/>. Accessed 30 November 2016.

include Morocco in the multilateral initiatives in this framework, to which it does not belong owing to its dispute with Algeria over the sovereignty of Western Sahara.

As for extra-regional organisations, two are playing a prominent role in stabilising the Sahel. One is the European Union, which has focused its efforts on training the military forces of Mali through the training missions (EUTM), to which it contributes 580 instructors, but without insisting on military combat operations. So far the European instructors are reckoned to have trained approximately 9,000 recruits from Mali, half of its army, though the chief of EUTM-Mali, the Belgian general Eric Harvent, was probably right when he pointed out at the Bamako headquarters that «we have to be realists, reform of an army ... can take ten years».<sup>74</sup>

The other organisation that is particularly active in the region is the United Nations, which has specialised in seeking peace between the Malian government and the armed groups, as well as in helping extend the state's authority to the north of the country. The aim is to offer Tuaregs and other northern groups a certain amount of autonomy if they renounce independence and to prevent the resurgence of militant Islamist groups skilled at exploiting any power vacuum. Unlike the exclusively French operation Barkhane, whose mission is to destroy the terrorist groups, that of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is limited to protecting the civilian population and mission personnel and it is not authorised to become involved in operations against the jihadists.<sup>75</sup>

The present of two operations – Barkhane and MINUSMA – in the same areas but with different purposes is a source of frustration given the difficulty of sharing intelligence and pursuing common objectives. The slowness of both the rebels and the government in implementing the peace agreement signed in 2015 means that the nearly 13,000 members of the United Nations mission, MINUSMA, belonging to 123 nations are paying the price of stabilisation, which costs more than 100 lives and nearly a billion dollars annually.<sup>76</sup> The results on the ground are, however, clearly unsatisfactory, as indicated by the many murders committed by the jihadists in the central region, where the law of silence has been imposed in cities like Douentza, Sevare and Möpti, preventing their inhabitants from collaborating with the Malian authorities.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> COCKS, Tim, «Mali's foot-dragging traps peace mission in unending conflict», Reuters, Bamako, 8 December 2016.

<sup>75</sup> GAFFEY, Conor, «Peacekeeping in Mali: The UN's Most Dangerous Mission», *Newsweek*, 12 June 2016. <http://europe.newsweek.com/mali-un-mission-northern-mali-conflict-aqim-africa-peacekeeping-468907?rm=eu>. Accessed 30 November 2016.

<sup>76</sup> COCKS, Tim, *op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> DUBOIS, Olivier, and SANGARÉ, Boubacar, «Mali. Extension du domaine de la guerre», *Journal dumali.com*. Reported by *Courier International* no. 1.369. 2017, p.16.

The United States is playing a secondary role and is helping stabilise the Sahel area by strengthening the military capabilities and training the armed forces of 33 of the 54 African countries, including Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Nigeria; the Special Forces have played a very important role in these tasks. The latter have grown exponentially: whereas in 2006 only 1 percent of the commandos sent abroad were deployed to Africa, in 2016 this percentage increased to 17.26 percent of all the United Nations' special operations forces overseas, amounting to approximately 1,700 soldiers operating daily.<sup>78</sup> US forces are also playing a significant role in areas such as the intelligence provided by fixed-wing aircraft and drones operating from bases located in Niger and Burkina Faso.<sup>79</sup> The main task of the American forces is to destroy the jihadist groups and neutralise their leaders as opposed to reconstruction.

### Critical assessment of operation Barkhane

But the most important role in fighting jihadist terrorism is currently being played by France in operation Barkhane. The operation began in August 2014 when the French armed forces reorganised operation Serval, their intervention in Mali in January 2013, merging it with another operation in Chad, called Épervier, which had begun 28 years earlier. The result was an antiterrorist mission consisting of an expeditionary force of 3,500 men,<sup>80</sup> with its headquarters in Yamena but bases in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. Barkhane is based chiefly on an agreement between France and these Sahel countries to seek out, capture and destroy the terrorist elements operating in this extensive area allowing France to attack targets in it practically without restrictions.<sup>81</sup>

Like many of their European partners, the French authorities believe that instability in the Sahel is the result of the existence of weak or fragile states incapable of controlling large expanses of their sovereign territory. This French vision is reflected in the French defence White Paper of 2013, which maintains that ungoverned spaces are safe havens for terrorist groups,

<sup>78</sup> TURSE, Nick, «U.S. Special Operations Numbers Surge in Africa's Shadow Wars», *The Intercept*, 31 December 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2016/12/31/u-s-special-operations-numbers-surge-in-africas-shadow-wars/>. Accessed 14 December 2016.

<sup>79</sup> TURSE, Nick, «U.S. Military Is Building a \$100 Million Drone Base in Africa», *The Intercept*, 29 September 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/29/u-s-military-is-building-a-100-million-drone-base-in-africa/>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

<sup>80</sup> See the website of the French defence ministry <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/sahel/dossier-de-presentation-de-l-operation-barkhane/operation-barkhane>.

<sup>81</sup> LARIVÉ, Maxime H.A., «Welcome to France's New War on Terror in Africa: Operation Barkhane», *National Interest*, 7 August 2014. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/welcome-frances-new-war-terror-africa-operation-barkhane-11029>. Accessed 4 December 2016.



Image 6. Operation Barkhane

criminal organisations and other destabilising elements.<sup>82</sup> The problem is that, in the Sahel, the French have few military forces to cover a huge territory. The mission is therefore going to be increasingly difficult and they must be prepared to be around for many years.

Therefore, in operational terms, the results of French military efforts in the Sahel can so far be considered positive, if not decisive, given that Paris's objective of keeping the terrorist problem below a manageable threshold does not appear to have been attained satisfactorily.<sup>83</sup> Even so, there have been important military achievements in tactical actions – such as operation Ossau, carried out jointly in March 2016 by the French forces of Barkhane and those of Mali at the bend in the Niger River in coordination with the Nigerian forces on the other side of the border – which achieved considerable success in disbanding the terrorist groups and confiscating their arsenals.<sup>84</sup>

Barkhane extends throughout the Sahel region, though its centre of gravity is in the Kidal region in northern Mali. The explanation is that after the Algiers

<sup>82</sup> Direction de l'Information Légale et Administrative, «Livre Blanc Défense et Sécurité Nationale-2013», Paris, 2013, pp. 39-44.

<sup>83</sup> POWELL, Nathaniel K. A., «Flawed Strategy in the Sahel. How French Intervention Contributes to Instability», *Foreign Affairs*, 1 February 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/west-africa/2016-02-01/flawed-strategy-sahel>. Accessed 4 February 2016.

<sup>84</sup> AHMED, Baba, «Gal Patrick Bréthous (Barkhane): au Mali, «les terroristes fuient les forces internationales»», *Jeune Afrique*, 29 July 2016. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/345701/politique/gal-patrick-brethous-barkhane-mali-terroristes-fuient-forces-internationales/>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

accords of 2015 the French forces are the only ones that carry out military operations in this area, where terrorist groups like Ansar Dine have sought refuge and where MINUSMA forces do not operate.

Nevertheless, the fact that the French forces are concentrated in the north does not mean that the rest of the country is calm. In the Timbuktu region in the centre of the country there are still jihadists who take advantage of the scant presence of Malian armed forces and MINUSMA blue helmets and of French Barkhane forces to carry out increasingly bold attacks.<sup>85</sup> The most violent of them was perpetrated on 19 July near the Wagadou forest near the Mauritanian border – where the French forces do not operate – and killed at least 17 Malian soldiers.<sup>86</sup> The fact that the French forces were incapable of providing air support to the Malian forces in this area indicates Barkhane's limitations when it comes to coordinating military operations in such a large area. These attacks were repeated throughout 2016 with local successes for the terrorist groups; at the beginning of December MINUSMA's offices in Gao in the north were destroyed by a truck bomb and a few days later, on Tuesday 6 December, five supposed Islamic militants succeeded in freeing 93 prisoners from a gaol in the city of Niono.<sup>87</sup> The presence in this city of a large contingent of soldiers of the Malian army together with elements of the coordinating committee of Azawad movements as part of the joint patrols envisaged in the Algiers agreements appears to highlight, apart from France's limitations, the difficulties posed by implementing these agreements and the sincerity of their signatories' intentions.

The importance of Mali should be understood in connection with the symbolic value the country holds for France, as it was a French colony for eight decades. It was in Mali where 4,000 French soldiers deployed in operation Serval achieved an important military success in 2013 in a unilateral military intervention when the inland city of Kona was occupied by an alliance of Islamist and Tuareg groups. The recovery of the cities which had been occupied by the Islamists during the previous months led to their expulsion towards the north, with significant losses.

In July 2013, after Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta won the general elections with 78 percent of the vote, it began to be considered that the country was stabilised. A year later the French defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian ended the mission, which was transformed into the current Barkhane focused on the wider Sahel region. Nevertheless, although the intervention can be considered a success, the fault lines are still there. The Tuareg rebels have

<sup>85</sup> AHMED, Baba, *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> «Attaque de Nampala au Mali: une action coordonnée doublement revendiquée». RFI, 20 July 2016. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160720-attaque-nampala-mali-une-action-coordonnee-doublement-revendiquée>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

<sup>87</sup> «Attaque de la maison d'arrêt de Niono au Mali: 93 détenus évadés», Afrique Presse, 6 December 2016. <http://afriquepresse.net/index.php/2016/12/06/attaque-de-la-maison-darret-de-niono-au-mali-93-detenus-evades/>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

resumed their clashes with the government troops and the Islamists are continuing with increasingly less isolated attacks on the French forces.

The signing of the Algiers accords of 15 May 2015, which were ratified by the rebel groups on 20 June,<sup>88</sup> opened a window of hope for a peaceful and lasting solution, though the process is proving to be slow and the path strewn with obstacles. The weakness of the state in the north is further exacerbated by the action of rebel armed groups, which appear to have made a comeback recently, as well as by the emergence of a number of groups in support of the Bamako government, which have retaliated against the rebels' actions with armed attacks, hindering the implementation of the accords.

The possibility of the Bamako government discretionarily establishing provisional authorities in the various regions of the country is viewed by the opponents of the agreements as tantamount to replacing the elected authorities compulsorily by others presumed to be related to the rebellion in the northern region. The result – which is certainly worrying – is that people have taken to the streets of the main cities of Mali, where the agreements have come up against growing opposition from various sectors of society.

A consequence of the discontentment over the handling of the implementation of the agreements is that a substantial part of the population of the city of Gao, chiefly young people, decided to take to the streets on 12 July and confront the authorities. At least three demonstrators were killed and 30 were injured.<sup>89</sup> These events indicate the difficulty the government is having regaining legitimacy and winning back the confidence of certain population sectors, who believe its attitude to be excessively accommodating towards the Tuareg groups who rose up against the state in 2012.

This already complex social situation is further exacerbated by the increasingly hostile attitude of a sector of the Malian population of the north towards the French forces of Barkhane, who identify with the postulates of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), an alliance created in the summer of 2014 which brings together the main groups that oppose the Mali government.<sup>90</sup>

The French operation has triggered a significant reaction, with demonstrations such as those staged in Kidal in April, in which several

<sup>88</sup> SILVA, Victoria, «Persistencia y diversificación del peligro yihadista en Mali», 15 January 2016, Bab al Sham. <https://www.baabalshams.com/mali-3-anos-despues-de-serval-persistencia-y-diversificacion-del-peligro-yihadista/>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

<sup>89</sup> «MaliTroops fire on Protein Gao, Killing Three», Reuters, 12 July 2016. <https://www.google.ru/#newwindow=1&q=http:%2F%2Fwww.reuters.com%2Farticle%2Fus-mali-violence-idUSKCN0ZS12V>. Accessed 15 July 2016.

<sup>90</sup> The CMA includes, among others, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (HCUA), a branch of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA), the Coalition for the People of Azawad (CPA) and the Patriotic Front of Resistance (CM-fpr2) and the Popular Front of Azawad (FPA); the latter withdrew from the CMA on 29 November 2014.

people were killed.<sup>91</sup> The French military authorities' attempts in September 2016 to force the inhabitants of Ber – a village east of Timbuktu held to be a strategic transit point for traffickers and a very important logistic base for the former rebels of the CMA who have been controlling it for two years – to be subjected to the authority of Bamaku has led the French army to be perceived as a threat and as a player that is too committed to the Bamako authorities.<sup>92</sup>

The French hold a very different view. The French military authorities appear to have come to the conclusion that there is too much porosity between the armed groups that signed the Algiers peace accord and oppose the Bamako government – chiefly the High Council for Unity of Azawad (HCUA), a movement directed by former deputies of Iyad Ag Ghali, the leader of Ansar Dine, with which they have in fact not broken off relations – and the jihadist groups they are combating. The fact is that France has toughened its stance recently, particularly since the death of three soldiers in April when a mine exploded. Since then the French forces of Barkhane have increased their pressure on the armed groups, and have progressively improved their relations with the Malian army, albeit remaining deeply wary of its military capabilities and operational efficiency.

Significant operational errors have also undermined their credibility in the eyes of the population in northern Mali, as occurred in the operation carried out in the northern region of Menaka<sup>93</sup> in April resulting in 12 deaths against elements described as «terrorists», though they were in fact members of the Algiers Platform, a movement allied with Bamako which brings together the Imghad and Allies Tuareg Self-Defence Group (GATIA) and a faction of the Azawad Movement (MAA). It is difficult to discern who is right because the boundary between the terrorist groups and those that support the Malian government is extremely vague and the truth could lie on both sides. The scenario envisaged by the local and international authorities has not materialised, as the Islamist militants, increasingly fragmented and mistrustful of the intentions of the United Nations force, are venturing further southwards with their attacks.

The errors of the French intervention are not limited to Mali, but extend to other countries of the region such as Chad, a former colony where for

<sup>91</sup> «Mali rocked by renewed violence in Kidal», *Africa France* 24, 22 July 2016. <http://www.france24.com/en/20160722-fighting-flares-second-day-northern-mali-town-kidal>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

<sup>92</sup> CARAYOL, Rémi, «Mali: les troupes de l'opération Barkhane prennent leurs distances avec les ex-rebelles touaregs», *Jeune Afrique*, 26 September 2016. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/357979/politique/mali-troupes-de-loperation-barkhane-prennent-leurs-distances-ex-rebelles-touaregs/>. Accessed 15 December 2016.

<sup>93</sup> «Mali: Ménaka, la ville défaite», RFI, 20 November 2016. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20121120-mali-menaka-ville-defaite-mnla-mujao-azawad-aqmi-qaida-ag-hamatou-touareg-ouelleminden>. Accessed 20 December 2016.

many years the French forces were essential to maintaining the regime of President Idriss Déby, who came to power in 1990. The consensus among the French authorities is that their presence in Chad has contributed to building the state and its armed forces, to the extent that today they can be regarded as among the most capable in the region. In fact, this viewpoint is excessively optimistic, and save for the presidential guard consisting of members of the president's own ethnic group and accused of serious human rights violations, the operational capacity of the rest of Chad's armed forces is highly deficient.<sup>94</sup>

The historical reparation of the grievances of communities like the Tama, who live in the east of the country, poverty, isolationism and endemic rebelliousness among the Toubou in the northwest and the political divides among the Zaghawa, who are one of the president's main sources of support, indicate that the country's stability is not guaranteed and the possibility of a new civil war cannot be ruled out; if it were to break out it would be a serious setback for operation Barkhane, which has its headquarters in Yamena, and one of the main support bases from which the French forces monitor the situation in the Fezzan in southwest Libya in Madama, in the north.

Therefore President Hollande's prudent statements made during the 14 July celebrations seem appropriate: «As the actions undertaken are bearing fruit, Serval can be considered a success; Barkhane, its successor, is continuing to put pressure on the armed groups and to facilitate – and this is a delicate task – the process of reconciliation between Malians.»<sup>95</sup> It remains to be seen whether the result of this operation will be as favourable as that of Serval. It is more realistic to think that Barkhane will end up turning into a mission impossible for France.

### Conclusions

Four years on from the deployment of the first French soldiers in Mali, the situation has slowly changed, ceasing to be a local conflict and taking on a regional dimension. The Sahel has become an area where, more than of peace, it is more fitting to speak of «war by another name». This is due to the difficulty encountered by the regional governments and the international United Nations and French Barkhane forces in their efforts to stabilise a region where jihadist groups and criminal organisations continue to enjoy considerable freedom of action.

<sup>94</sup> POWELL, Nathaniel K. A., *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> «France /Afrique: François Hollande met fin à l'opération Sangaris et poursuit l'opération Barkhane». France/Afrique: François Hollande met fin à l'opération Sangaris et poursuit l'opération Barkhane. Agence d'information d'Afrique Centrale, 14 July 2016. <http://www.adiac-congo.com/content/france-afrique-francois-hollande-met-fin-operation-sangaris-et-poursuit-operation-barkhane>. Accessed 22 December 2016.



In this connection, during 2016 the Sahel was an extraordinarily complex region where the extremist organisations interacted in varying degrees and ways with criminal organisations, ethnic militias, armed groups and government authorities, creating an environment of insecurity that is making it difficult for governments to control their territory, and also facilitating the spread of jihadism and armed insurgency.

To this situation should be added the trends in international jihadism that are starting to emerge and will mark the efforts to combat the radicalisation of the Sahel over the coming years now that Iraq, Syria and Libya are becoming increasingly hostile to terrorist groups, chiefly Daesh.

The first detectable trend is that, as pressure on the existing groups grows and their capabilities dwindle, they are forming new alliances in pursuit of operational synergies. It is possible, and particularly worrying, that these groups may reorganise themselves and infiltrate the social structures, especially in sectors that feel discriminated against by their governments, to capitalise on their grievances. They would aim to create new networks to spread their message and rebuild their structures, which have been seriously damaged by the recent clashes.

Another trend deriving from the military fiascos of the jihadist organisations and their leaders' loss of prestige is the broadening of the scope of action of their activities in an attempt to carry out actions of a strategic nature. This amounts to operating outside the Sahel region given their growing difficulty of finding and acting against worthwhile targets – by which we mean those with international repercussions. Their preference in the region would be for spectacular attacks, especially in urban environments, which will become a priority – if they want to continue to be considered significant organisations – as their control over territory lessens or weakens.

A third trend stems from an intensification of relations between local jihadist franchises and their international parent organisations. Through closer ties and loyalties, the former seek to gain greater military and logistic support that will enable them to survive in increasingly hostile operational environments, while the latter will resort to their franchises as sources of possible recruits, safe havens and places for training their combatants and as a means of demonstrating they are still global in scope.

A fourth tendency is the possibility that the Sahel – perhaps together with Afghanistan – could become the only geographical area where the jihadist groups still enjoy considerable freedom of movement and operational capabilities. Eventual defeats in Libya, Syria and Iraq are making these countries increasingly more unlikely to be used by the jihadists, and the survivors are therefore being forced to seek refuge in the few areas where their safety and survival are still assured.

A fifth and last tendency is the prevalence of al-Qaeda over Daesh in the universe of jihadist narrative. Daesh is the terrorist organisation whose ranks have been hardest hit by the conflicts in the Middle East and Libya. As a result, the various groups which had deserted from al-Qaeda to join Daesh have been progressively returning to the initial discipline of an al-Qaeda that seems to have emerged victorious from the dispute for leadership of the jihadist movement waged over the past two years. After all, al-Qaeda has been around much longer than Daesh in the Sahel and al-Qaeda will remain there after Daesh has departed or disappeared altogether as a terrorist organisation.

Although the situation of jihadist terrorism seems to have improved in the past year, the endemic problems that underlie and fuel the phenomenon of radicalism in the Sahel have not improved to the same extent and the problem therefore remains. It will take more than police and military action to solve it. It is necessary to find a response to the basic challenges of the region, a process that entails re-establishing and reinforcing the presence of the state in infra-administered regions in the economic, administrative and security fields, facilitating the development of the population both individually and as a whole.

It is therefore necessary to strengthen the political, social and economic capabilities of the Sahel governments to enable them to combat religious and identity-based extremism, while pressing ahead with security-sector reforms. It is also necessary to promote good governance, internal and external political dialogue and a negotiated solution to the conflicts, setting up inter-community mechanisms and building bridges for dialogue between the various ethnic or religious groups in order to combat radicalisation, extremism and the use of violence in the Sahel.

At the same time, in order for the Sahel countries to succeed in exercising their sovereignty, the international community must continue with its technical cooperation efforts by training the region's armies along the lines followed in recent years by the European Union's training missions – not to replace them but to improve their technical grounding and operational capabilities so that these armies are capable of guaranteeing the control of their territory and the destruction of the terrorist groups operating in them.

Lastly, it is necessary to step up military cooperation and the exchange of intelligence between the countries of the Sahel in order to eradicate the criminal and terrorist groups that operate in the region, even if this requires greater long-term commitment.

All in all, the idea is to design a collaborative response strategy that attaches greater importance to common interests and aims and involves all the stakeholders who are present or have interests in the region. The ultimate aim should be to defeat jihadism and make the Sahel a region that is hostile to the development of these groups' criminal activities, preventing defeated

terrorists fleeing from the conflicts in Iraq, Libya and Syria from seeking a new haven in this vast region in turmoil. Achieving it will require greater regional and international commitment and the adoption of a coherent, reasonable and sustained approach that allows the Sahel to develop into a region that is stable enough to be managed by its own governments and secure enough not to become an endemic threat for local governments and those of the neighbouring regions. It is neither an easy nor a short-term task, but an effort must be made to solve this complex problem of security and development in a regional so close and critically important to Europe and Spain.

## Chapter five

### Latin America: Unknown Quantities and Uncertainties

Cástor Miguel Díaz Barrado and María Sagrario Morán Blanco<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

Latin America and the Caribbean are an extremely volatile area that is shaped above all by certain events. Although it is very difficult to predict the outlook for the region, recent developments point to some of its defining characteristics. This chapter stresses the current state of the integration schemes under way and what lies ahead in the near future, as well as the «political changes» and instability witnessed in some major countries such as Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil. Some of the regional conflicts are slowly being solved, albeit with difficulties, especially relations between Cuba and United States, which have an impact on the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean; the Colombian conflict, which has far-reaching implications; and, as an example of a territorial quarrel, the dispute between Chile and Bolivia over access to the sea. All this and much more makes for a Latin American landscape characterised by unknown factors and, above all, fragmentation.

#### Keywords

Latin American and the Caribbean integration, political changes and instability. Conflicts and disputes, Latin American fragmentation.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sagrario Morán Blanco wrote section II and point 3 of section III. Professor Cástor Miguel Díaz Barrado section I and points 1 and 2 of section III.



## Introduction

The situation of Latin America and the Caribbean is increasingly complex and a string of recent events has exacerbated the confusion and uncertainty. Providing a substantial definition of an area that encompasses all the countries that make up Latin America and the Caribbean is no easy task. Fragmentation is a constant feature of policies and objectives and is giving rise to a host of micro-spaces for cooperation and integration as well as to many components of relations between Latin Americans that overlap in very different and unstable frameworks. The essential feature of the regional reality is, without a doubt, indecisiveness in the relations that are being built and it is causing the term «Latin America» to lose its substance and effectiveness in international relations.

External factors greatly influence relations in Latin America and the Caribbean, but they are insufficient to explain the whole Latin American reality. The policy pursued by the Obama administration has established very specific characteristics for the future of many countries in the region. Nevertheless, the emergence of a new administration, that of Donald Trump, points to changes in the policies the United States had pursued in much of Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in nerve centres like Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela. Although it is too soon to solve the enigmas regarding the new administration's relations with the main players in the region, it is evident that the United States' leading role in this part of the world cannot be based on past criteria. The United States' traditional policy in Latin America has proven to be a failure and only a new perspective, closer to the approach of the Obama administration, could lead to closer relations and bring the region's interests into line with those of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Further afield, both Russia and China are determined to leave their mark on Latin America and shape the region's future on the basis of very specific political and economic terms and conditions. This means that other players which had a very limited role in the past are gradually becoming more intensely involved in the region. In China's case, as has been stated, «Latin America and the Caribbean are part of China's global strategy of dealings through a complex interrelationship that in essence stems almost entirely from its own interests, even in shared concerns such as seeking to shape a multipolar (more participatory and democratic) world or the supposed virtuous circle established in economic relations (trade and investment)».<sup>3</sup> As for Russia, V. Sheykina aptly states that «Latin America is going to enjoy

<sup>2</sup> In general, for recent developments in these relations, see ALVEIRO MUÑOZ SÁNCHEZ, Olmer, «La política exterior de Estados Unidos hacia América Latina en el periodo 2001 al 2014», *Analecta política*, vol. 5, no. 8, January-June 2015, 199-217.

<sup>3</sup> YOPO HERRERA, Mladen, «República Popular China-Iberoamérica. Una relación que necesita reacomodarse», *Documento Marco, IEES*, 10/2011, September, p. 17.

great significance in the broadened scope of Russia's international activity and the consolidation of its world power status. In addition, cooperation with the Latin American countries can, in a sense, compensate for Russia's weak positions in other areas of foreign policy».<sup>4</sup> Whatever the case, what matters is that many Latin American states welcome the presence of China and Russia in the region and are willing to intensify relations with these countries.

Despite suffering from considerable fatigue in recent times, the European Union is holding on to its position and defending its interests in Latin America. These efforts could be stepped up depending on the direction the «new» American policy takes. The European Union and its member states' agreements with Peru and Colombia<sup>5</sup> are proof that the European Union remains determined to play a prominent role in Latin America. To this should be added the recent agreement signed with Cuba in December 2016, which not only puts an end to the Common Position of 1996 which caused so many «headaches» in relations but above all normalises what are essential relations for the European Union in both economic and trade terms.

Nevertheless, even if Latin America is feeling the influence of the foreign policies of other states and extra-regional blocs, the shaping of the Latin American and Caribbean space ultimately depends on the conduct adopted by the countries in the region. If they last, the very noticeable recent changes will result in a situation very different to that established following the triumph of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1999, which has conditioned much of the internal and external policies of Latin America and Caribbean for nearly 20 years. In other words, the Latin America reality is being built on transformations that are pointing to «a change of cycle» or, at least, new cooperation and relationship structures in the region.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter examines some of the focal points that provide a clear insight into the true configuration of the region, what lies ahead and emerging and waning regional trends, centring specifically on the following areas:

---

<sup>4</sup> SHEYKINA, Violeta, «Historia de las relaciones Rusia-América Latina: evolución y prospectiva», *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2010, p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> See the article by Sagrario Morán Blanco, «El Acuerdo de asociación de la Unión Europea con Centroamérica y el Acuerdo multipartito Unión Europea con Colombia y Perú: objetivos y logros», *Revista General de Derecho Europeo*, no. 33, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> MALAMUD, Carlos, «América latina 2016: ¿cambio de ciclo o agotamiento del modelo?», *Infolatam*, 17 January 2016. See also SEPÚLVEDA MUÑOZ, Isidro, «América Latina: final de ciclo y riesgos persistentes», *Panorama Estratégico 2016*, IEES, Madrid, March 2016, pp. 107 and ff. This author states that «Although cycles of homogeneous development in entire regions can be identified in history, given the plurality of Latin America and the very different domestic circumstances of the various countries it is only possible to speak of widespread ideological swings in very general terms» (quoted from the English translation).

Firstly, it is essential to reflect on the progress, setbacks and standstills that the «integration phenomenon» is experiencing in the Americas as a whole and in Latin America and the Caribbean in particular. Above and beyond the rhetoric – and there is plenty of it – the continent is focused on integration efforts and the only means of combating inequality and achieving well-being is to devise and implement effective integration schemes. The countries in the region are fully conscious of this and agree on the need to find a way out of labyrinth in which these efforts are currently trapped.

Secondly, it is appropriate to examine in detail the main political changes that have taken place recently in some Latin American countries, as they are going to influence the region's future significantly. The triumph of Mauricio Macri in Argentina and the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil are events of far-reaching significance that will mark the direction in which Latin America will head. But political instability in Venezuela is one of the most significant components of what could be in store on the political front and in other areas to which its influence will extend.

Lastly, there are a few changes that affect the very essence of the Latin American and Caribbean reality and their materialisation will provide a more or less permanent framework for the relations that are finally established in the region. The end of the Colombian conflict – at least with respect to the FARC<sup>7</sup> – underlines the region's ability to deal with very thorny issues. Similarly, the beginning of the end of the conflict between Cuba and the United States brings many elements of stability and opens up new prospects for the region as a whole, as the conflict was «poisoning» peaceful relations on the continent. Similarly, the keys and proposed solutions to the historic dispute between Bolivia and Chile over access to the sea, although it will be some time before it ends, illustrate the standard used in Latin America and the Caribbean to settle territorial quarrels which, although abundant, have fortunately not given rise to wars except for in 1982 when Argentina attempted to put an end to Britain's military occupation of the Falkland Islands.

Latin America essentially appears to be a very vague region that must be studied with highly changeable and uncertain parameters. It is not easy to make predictions, let alone take for granted that the changes begun recently will be completed. The conclusions of this chapter are therefore highly provisional and subject to the very uncertainty that characterises Latin America and the Caribbean in the twenty-first century.

---

<sup>7</sup> As Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos stated in his Nobel speech, «A war that has brought so much suffering and despair to communities all across our beautiful land has finally come to an end», see Discurso: <http://cnnspanol.cnn.com/2016/12/10/este-es-el-discurso-completo-de-juan-manuel-santos-al-recibir-el-nobel-de-la-paz/>.



### **Outlook for integration in Latin America and the Caribbean: The simplification that never happens**

The situation of Latin American and Caribbean integration is increasingly complex. The natural tendency to simply and outline the various integration schemes has turned into quite the opposite. Latin America is currently undergoing a period characterised by the «mass» proliferation of integration schemes and by failure to sufficiently define the significance, scope and content of the existing processes. This is an important point to stress because true integration can only be achieved if states commit to ceding sovereignty to the integration schemes – something that seems difficult when the same state is involved simultaneously in several integration processes and when there does not appear to be firm political will to commit to a particular project. The factors that are hindering integration in the Americas as a whole have been present since the middle of the last century and little progress has been made in mustering the political will required to establish integration schemes that involve a considerable loss of state powers.

The recent political and economic changes taking place across the continent are logically adding further ingredients of uncertainty but, above all, they clearly show that in this region the effects of political changes, which are more abrupt, are strongly felt in integration schemes.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the latest political developments in Argentina and Brazil, which we will examine in due course, are ushering in very different situations in the field of integration compared to those of the start of the century. But the situation in Venezuela also influences integration in the region considerably.

The state of integration in the Americas, and specifically in the Latin American and Caribbean states, can be examined bearing in mind a number of decisive aspects:

First, it is evident that efforts to integrate the two hemispheres, begun in the mid-1990s and spearheaded by the United States, are at a definitive standstill. The possibility of creating a free trade area through a multilateral treaty has been ruled out and there is no sign of any political will to revive and revitalise this type of integration. Hemispheric integration had thus been ruled out for a long time and would involve changing not only the agreed names (ALCA-FTAA Free Trade Area of the Americas) but also the substance of integration efforts of this kind. The FTAA as an integration scheme is «dead», or rather, it never came to be considered as a hemispheric integration process. The Latin American countries forgot about this integration possibility some time ago and therefore hemispheric integration is currently not possible. It is not even clear whether the countries are willing to lay the foundations for this

---

<sup>8</sup> A very interesting article that assesses integration in the region is MALAMUD, Carlos, «Integración y cooperación regional en América Latina: diagnóstico y propuestas», Real Instituto Elcano, *Documento de Trabajo* DT 15/2015, 26 October 2015.

type of integration in the near future. This has led to the signing of bilateral free trade agreements and what we might call «fragmented integration».

Other broader integration schemes encompassing the continent as a whole and aimed at competing with and hindering the development of the FTAA are also showing signs of fatigue and decline. Although these schemes are inspired by other reasons, their achievements have been paltry, and we are even witnessing a decline in initiatives of this type. Specifically this applies to both ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) and CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States). In the case of the former, the «political change» in some countries of the region has greatly weakened the aims of this alternative alliance but, above all, Venezuela's smaller role in Latin America and the «new direction» Cuba's foreign policy has taken are undermining this initiative. With respect to the second, CELAC's very makeup does not allow it to envisage progress towards integration in the strict sense of the word. CELAC is no doubt a markedly political initiative that acts in the framework of cooperation. Perhaps its greatest effectiveness lies in the fact that it is the forum for relations between all the Latin American and Caribbean states and the European Union. The European Union-CELAC ministerial meeting, which adopted the «Santo Domingo Declaration» in October 2016, once again reflects this situation but there have been no significant novelties in the relationship between the two blocs. All that can be highlighted is the reiterated statement that CELAC and the European Union represent a bi-regional partnership in which economic and political links should be promoted.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, we find more achievements in the schemes for regional integration. It is necessary to underline the progress made by the Pacific Alliance, which, as we know, has taken shape as a predominantly economic and trade framework.<sup>10</sup> Now that the free trade area has been established with the entry into force of the Additional Protocol to the Framework Agreement, it must now continue with «deep integration progressively and continuously», as was recently stated in the Puerto Varas Declaration issued in Chile in 2016. Sooner or later the Pacific Alliance should embark on institutional integration and equip itself with mechanisms that lead to the shaping of a proper integration scheme without hindering the progress made in the financial, trade and economic sectors. The achievements of this integration

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/press/press-releases/2016/10/26-celac-santo-domingo-declaration/>.

<sup>10</sup> In particular, DÍAZ GALÁN, Elena C., «La Alianza del Pacífico: características y dimensiones de un nuevo proceso de integración en América Latina», *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2015; and PAMPILLO BALIÑO, Juan Pablo, «La Alianza del Pacífico y la integración jurídica latinoamericana. Antecedentes, balance y perspectivas, en la arquitectura del ordenamiento internacional y su desarrollo en materia económica», TREMOLADA ÁLVAREZ, E. (ed.), *Colección ius cogens. Derecho Internacional e integración 3*, Universidad Externado de Colombia, Bogotá, 2015, pp. 365-406.

scheme in the short time it has been functioning are quite impressive. However, careful thought needs to be given to two issues that will determine the future of the Pacific Alliance.

It will be necessary to assess thoroughly which new states ought to join this integration project. The partnership with Canada highlights this country's interest in taking part in the Alliance and the current members' willingness to take in more partners. However, the alliance would lose any Latin American character it previously had and would advocate and give impetus to a unique type of regional integration. It is also advisable to define the Pacific Alliance's relationship framework with other integration processes underway on the American continent. The development of the Alliance may at least have a decisive influence on the future of the Andean Community (CAN) and on the shaping of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As if that were not enough, the Alliance must lay the foundations for its necessary relationship with other processes such as the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur). It is thus necessary to tweak the «integration schemes».<sup>11</sup>

Further afield, in the regional framework, we have witnessed a certain standstill in the initiatives carried out by Unasur since its formal establishment in 2008, largely as a result of the political and economic crisis in Brazil, as the leader of this integration scheme. Certainly, we should not neglect the progress being made in the fields of infrastructure and connectivity, as well as in the defence sector, but it has been clear for some time that Unasur has yet to address economic integration. The safest route would be to put in place the systems of the Andean Community and Mercosur and, now, the Pacific Alliance.<sup>12</sup> It was rightly pointed out some time ago that «we know that convergence between countries and the subregional integration blocs will play an important role in building South America».<sup>13</sup> Indeed, intense cooperation towards physical integration as well as in energy and defence matters and in the field of political agreement will necessarily require a framework in which economic integration eventually becomes part of Unasur's tasks.

Finally, the situation of the subregional agreements is more unequal. Some time ago the Andean Community slid into a «structural crisis» and is heading

---

<sup>11</sup> A positive view of the Pacific Alliance is still held by MALAMUD, Carlos, «La Alianza del Pacífico y su impacto en América Latina», *Infolatam*, 7 November 2016; and, previously, «La Alianza del Pacífico: un revulsivo para la integración regional en América Latina», *Real Instituto Elcano*, ARI 46/2012, 27 June 2012.

<sup>12</sup> There is a very interesting study by RODRÍGUEZ CUADROS, Manuel, «El nuevo regionalismo latinoamericano y la Comunidad andina: Convergencias y espacios de acción conjunta», *Comunidad Andina, Secretaría General, Documentos informativos*, SG/di 996, 16 April 2013 E.

<sup>13</sup> CONTRERAS BASPINERO, Adalid, «Se hace Sudamérica al andar, la construcción de la integración suramericana», *Revista de la Integración*, 2 July 2008, p. 9.

irremediably towards insignificance. Mercosur has yet to find its place in the space in which it operates. At any rate, the recent crisis over Venezuela's role in the organisation has shown that it is going to be very difficult to reach an agreement in this integration scheme.<sup>14</sup> We should not forget that these subregional agreements, together with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Central American Integration System (SICA), are the projects that had made the most headway towards economic integration, achieving an imperfect customs union. Nevertheless, none of these agreements has made much progress in recent years.

However, we must pay close attention to developments within Mercosur, as the decisions that are adopted will have significant influence on Latin American integration as a whole. As Isidro Sepúlveda stated in last year's *Strategic Panorama*, «in Mercosur the crisis stems from a significant change of strategic definition». This author warned that «the ideological swing of the Argentine government, the fall of the Chavista regime and Venezuela's institutional instability, the structural problems of the Brazilian economy and the impeachment of President Rousseff, together with plummeting export revenues – especially from oil – are heralding an era of deep changes in the South American economic organisation».<sup>15</sup>

In short, it cannot be stressed enough that integration in Latin America and the Caribbean needs to be simplified and that true integration will not be possible in an environment where integration schemes proliferate. As was stated some time ago, «integration continues to be an aspiration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean and a legitimate project with political implications» but all the efforts will be to no avail unless it is decided as soon as possible to clarify the political, economic and institutional framework with which the region needs to equip itself.

### The most significant political changes in Latin America

The Latin American reality can be gauged chiefly through the political situation that prevails in the region. The trend that began at the start of the century, when left-wing governments were prevalent, has partly been reversed in recent years by the emergence of liberal governments, and this is going to bring substantial changes for at least three reasons.

Firstly, because these changes affect Latin American countries that play a crucial role in shaping the Latin American reality, and we will therefore focus on recent developments in Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil. Secondly, because the political changes influence significantly the economic design that is going

<sup>14</sup> As announced, for example, by Carlos Malamud, «Mercosur y Venezuela al borde de la ruptura», *Infolatam*, 18 September 2016. Venezuela was suspended from its membership of Mercosur in December 2016.

<sup>15</sup> SEPÚLVEDA MUÑOZ, Isidro, *loc. cit.*, pp. 113 and 114.

to prevail in these countries and in the region as a whole. And lastly, because the political transformations we are witnessing have very direct repercussions on the integration schemes and alliances forged on the continent.

Latin American practice has clearly shown that it is not easy to separate the region's future from political stances and that, therefore, political changes do not guarantee continuity in economic matters or lasting cooperation and integration relations. In other words, every political change that takes place in Latin America goes hand in hand with notable changes that hinder stability in the region in all fields. As pointed out, it is «a region in constant movement» and therefore, if we survey what has been occurring since the start of the century, it is true that «the region has undergone countless changes with respect to new governments, new economic policies and new spaces of economic and political organisation between its countries that were unthinkable at the end of the nineteenth century».<sup>16</sup> Changes that are occurring in a different direction also deserve to be briefly analysed.

### *Political instability in Venezuela*

Developments in Venezuela illustrate some of the components of what is changing and what remains the same in Latin America. Venezuela embodies both the virtues and the defects of a good many Latin American countries. It has significant natural resources such as oil, and structural problems that make it difficult to consolidate democracy, stability, progress and citizens' well-being. Corruption, social inequalities, populism and lack of public safety are some of the main problems which have evidently worsened in recent years and are greatly complicating the country's current economic, political and social situation as well as affecting intra-regional relations.

As is known, the advent to power of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 marked the start of what was known the «Bolivarian Revolution» which entailed, among many other things, a total overhaul of the country's political and economic systems. During his 13 years in power, President Chávez carried out an agricultural reform and changed the oil industry. However, halfway through 2008, the country was hard hit by the global financial crisis when the price of crude oil slumped by 70 percent. This fall in the price of oil, which came to account for 96 percent of the country's export earnings, dealt a hard financial blow to Venezuela because the government ceased to receive substantial revenues from oil sales – revenues that enabled it to pay for its imports comfortably.<sup>17</sup> All this has exerted decisive influence on the current situation of political and economic instability in the country.

<sup>16</sup> Equipo CELAG: SERRANO MANCILLA, Alfredo, et al, «Desafíos políticos y económicos de América Latina 2016», *Centro Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica*, pp. 2 and 4.

<sup>17</sup> See, in particular, RAMONET, Ignacio, *Mi primera vida: Conversaciones con Hugo Chávez*. Editorial Debate, Madrid, 2013; LALANDER, Rickard, «La descentralización venezolana

During his long term in office, Hugo Chávez faced highly challenging domestic situations such as the referendum of 2004, from which he emerged victorious and with strengthened popularity. He encouraged Venezuela to withdraw from some integration processes and join others – for example, it left the Andean Community and joined Mercosur – and played a decisive role in creating various integration schemes such as ALBA. At this point Chávez sought above all to modify the «political landscape» and present a process that provided a counterpoint to the US-promoted FTAA and helped consolidate the «Bolivarian Revolution».<sup>18</sup> Hemispheric relations during Chávez's terms in office were conditioned by tension between Venezuela and the United States. This tension mounted in particular when the US president, George Bush, declared that Venezuela was part of the «axis of evil» in his war on terrorism. Even so, economic relations have never been broken off and the United States continues to be one of the country's main trading partners.<sup>19</sup>

The Venezuelan leader died in March 2013 following a long illness. The presidential elections held the following month resulted in a tight victory for his successor, Nicolás Maduro, over his rival Henrique Capriles. Since then political and economic instability has not ceased to grow, with unforeseen consequences. According to the International Monetary Fund, 2016 ended with soaring inflation (475 percent, the highest rate in the world), and a 10 percent decrease in GDP in an international context in which the price of oil is still dropping.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, at the end of 2015, the price of oil stood at 38

---

y el chavismo: transformaciones del sistema político partidista», *Revista Venezolana de Ciencia Política*, no. 26, July to December 2004, pp. 29-74. Centro de Investigación de Política Comparada CIPCOM, Universidad de los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela; and ARENAS, Nelly, «El proyecto chavista. Entre el viejo y el nuevo populismo», *Desacatos*, no. 22, Mexico, September to December 2006.

<sup>18</sup> In SUÁREZ, J., «Imágenes para la solidaridad y amigas del Alba», in <http://www.miraicrida.org/ALBA.pdf> (Accessed 3 December 2016). ALTMANN, Josette, *Dossier ALBA. Alternativa Bolivariana para América Latina y el Caribe*. San José: FLACSO/Fundación Carolina, 2007; OLIVA, Carlos, «El ALBA y la Unasur: entre la concertación y la confrontación»; in Andrés Serbín, Pável ISA-Contreras and Lázaro Peña: *Anuario de la Integración Regional de América Latina y el Gran Caribe*, no. 6. Buenos Aires: CRIES (Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales), 2007, pp. 71-86; and SANAHUJA, José Antonio, «Del regionalismo abierto al regionalismo posliberal. Crisis y cambio en la integración regional en América Latina y el Caribe», in MARTÍNEZ, L., PEÑA, L., and VÁZQUEZ, M. (coords.): *Anuario de la Integración de América Latina y el Gran Caribe*, no. 7, 2008-2009, Buenos Aires, CRIES, pp. 11-54.

<sup>19</sup> AYUSO, Anna, and GRATIUS, Susanne, «Venezuela 2016: nuevo escenario político», 2016, in [http://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie\\_de\\_publicacion/notes\\_internacionales/n1\\_137\\_venezuela\\_2016\\_nuevo\\_escenario\\_politico/venezuela\\_2016\\_nuevo\\_escenario\\_politico](http://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionales/n1_137_venezuela_2016_nuevo_escenario_politico/venezuela_2016_nuevo_escenario_politico) (Accessed 9 November 2016).

<sup>20</sup> BALZA GUANIPA, Ronald (coord.), «Venezuela 2015. Economía, política y sociedad». Fundación Konrad Adenauer. Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Caracas, 2015, and <http://www.analitica.com/economia/fmi-inflacion-en-venezuela-cerrara-en-4758-en-2016/>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

dollars per barrel and in the accounts submitted by the Venezuelan president to calculate his revenues in the 2017 budget the price per barrel was 30 dollars.<sup>21</sup> But the important point is that Hugo Chávez's death is going to have very significant consequences not only in Venezuela but in the whole region, as it will weaken the ties that had been progressively woven to shape a «new» vision of Latin America and the Caribbean, from a political and also economic and integration perspective.

In recent years the overall deterioration in the living conditions of the Venezuelan people, their impoverishment and consequent shortage of staple foods and medicines that affects most of the population and the growing weakness of the health and education services<sup>22</sup> have triggered many attempts at destabilisation and violent street revolts that have caused dozens of deaths and injuries.<sup>23</sup> Today the capital, Caracas, tops the ranking of the most unsafe cities in the world, with a murder rate higher even than those of the formerly most dangerous San Pedro Sula in Honduras and Ciudad Juárez in Mexico.<sup>24</sup> In fact, violence is the country's other main problem. According to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV), the murder rate has not ceased to rise since 2013, attaining the historic figure of 90 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015. This figure makes Venezuela the most violent country in the continent and contrasts with the general trend in the region towards stability and fewer homicides.<sup>25</sup> As a result the population in general is deeply frustrated.

In an increasingly turbulent social climate, Maduro's government, far from being self-critical, blames the opposition for the situation, whereas the opposition holds the government's dire management of the economy to be the sole cause of all the ills from which the country is suffering. Political

---

<sup>21</sup> At <http://www.preciopetroleo.net/petroleo-venezuela.html>. Accessed 4 November 2016. The price of oil has more than halved since 2014, exacerbating the country's economic crisis. As a result, the government has been forced to reduce welfare spending. This affected one of the pillars of the «Bolivarian Revolution»: subsidies designed to reduce poverty and inequalities in income and opportunities. Even the bilateral alliance with Cuba based on oil in exchange for human resources is experiencing difficulties.

<sup>22</sup> At [http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-venezuela-alcanza-2015-cifra-historica-homicidios-90-cada-100000-habitantes-201512290116\\_noticia.html](http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-venezuela-alcanza-2015-cifra-historica-homicidios-90-cada-100000-habitantes-201512290116_noticia.html).

<sup>23</sup> ACERO VELÁSQUEZ, Hugo, *Situación de Violencia y delincuencia de Venezuela y concentración delincriminal en Caracas*. Caracas, 2006, in <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Security/citizensecurity/Venezuela/documentos/violencia.pdf> (Accessed 4 December 2016).

<sup>24</sup> See *El Global Peace Index 2015*, Instituto para la Economía y la Paz (IEP). So much so that in Venezuela security companies offer services that were hitherto unthinkable such as bodyguards by the hour, armoured taxis and person defence, among others.

<sup>25</sup> Informe del Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, 2015, Caracas, 28 December 2015, at <http://images.eluniversal.com/2015/12/28/informe-del-observatorio-venez.pdf>. Accessed 20 November 2016. CEDEÑO, Luis, *Violencia y criminalidad en el Área Metropolitana de Caracas: Situación actual y propuestas de acción*. Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, September 2013.

stances in the country are at odds with each other and this is creating significant instability. According to analysts, however, the steady drop in the price of oil and the failure of the model of a state-controlled economy are the main reasons why Venezuela has gone from oil prosperity to economic emergency.

If this were not enough, parliamentary elections were held in Venezuela in this political and social context on 6 December 2015, and Nicolás Maduro's government suffered a crushing defeat. The opposition, with a parliamentary majority, thus managed to put an end to 16 years of Chavista majority in the unicameral National Assembly. Since then the parliament has been dominated by opposition to President Maduro. This situation has complicated the coexistence between the legislative and executive powers. There have been constant conflicts between the two because the opposition, which has the capacity to pass laws, has attempted to push through a constitutional amendment to shorten Maduro's term and has pressed for an amnesty for political prisoners, as well as attempting to modify the power structures in place for nearly two decades.<sup>26</sup> In the middle of these two political forces is the army, a political player which currently supports President Maduro. In fact, in a communiqué the armed forces rejected the «systematic campaign, orchestrated from abroad, which consists in discrediting and provoking».<sup>27</sup>

The new phase in Venezuelan political life has not succeeded in stabilising the situation in a country diagnosed as being in a critical economic state and with growing insecurity. In addition, the institutional conflict is reflected in the streets in demonstrations, with varying degrees of violence, for and against Maduro's government. As a result, Venezuela is becoming ungovernable.<sup>28</sup> Political and institutional instability has set in and this is going to have repercussions in the region as a whole.

During this time, the opposition has attempted to set in motion the «recall referendum» envisaged in the Venezuelan constitution in order to remove the president from office before his term ends in 2019. May 2016 saw a new clash over the attempt to call such a referendum. However, «the government has stated that it will not be possible to hold it owing to procedural errors and

<sup>26</sup> AYUSO, Anna, and GRATIUS, Susanne, *Venezuela 2016: nuevo escenario político*, 2016, in [http://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie\\_de\\_publicacion/notes\\_internacionales/n1\\_137\\_venezuela\\_2016\\_nuevo\\_escenario\\_politico/venezuela\\_2016\\_nuevo\\_escenario\\_politico](http://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionales/n1_137_venezuela_2016_nuevo_escenario_politico/venezuela_2016_nuevo_escenario_politico) (Accessed 9 November 2016).

<sup>27</sup> At <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20160531/claves-crisis-politica-venezuela/1351458.shtml>, mayo de 2016. Accessed 20 November 2016. See the recent article by MALAMUD, Carlos, «El poder militar y el futuro político de Venezuela», *Infolatam*. Madrid, 8 January 2017.

<sup>28</sup> In May 2016, according to data supplied by the public opinion survey institutes *Datanálisis* and *Venebarómetro*, seven out of every ten Venezuelans disapproved of President Maduro's government of the country and the situation has only worsened since then.



failure to meet deadlines».<sup>29</sup> In October the Venezuelan electoral committee suspended the opposition's campaign to hold the referendum.

Therefore, the 17 years of «Bolivarian Revolution» and the current political quarrel with the opposition have made Venezuela a country that is veering dangerously towards being considered a state «in a situation of exception and emergency» on account of its grave crisis and high murder rate.<sup>30</sup> Added to this is the crisis in the supply of staple goods, for which people are finding themselves forced to queue all over the country, and inflation – the two problems which are affecting the most vulnerable sectors of the population in particular. It should not be forgotten that Venezuela, as has been stated, imports between «70 and 80 percent of foods from abroad, chiefly Colombia, though increasingly from Brazil since joining Mercosur».<sup>31</sup>

In order to address the political crisis in the country, which stems largely from the clash between Maduro's government and the opposition (leaders of the Democratic Unity Roundtable coalition, MUD, and other parties), talks were established between them with the international mediation of the Vatican<sup>32</sup> and the former presidents Leonel Fernández, of the Dominican Republic; Martín Torrijos, of Panama; and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, of Spain.<sup>33</sup> On 30 October 2016 President Maduro met representatives of the Democratic Unity Roundtable and other opposition parties, including its secretary Jesús Torrealba, to explore the possibility of dialogue. Even the Holy See has been involved in the process. However, the various meetings held to date have not been very fruitful.

The lack of results achieved by the negotiations and the dissatisfaction of both parties has triggered a crisis in the political process and only time will tell if they are prepared to resume it.<sup>34</sup> The talks have come to a standstill. The parties blame each other for not committing to an agreement that favours political stability in the country and for failing to comply with the minor progress they do make. In this context of political impasse, despite the presence of the Vatican and three former Latin American presidents seeking a consensus between the two sides, and with a divided opposition,

---

<sup>29</sup> At <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20160531/claves-crisis-politica-venezuela/1351458.shtml>. Accessed 10 December 2016.

<sup>30</sup> See the *Fragile States Index*, at <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/>, 2016. Venezuela ranks 63<sup>rd</sup> out of 177.

<sup>31</sup> AYUSO, Anna, and GRATIUS, Susanne, *Venezuela 2016: nuevo escenario político*, 2016, *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> Eighty-three percent of Venezuelans agree with talks and 87 percent support the mediation of the pope according to a survey by the firm *Hinterlaces*, published in October 2016.

<sup>33</sup> See DÍEZ, Francisco, and Mc COY, Jennifer, *Mediación Internacional en Venezuela*, Gedisa Editorial, 2012. DÍEZ, Francisco, and TAPIA, Gachi, *Herramientas para trabajar en Mediación*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> At <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/11/23/5835c86846163f15588b4607.html>.

everything indicates that it will very difficult to reach an agreement. Let us not forget that the alliance of opposition parties such as Democratic Action (AD), Justice First (PJ), Popular Will (VP)<sup>35</sup> and A New Time (UNT) has not shown unity but quite the opposite – significant differences on the issues to be addressed as part of this process.

From this perspective, some of the consequences of Venezuela's political instability and the deep economic crisis are going to be felt in the field of foreign policy and the situation of the alliances that had been progressively forged in recent years.

The current uncertainty, as pointed out in the previous section, has been further exacerbated by Mercosur's decision to «suspend» Venezuela.<sup>36</sup> The other four member states of this integration scheme considered that the deadline granted to Venezuela for adopting the bloc's rules expired on 1 December 2016. The decision means that the Caribbean country has been suspended from its rights as a full member of Mercosur, that is, it has lost the right to vote but not its voice, and it cannot hold the rotating presidency. Maduro complained that his country had been «hounded» by the rest of the bloc's partners.

However, if all the effects of the suspension become final, the measure will highlight even more the solitude of the Venezuelan government in the regional context closest to Venezuela. That is, the measure also shows that the political shift a few of the Mercosur members have experienced, such as Argentina, with the arrival in power of President Mauricio Macri, and Brazil, with the advent of Michel Temer, aims to isolate the current Venezuelan government in the region, embodying the underlying wish not to encourage the presence of Venezuela in this integration agreement. In fact, the two new presidents are criticising Maduro's government for the deterioration of democracy and lack of respect for human rights in the country. Bilateral relations between Venezuela and Argentina, and between Venezuela and Brazil, are at their lowest ebb for decades. But it is especially significant to note that Venezuela has lost the importance it previously enjoyed in the region, and that this is affecting the shaping of relations in Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole and its participation in certain integration schemes.

Venezuela's political and economic situation is preventing the Venezuelan government from developing the components of the foreign policy it had been pursuing for years. As a result, the integration schemes in which Venezuela

---

<sup>35</sup> Although the political party of the imprisoned Leopoldo López, Popular Will, initially expressed its willingness to take part in the dialogue process, it subsequently called for the release of 13 imprisoned political opponents as a requirement for sitting down at the negotiating table.

<sup>36</sup> In 2012, Mercosur asked Venezuela to incorporate «nearly 300 rules and 112 resolutions» in order to comply with its obligations as a full member of the integration process.

acquired a prominent role are growing weaker. The indecisiveness and paltry progress of Unasur are also due to this reason and not only to the weakening and political and economic fragility of Brazil. In fact, the ability to reach political agreement that the South American bloc had been displaying has been undermined by the unstable situation in Venezuela. Similarly, CELAC has lost its initial impetus and is ceasing to hold the appeal it formerly enjoyed as a framework for cooperation and integration opposed to the OAS and as a strictly Latin American and Caribbean space that expressed the essence of pan-Americanism without the presence of the United States and Canada. It goes without saying that the definitive shaping of the ALBA has suffered the effects of the situation in Venezuela and has lost some of the momentum and ideological influence that used to characterise this integration scheme.

Lastly, the situation of Venezuela's government seems unsustainable both internally and externally, as its most influential regional neighbours are turning their backs on it to an extent, heightening its isolation and making it more difficult to remain in power. Similarly, nor does it seem that Donald Trump's victory in the 8 November 2016 elections is going to help Maduro's government, even though the Venezuelan foreign ministry declared in a communiqué on learning of the Republican candidate's win that it hoped to «establish new bilateral relations based on non-intervention and respect for the sovereignty of nations».<sup>37</sup>

In short, the political and economic situation in Venezuela requires new leaders who are willing to alleviate the country's grave economic crisis, which, as stated earlier, has been further exacerbated by the slump in oil revenues and is the cause of the shortage of food and medicines. Post-Chavista Venezuela needs a change of leader, though this is difficult to predict as things currently stand because both Nicolás Maduro and the outgoing president of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, are clinging on to power.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of the host of interpretations, the fact is that Venezuela is politically unstable and gripped by an economic crisis that is causing it to lose the influence and importance it enjoyed as a leading player in Latin American relations at the start of the twenty-first century. Sooner or later developments will give a clearer idea of its position and ability to influence the region.

### ***New influences in Brazil and Argentina. Political changes in a context of economic recession***

The two «biggest» South American countries in nearly all aspects, Brazil and Argentina, have followed the regional trend towards alternation in

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.telesur.tv/news/Venezuela-felicita-a-D.-Trump-nuevo-presidente-de-EE.UU.-20161109-0057.html>.

<sup>38</sup> AYUSO, Anna, and GRATIUS, Susanne, *Venezuela 2016: nuevo escenario político*, 2016, *op. cit.*

power – a trend that has marked the end of a «political cycle».<sup>39</sup> Specifically in Argentina, one of the largest economies in Latin America, Mauricio Macri was elected as president in December 2015, putting an end to nearly 15 years of «Kirchnerism». In Brazil, the government led by the Workers' Party, which had a close win in the presidential elections of 2014, put Dilma Rousseff against the ropes and in August 2016 Michel Temer of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) became president.

i) The political change that has taken place in Argentina will have far-reaching consequences for Latin America. As is known, in 2015 Argentina was in the grip of economic recession. Inflation (25 percent), unemployment, debt and the informal economy rose substantially, leading to the deterioration of public services such as health, education and transport. There are other lingering structural problems and deep social and political decay. It could be said that some of the problems that are most bothering Latin Americans are evident in Argentina, such as corruption and citizen insecurity. The crime rate has risen substantially over the past years.<sup>40</sup>

Against this backdrop of economic turmoil, Macri won the second round of the elections in December 2015 and became president, bringing about a significant change in Argentina's economic policy and political stance towards the region. Since then, the new Argentine administration has implemented reforms with the goal of reactivating sustainable growth with social inclusion and incorporating the country into the global economy. Precisely with this aim in mind, the Central Bank of Argentina eliminated capital control as a means of encouraging investments at a time of fears about overvaluation of the national currency. No doubt, the key reforms include «unifying the exchange rate, agreements with international creditors, modernising the import system, slowing down inflation and reforming the system of national statistics.»<sup>41</sup> The decisions adopted to date by Macri's government indicate a firm wish to steer the country towards reforms that boost trade by strengthening the country's exports and reintegrating it into the global capital market, but they are coming up against considerable social criticism. At any rate, he is following a path very different to that chosen by previous governments.

On the international front, since Macri came to power Argentina has given fresh impetus to its foreign policy and has confirmed it will hold the presidency of the G-20 in 2018, as well as expressing its intention to join the OECD and, more importantly for us, it has taken on the role of observer in the Pacific Alliance.

<sup>39</sup> MALAMUD, Carlos, «¿Está cambiando el ciclo político en América Latina?», *Infolatam*, Madrid, 26 October 2016.

<sup>40</sup> See «América Latina: Nuevos retos en seguridad y defensa», *Cuadernos de Estrategia 181*, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Ministerio de Defensa, 2016, pp. 34-37. OPALÍN, L., <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/compleja-situacion-politica-en-argentina.html>, 9 February 2015.

<sup>41</sup> At <http://www.bancomundial.org/es/country/argentina/overview>.

It is evident that Macri's government is attempting to improve the country's economic situation and Argentina's position in the regional and international context because, among other reasons stated above, legislative elections are due to be held in 2017. In an interview given to the daily newspaper *Clarín* after completing a year in power, the president stated he was convinced of winning: «We are going to win the election because Argentínians are going to say that they went to continue in this direction.»<sup>42</sup> However, surveys point to social discontent, as more than 40 percent of those polled reckon that Macri has delivered «nothing» of what he promised.<sup>43</sup> On top of this, the country is in a delicate social situation: tension between trade unions and government are evident as a result of rising unemployment (from 7 percent in 2015 to 8.4 percent in 2016) and slowed economic growth (from 2.4 percent in 2015 to -2 percent in 2016). In addition, poverty levels continue to be very high and malnutrition remains a problem.<sup>44</sup>

But it is interesting to stress that the new Argentine government has adopted very different stances towards Latin American reality and essentially advocates a political and economic framework that is unrelated to the positions of previous governments. Political change in Argentina has direct repercussions on the configuration of Latin America and has given rise to an important question: what role will the country play in the new regional balance?

ii) Brazil, practically since gaining its independence, has been the major regional power in South America.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, for decades the Brazilian elites remained convinced of the important international role their country should rightfully play. Certainly, its size, population and resources situate it among the five largest countries in the world. However, owing to both internal and external factors these expectations have been dashed: Brazil was «the country of the future» but without international influence in the «present».<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, the country is currently rated as the ninth strongest economy in the world. The effort to open up to private enterprise and foreign investment – the political centrepiece of the governments of Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003) – continued and strengthened by subsequent governments, made Brazil a reliable country and following the crisis of 1999 its economy grew steadily for almost a decade until running into difficulties as a result of the collapse of the international financial system. The pragmatic President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's «Letter to the Brazilian People» of 2002, which

<sup>42</sup> At [http://www.clarin.com/politica/Entrevista-exclusiva-Mauricio-Macri-politica\\_3\\_1690060997.html](http://www.clarin.com/politica/Entrevista-exclusiva-Mauricio-Macri-politica_3_1690060997.html) (Accessed 29 November 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Survey by Grupo de Opinión (GOP), December 2016.

<sup>44</sup> At <http://www.bancomundial.org/es/country/argentina/overview>.

<sup>45</sup> See MORÁN BLANCO, Sagrario, «Brasil: protagonismo e incertidumbres en la escena internacional». *Anuario Español de Derecho Internacional*, no. 30, 2014, pp. 251-301.

<sup>46</sup> GRABENDORFF, Wolf, «Brasil: de coloso regional a potencia global», *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 226, 2010, pp. 158-71.

promised to honour contracts and obligations with international financial institutions, was a major spur for development.<sup>47</sup>

Dilma Rousseff, who won the elections in October 2010 and subsequently in 2014, continued the economic policy of her mentor, Lula, and the country became a more equitable place. Indeed, the policies of presidents Lula and Rousseff led to a reduction in poverty and taxes and better macroeconomic and microeconomic indicators. During this period Brazil achieved significant progress in social matters: the middle class, whose belief in Brazilian society was restored, came to account for 54 percent of the population.<sup>48</sup> In addition, during Rousseff's presidency the country chalked up two world-level «soft power» achievements: hosting the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016 (Rio de Janeiro). With the latter Brazil enjoyed the honour of being the first country in South America to organise these games. Another significant achievement was becoming the most industrialised and diversified economy in the southern hemisphere.<sup>49</sup>

However, after a decade of steady growth, in 2015 economic pessimism took hold and the spectre of recession loomed. The effects of Brazil's economic slowdown, recorded two years earlier, began to take their toll, sparking the discount of the middle class. Indeed, during that year Brazil's economy recorded the worst figure of the past two decades, 3.8 percent. As a result, economic crisis and corruption largely marked the presidency of Dilma Rousseff, who was re-elected in the most hotly disputed elections in Brazil's democratic history. Lula stated in this connection that Brazil's train «had come off the rails» and that his party in crisis, the Workers' Party (PT), needed to be re-established.<sup>50</sup> From this moment onwards, Rousseff fell victim to

<sup>47</sup> GRATIUS, Susanne, «Brasil en las Américas: ¿Una potencia regional pacificadora?», *Documentos de Trabajo FRIDE*, no. 35 (2007), p. 8; and BURGESS, Sean W., «Building a Global Southern Coalition: the competing approaches of Brazil's Lula and Venezuela's Chavez», *Third World Quarterly*, 2007, vol. 28, no. 7, pp. 1343-58. MORÁN BLANCO, Sagrario, *loc. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> SERRANO MONTEAVARO, Miguel Ángel, «Los patios traseros de Brasil», *Documento informativo 20/2013*, Boletín Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos del Ministerio de Defensa, Madrid.

<sup>49</sup> OROPEZA JIMÉNEZ, Fernando, *Brasil potencia emergente y la guerra de los ricachones*, Agencia Informativa, Archivo Confidencial, y HARGREAVES, Steve, *Brasil, revolución de la clase media*, at <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/economia/2013/06/25/clase-media-impulsa-protestas-en-brasil>, Accessed 20 November 2016. However, the growth that established Brazil as the seventh largest economy in the world, according to the IMF, did not prevent it from continuing to be the country with the biggest gap between the rich and the poor. Indeed, the country has several outstanding debts especially in relation to welfare development. The gap between rich and poor makes it one of the most unequal states in the region. That is, despite the encouraging figures achieved until 2013, it was so large that the problem continued. It could be suspected, then, that Brazil was close to Japan, Spain and South Korea in terms of economic indicators, and similar to a few African countries like Zimbabwe and Zambia in terms of welfare indicators.

<sup>50</sup> ARIAS, Juan, «¿El Brasil de Temer empieza a encarrilarse?» at [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/10/21/america/1477059964\\_802869.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/10/21/america/1477059964_802869.html). Accessed 12 December 2016. Also, SEPÚLVEDA, Isidro, «América Latina: Final de ciclo y riesgos

a lengthy impeachment trial that hastened her removal from power. As is known, Cunha, the speaker of the lower house, initiated the process against the president and won. In April 2016, Congress voted for the first time to approve Rousseff's impeachment.

After the president was ousted from her post on charges of administrative misconduct on 1 September, her vice-president Michel Temer, whom she accused of being the «chief of the conspirers», went from being a practically unknown figure to Brazil's head of state until the 2018 elections. Temer's rise to power entailed a political shift towards a right-wing government after the 13-year administration of the PT. This was another of the most significant political developments which have occurred in Latin America, leading to the «change of cycle».

During the first months, Temer took the reins of the country amid an avalanche of controversy, as many people in and outside the country considered the new government to be illegitimate. However, in order to combat the economic crisis, the new president is implementing political measures characteristic of capitalist and neoliberal systems, such as privatisations and concessions in strategic areas like communications and energy, among others. Even so, Latin America's largest economy, which ended 2016 with a deficit of more than 3 percent of GDP for the second year running, is in the grip of an economic, political, social and moral crisis that is reducing citizens' income and has 12 million jobless people (nearly 12 percent). As if that were not enough, politicians, entrepreneurs and even government officials are being investigated or have already been imprisoned for alleged corruption.

Nevertheless, the outlook is encouraging because bank interest rates, the highest in the world, have started to drop after four years. Inflation is also falling, relieving the economic situation of the poorest Brazilians. At the same time the dollar is falling while the stock market is rising, strengthening the national currency.<sup>51</sup> These forecasts are bolstering Temer's government, which is starting to be recognised by the most important countries in the world though it only has the approval of 14 percent of Brazilians.

In any case, it has always been said that Brazil is the «country of the future». This optimism is based on its huge reserves of mineral resources, rich farmlands and human capital that are seen to be able to put the Brazilian economy back on the rails and create political and social stability in the country. Temer himself stated in his Christmas address that in 2017 «the crisis will be defeated».<sup>52</sup>

---

persistentes», *Panorama Estratégico 2016*, Madrid, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Ministerio de Defensa, 2016, pp. 107 and ff.

<sup>51</sup> Among the countries and sectors worst hit by the Brazilian recession is Argentina's industry. See the official figures of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

<sup>52</sup> At <https://www.nodal.am/2016/12/mensaje-de-michel-temer-2017-sera-el-ano-en-que-derrotaremos-la-crisis/>.

It does not seem a priori that Donald Trump's election victory in the United States will be detrimental to Brazil, as the South American giant is a very important trading partner. Specifically, the United States is «Brazil's second largest trading partner after China: it receives 20 percent of Brazilian exports».<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, today there are many uncertainties and everything indicates that although Brazil possesses many of the ingredients of a power, its capacity to act in international relations as such is conditioned by many factors. As pointed out, its society suffers from significant economic inequality, lack of cohesion and a high level of violence and organised crime, poverty and epidemics such as AIDS and, in the past two years, zika, which has had devastating effects in Brazil.<sup>54</sup> Inequality and violence are two major structural problems which, as well as weakening the country's stability and placing it among the group of «threatened states», are a serious impediment to development and political stability.<sup>55</sup>

Democratic stability is not synonymous with citizen security and social welfare. Indeed, security is the blot on Brazil's international image.<sup>56</sup> The fact is that violence and insecurity continue to be one of the most salient factors that condition the establishment of democracy and political and social stability in the country.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, it is interesting to stress that Brazil's regional policy is based on two key instruments: the promotion of South American integration through political dialogue and negotiation; and the prevention and peaceful settlement of inter- and intra-state conflicts through mediation. Indeed, Brazil defines itself as a pacifying power that «stabilises» its region and promotes multilateralism. Brazil has in fact been leading, and playing a prominent role in, one of the most interesting integration processes in the Americas today, Unasur. It is likely that the new president will prove to be less enthusiastic about integration processes. According to Paulo Velasco, a professor of International Relations at Rio de Janeiro State University, «the new Brazilian

<sup>53</sup> BEDINELLI, Talita, «Temer cree que Trump beneficiará a Brasil y perjudicará a México», at [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/15/america/1479237146\\_105967.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/15/america/1479237146_105967.html).

<sup>54</sup> ROSEN, Meghan, «Year in review: Zika virus devastates Brazil...» *Science News*, 14 December 2016. <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/zika-virus-top-science-stories-2016>.

<sup>55</sup> As for violence, it is paradoxical that Latin America lacks inter-state conflicts but is rife with intra-state crises with high rates of violence – a violence that is particularly visible in Brazil, which, unlike many of its neighbours, enjoys greater democratic stability.

<sup>56</sup> UNESCO statistics at the start of the twenty-first century placed Brazil among the first four countries in the world in terms of number of deaths from firearms (between 120 and 136 per day).

<sup>57</sup> CABALLERO SANTOS, Sergio, «Brasil y su imagen: «No es oro todo lo que reluce», *Anuario americanista europeo*, no. 10 (2012), p. 84; and SOARES, Eduardo, and GUIDANI, Miriam, «La tragedia brasileña: la violencia estatal y social y las políticas de seguridad necesarias», *Nueva Sociedad*, 208 (April 2007), p. 59.



government will not attach the same importance as the foreign secretaries of Lula and Dilma did to the idea of Mercosur and Unasur». <sup>58</sup>

Brazil's political influence has also been apparent in certain conflicts that have emerged in the region, such as the Honduran crisis during 2009 and 2010,<sup>59</sup> and its peace-making and stabilising role during the conflict between Colombia and Venezuela in the summer of 2009, to cite a few examples.<sup>60</sup> The question that arises is whether, in the light of the latest changes, Brazil will continue to play this role in Latin America.

The political change in Brazil reveals that the new government is more focused on purely domestic issues than on boosting the country's future role in the region. The latter question is complicated because Temer's government is unanimously rejected by those of Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba. In addition, Brazil's political and economic fragility is causing a regional impact in that it is weakening the country's role or, at least, shows that Brazil is not taking the initiative in shaping the Latin American reality.

### **Towards a solution for long-standing conflicts in Latin America and the Caribbean**

One of the most salient features of the current situation in Latin America and the Caribbean is determination to put an end to the traditional disputes and quarrels that characterised the region as a whole. These conflicts considerably undermine the framework of relations on the continent and have greatly influenced developments in this part of the world. The ideological clash between the United States and Cuba has poisoned Latin America to an unforeseen extent. The armed conflict in Colombia not only dragged on but caused incredible pain and suffering among the Colombian population and also had repercussions on Colombia's foreign policy. The dispute between Bolivia and Chile, above and beyond legal connotations, has marked sharply contrasting political positions between the two states, and is largely a reflection of the need to settle the territorial and maritime conflicts between Latin American states for once and for all.

<sup>58</sup> BERMEJO, Roberto, «Michel Temer ¿un cambio positivo para el futuro de Brasil?» 6 September 2016, at <http://www.las2orillas.co/michel-temer-un-cambio-positivo-para-el-futuro-de-brasil/>.

<sup>59</sup> ROMERO, C. A., «Las secuelas regionales de la crisis de Honduras», *Nueva Sociedad*, 226 (March-April 2010), p. 86.

<sup>60</sup> CASTELLANO, Alegría, «El conflicto colombo-venezolano y la construcción de escenarios desde la teoría de juegos», *Convergencia, Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, UAEM, no. 52 (January-April 2010), pp. 97-124; ROJAS ARAVENA, Francisco, «La Celac y la integración latinoamericana y caribeña. Principales claves y desafíos», *Nueva Sociedad*, 240 (July-August 2012); and *VIII Informe del Secretario General de FLACSO*, «Escenarios Globales Inciertos: Los Desafíos de la CELAC», Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, (Flacso), 2012.

These three situations sum up better than any others – though they are not the only ones – the «conflictual» reality in Latin America, and a lasting solution to these cases will lay the foundations for shaping the region in the near future. In any case, they are issues with far-reaching political implications for which solutions are being found, albeit with reservations.

### The conflict between Cuba and the USA: The «appeal» of Cuba

The United States government's determined efforts to isolate Cuba internationally have failed miserably. As is known, on 17 December 2014 the leaders of both countries simultaneously issued declarations putting an end to more than 50 years of lack of communication and laid the foundations for «normalising» relations between the two countries. This marked the start of a new relationship and paved the way for future agreements unless substantial changes take place in either of the states. The important fact is that relations between the United States and Cuba should not be addressed in the framework of mere bilateral relations; on the contrary, they significantly influence international relations as a whole, particularly in Latin America.<sup>61</sup> A few essential components should be taken into account when examining these relations:

First, the agreement of December 2014 and the successive agreements that have been signed between Cuba and the United States clearly underline the failure of America's foreign policy with respect to the Caribbean country. We could undoubtedly speak of the triumph of the Cuban foreign policy that succeeded in isolating the United States and led the Obama Administration to publicly go back on many of the decisions that had shaped the United States' policy towards Latin America over the years. Cuba's «resistance» has shown how a state with much less international clout proved capable of withstanding the most powerful state in the world. The American president's comment on stepping off the plane during his visit to Cuba in March 2016 that «this is a historic visit and a historic opportunity» clearly shows that the United States made the first move to re-establish relations with the island.

<sup>61</sup> Among others, the following studies are worth reading: VERDECÍA TAMAYO, Manuel de Jesua; RODRÍGUEZ RICARDO, Efrén Evelio; and PANTOJA TAMAYO Laritza, «¿Cambio de enfoque en la política exterior de Estados Unidos hacia Cuba? Incertidumbres y certezas», *Revista Enfoques: Ciencia Política y Administración Pública*, vol. 14, no. 24, 2016, pp. 229-51; R. AYÓN, David, and MARGHERITIS, Ana, «El giro latino de Obama: ¿estrategia de cambio estructural?», *Foreign affairs: Latinoamérica*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2015, pp. 2-11; HERNÁNDEZ MARTÍNEZ, Jorge, «El conflicto Cuba-Estados Unidos y la dinámica hemisférica: más allá de la coyuntura», *Cuadernos Americanos*, Nueva época, vol. 3, no. 153, 2015, pp. 159-82 and «La política latinoamericana de Estados Unidos y la nueva convivencia con Cuba: El conflicto en su laberinto», *Anuario de Integración*, Edición especial, año 2016, pp. 103-34; COVARRUBIAS, Ana, «Cuba, EEUU y América Latina», *Análisis RIBEI*, January 2016; and ALDA MEJÍAS, Sonia, «Certezas e incertidumbres sobre las nuevas relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Cuba», *Documento-Opinión*, IEES, 16/2015, 5 February 2015.

Nevertheless, neither of the two states wished to interpret the United States' diplomatic «surrender» as a Cuban triumph and, accordingly, the failure of the United States' traditional stance. Relations have undoubtedly returned to a framework of extraordinary friendship and understanding, but it is difficult not to see how the United States' ability to influence the whole continent has decreased very significantly since Cuba's reincorporation into the continent in 2008. The various summit meetings of the Americas and of the CELAC held since then are irrefutable proof that the United States was seeking determinedly to become a principal dialogue partner in the Americas after losing its leading role following the failure to establish the FTAA at the Mar de Plata summit in 2005.

There is no doubt that December 2014 marked a decisive and irreversible step forward, regardless of the progress and setbacks we will witness from now on in the more uncertain situation generated by the advent of Donald Trump to the US presidency. Attitudes have changed on both sides. The United States' foreign policy has come to its senses about Cuba's situation and at the same time Cuba's foreign policy is also changing as a result of the significant relationship it needs to maintain with the United States. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations, with the opening of embassies in each country, on 20 July 2015, ushered in a new period from which it will difficult to turn back, and it goes without saying that a decision of this type has numerous implications both for the states and for Cuban and US citizens.

All in all, one of the primary components of the new relations between Cuba and the United States will undoubtedly be the change of outlook and, above all, the new direction which both states' foreign policies will take.

Secondly, it is surprising that the full re-establishment of diplomatic relations has not yet brought about, even gradually, a change in the main issues that pit the states against each other, in particular with respect to lifting of the blockage or embargo. Though the tentative measures adopted to date, while pointing in the direction of putting an end to the situation, are insufficient proof that there are no major differences between the United States and Cuba. In October 2016, the Obama administration decreed a series of measures designed to ease some of the economic and commercial restraints of the «embargo». These measures are centred specifically «on civil aviation, trade, tourism, financial transactions, humanitarian assistance and public health. They include lifting the ban preventing Cuba from exporting third-country products to the United States and allowing people under US jurisdiction to offer commercial services to Cuba».<sup>62</sup> Therefore, apart from lifting travel restrictions imposed some time ago on Cuban Americans<sup>63</sup> and

<sup>62</sup> ABC. «Internacional», 14 October 2016. [http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-obama-aprueba-mas-medidas-para-desmontar-embargo-cuba-201610142114\\_noticia.html](http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-obama-aprueba-mas-medidas-para-desmontar-embargo-cuba-201610142114_noticia.html).

<sup>63</sup> GRACIA ALDAZ, Jesús, «Cuba, EE.UU. y el embargo», *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político*, July-September 2009, pp. 79 ff; and MESA-LAGO, Carmelo, «Normalización de relaciones

making it easier for US citizens to travel to the island,<sup>64</sup> the «new» relationship between Cuba and the United States entails an array of measures to ease the embargo policy.

Nevertheless, the blockade remains in force and apart from progressively dismantling it the US government needs to show firm commitment to do away with this practice. The expressly stated political decision to put an end to the embargo would mark a significant change and complete the «new» relations between Cuba and America. Nobody doubts that the United States' foreign policy towards Cuba, implemented through the blockade, has failed, as well as being a practice contrary to international law. Its definite lifting will therefore no doubt be accompanied by demands of international accountability. However, the first statements made by the president elect, Donald Trump, do not indicate that the embargo will be lifted, though nor do they suggest that we will witness a worsening or retrogression in relations between the countries.

The illegality of the blockade or embargo under international law is almost unanimously agreed by the international community and it is therefore necessary for a clear-cut decision to be made during this new period to put an end to this situation. Latin American practice has constantly confirmed this position and an appeal for it to be ended has been voiced at each of the summits. Days before the joint Cuban-US declaration in December 2014, the Veracruz Ibero-American Summit issued a special communiqué on the need to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the US government on Cuba, including the implementation of the so-called Helms Burton Act. The message was repeated on 29 October 2016 during the 25th Ibero-American Summit held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. It cannot be stated categorically that declarations of this kind do not achieve any results – on the contrary, the sound reiteration of this stance has also conditioned the United States' foreign policy.

Furthermore, the United Nations' condemnation of the US embargo has prompted a very striking result. On 26 October 2016, the General Assembly

---

entre Estados Unidos y Cuba: causas, prioridades, progresos, obstáculos, efectos y peligros», *Real Instituto Elcano, Documento de Trabajo* 6/2015, 8 May 2015.

<sup>64</sup> In January 2015 important measures were announced which weakened the US embargo. Some were designed to facilitate US citizens' travel to the island without prior authorisation from the government provided it is for specific purposes, such as «to visit a relative, for work or for journalistic, educational, sporting, religious and cultural activities»; it similarly «raises the limits on remittances that can be sent to the island from 500 to 2,000 dollars per quarters, authorises US financial institutions to open accounts in their Cuban counterparts in order to facilitate transactions and allows other activities in the field of telecommunications, and financial, banking and trade services»; it also facilitates the sale and donation of products to facilitate Cubans' communications, such as mobile telephones, televisions, recording equipment and software», <http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201501/91995-cuba-estados-unidos.html>.

adopted Resolution 71/5, which expresses «the need to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America on Cuba». More importantly, all the members of the General Assembly voted for this resolution and, for the first time, the United States abstained.<sup>65</sup>

Thirdly, the normalisation of relations between Cuba and the United States has also extended to the political sphere, specifically in the consideration US foreign policy has been showing towards Cuba. In May 2015, the United States decided to withdraw Cuba from the list of countries that support international terrorism, to which it was added in 1982. The decision has more far-reaching consequences than it has sometimes been attributed. Cuba's position was very clear in this respect. As the Cuban Government stated, «in the period between April of 2015 and April of 2016 some results have been achieved in the bilateral relations between the United States and Cuba. It can particularly be indicated the re-establishing of diplomatic relations and the re-opening of embassies that were preceded by the just action of taking Cuba off the spurious list of States sponsoring terrorism, a list on which Cuba should never have been in the first place.»<sup>66</sup>

A decision of this kind above all paves the way for dialogue between the parties and eliminates the stumbling block entailed by the consideration of Cuba as a state that sponsored international terrorism, even though there was not even the slightest proof. In fact, little progress would have been made in relations between Cuba and the United States were it not for the agreement to put an end to this situation which, logically, blighted any type of contact between the parties. It is clearly a political decision that paves the way for negotiation and was therefore a condition *sine qua non* for the lifting of the embargo in the future. The international community welcomed this measure which had been announced for some years.

Finally, the new climate of Cuban-US relations is having repercussions on the positions of other states and international organisations. It is worth now examining the position of the European Union and Spain. In fact the European Union and Spain have been aware that they must not lost any of

---

<sup>65</sup> «On this occasion, the document was supported by 191 of the 193 member states». This was the first time in the 25 consecutive years in which this petition was made that the United States and Israel abstained. On announcing during the debate that her country would abstain, the US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, said that «the resolution voted on today is a perfect example of why the US policy of isolation toward Cuba was not working – or worse, how it was actually undermining the very goals it set out to achieve» and that «Instead of isolating Cuba, as President Obama has repeatedly said, our policy isolated the United States, including right here at the United Nations.» [http://www.un.org/spanish/News/story.asp?NewsID=36140#.WCGwE\\_QerVQ](http://www.un.org/spanish/News/story.asp?NewsID=36140#.WCGwE_QerVQ).

<sup>66</sup> Report by Cuba on United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/5 entitled «Necesidad de poner fin al bloqueo económico, comercial y financiero impuesto por los Estados Unidos de América contra Cuba», June 2016. Quoted from the English version.

their importance in their talks with the island and that they need to step up their cooperation with this state. This explains not only the successive visits paid by European leaders to Cuba – unfortunately not including the head of state or government of Spain – but above all the European Union's firm wish to establish closer relations with Cuba.<sup>67</sup> As was stated some time ago, «the EU has decided that development co-operation with Cuba should be broadened and consolidated. Political dialogue between Cuba and the EU has intensified».<sup>68</sup>

As is known, in March 2016 the Cuban and European Union delegations reached an agreement on political dialogue and cooperation between the parties putting an end de facto to the Common Position of 1996 which has caused so many problems in bilateral relations. The European Union's abandonment of the Common Position is a symptom of the normalisation of relations and has taken its time, as a result of which the United States has carved out a better role for itself than the European Union in relations with Cuba. Whatever the case, as the European Commission recognises, «The agreement includes three main chapters on political dialogue, cooperation and sector policy dialogue as well as trade and trade cooperation».<sup>69</sup>

But what matters is that we are at last witnessing the end of a period marred by the content of a Common Position<sup>70</sup> drafted in terms that were not acceptable to the Cuban authorities. The ratification of the agreement marks the formal end of this Common Position, but everything indicates that from now on relations between Cuba and the European Union will take a different course and be governed by criteria very different from those of 1996. The position of the European Union and its member states with respect to Cuba, in particular Spain, makes it advisable to establish a close economic relationship which, in the case of Spain, extends to many other sectors of international cooperation. The agreement was finally signed in Brussels in December 2016.

In short, Cuban-US relations have been steered on a «new» course that marks the end of a past that prevented any progress from being made in

<sup>67</sup> A general survey in DÍAZ LEZCANO, Evelio, «Las relaciones Unión Europea-Cuba. Evolución y perspectivas», *Clío América*, 2007, pp. 259 ff.

<sup>68</sup> It stated that «14 February 2003 marks the start of a new phase in EU-Cuban relations. On this day the European Commission officially opened its Delegation in Havana. It is the declared willingness of the European Union to strengthen and widen its relations with Cuba in the political, economic, social and cultural fields». It even pointed out that «Cuba and the EU are tied together in an important strategic partnership. A partnership based on our historical ties but also on the fact that the EU today is Cuba's main trading partner, major source of foreign investment, first provider of tourists and its principal partner in development co-operation», European Commission. Cuba and the European Union, 2003.

<sup>69</sup> European Commission press release. European Commission proposes Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement with Cuba, Brussels, 22 September 2016.

<sup>70</sup> See the interesting study by GRATIUS, Susanne, «Cuba y Europa: más allá de la Posición Común», *Policy Brief, FRIDE*, no. 48, November 2010.

joint cooperation efforts. Although nothing is final and the advent to power of the new US president may bring relations to something of a standstill,<sup>71</sup> in our view a significant backward step is unlikely. Only time will tell.

### **The definitive solution to the Colombian conflict: The peace agreements**

On 2 October 2016, Colombian society decided in a referendum not to support the peace accords between the Colombian government and the FARC. The implementation of the so-called «Final agreement for ending the conflict and building stable and lasting peace» of 24 August 2016, drawn up in Havana, was signed in Cartagena de Indias on 27 September that year by the Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, and the leader of the FARC, Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, alias «Timochoenko». Although everything was up in the air, the parties hastily revised the content of the agreements to save them. Nevertheless, developments of the past years highlight the main components that currently define the Colombian conflict and, above all, what has come to be called the «post-conflict» period.<sup>72</sup>

They have certainly ushered in a new period in Colombia which undoubtedly marks the end of a conflict that has dragged on for more than 50 years, some points of which have given rise to significant divergences.<sup>73</sup> Peace in Colombia entails ending one of the most lasting conflicts in Latin America. It can essentially be said that the conflict has ended. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to stress at least some of the most salient aspects that currently define the peace process in Colombia:

Firstly, the Havana agreements are the result of a long process and, ultimately, the last stage of various attempts to achieve an agreement between the government and the FARC.<sup>74</sup> The successive failures of the peace efforts in

<sup>71</sup> We do not believe that the death of Fidel Castro on 25 November 2016 will bring significant changes in the position of Cuban diplomacy, though there are many different opinions.

<sup>72</sup> DÍAZ BARRADO, Cástor M.; FERNÁNDEZ LIESA, Carlos R.; and RODRÍGUEZ-VILLASANTE, José Luis, (coords.). *Doce miradas del conflicto colombiano*, Instituto de Estudios Internacionales y Europeos Francisco de Vitoria, Getafe-Madrid, 2013; VARGAS PADILLA, Sandra Patricia; JARAMILLO HENAO, Juliana; and RÍOS SARMIENTO, Melissa, «Tratamiento normativo al *status* de beligerancia y terrorismo dentro del conflicto armado en Colombia», *Revista Inciso*, edición 15-2013, pp. 9-26; and FERNÁNDEZ LIESA, Carlos R., «Derecho internacional humanitario y derechos humanos: reflexiones sobre el conflicto colombiano», in *Derecho internacional humanitario y derechos humanos: reflexiones sobre el conflicto colombiano*, DÍAZ BARRADO, Cástor Miguel; FERNÁNDEZ LIESA, Carlos R.; and RODRÍGUEZ-VILLASANTE Y PRIETO, José Luis, (dirs.), 2013, pp. 67-75.

<sup>73</sup> PARRA DUSSAN, Carlos, and HERRERA NOSSA, Carolina, «Instrumentos jurídicos del proceso de paz», *Revista de Derecho*, no. 45, Barranquilla, 2016, pp. 11-136.

<sup>74</sup> PECO YESTE, Miguel, and PERAL FERNÁNDEZ, Luis, *El Conflicto de Colombia*, Madrid, 2006, and DÍAZ BARRADO, Cástor M.; FERNÁNDEZ LIESA, Carlos R.; and RODRÍGUEZ-

Colombia were deeply frustrating for Colombian society, such as the peace process conducted by President Pastrana from 1998 to 2002. However, from the outset, the Havana accords aroused higher expectations and everything indicated that they would be brought to fruition. They are the result of many years of negotiations in which it was attempted at all costs to avoid committing the mistakes of the past. Since the talks began in Oslo in October 2012, there have been a host of meetings and times when it seemed that the negotiations were going to be broken off. At some points it was even thought that they would go back to square one. The Havana accords represent the last stepping stone towards lasting peace in Colombia with the FARC; the dialogue process with the ELN has yet to be concluded.

Secondly, the agreements that were finally reached address all the issues which are truly relevant to the peace process and do not side-step any of the most controversial and hotly debated issues. Another matter is the solution adopted for each of these issues, the degree of consensus reached and even how what was agreed on will be implemented. The main points are rural reform, questions relating to political participation, determining the end of the conflict, drug trafficking and the thorny issue of victims in the framework of the notions of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition.<sup>75</sup>

In the short time that elapsed after the holding of the referendum, the Colombian government finalised the contents of these agreements, incorporating the modifications deemed appropriate. In late November and early December 2016, the Colombian senate and congress ratified the new text which was signed by the two sides on 24 November at the Teatro Colón in Bogotá.<sup>76</sup> It is appropriate to highlight some of the salient components of the agreements, albeit briefly:

i) The Comprehensive Rural Reform is one of the most complex political and social issues. It refers to the ownership and enjoyment of the land which has largely lain at the heart of the conflict. The aim of the agreements was, as is stated, none other than to ensure comprehensive rural development which is considered «a determining factor in fostering regional integration

---

VILLASANTE, José Luis (dirs.) *Doce miradas cit.*

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/colombia/proceso-paz/noticias/detalle-estos-son-seis-puntos-acuerdo-final-paz-con-farc>. In general, for a few aspects of the conflict, see the articles by GOMEZ ISA, Felipe, «Desmovilización paramilitar en Colombia: Entre la paz y la justicia», *FRIDE, Documento de Trabajo*, 57, April 2008; «Justicia, verdad y reparación en el proceso de paz en Colombia», *Revista Derecho del Estado*, no. 33, July-December 2014, pp. 35-63; and «La restitución de la tierra y la prevención del desplazamiento forzado en Colombia», *Estudios Socio-Jurídicos*, Bogotá (Colombia), 12(2): July-December 2010, pp. 11-58.

<sup>76</sup> The contents can be found in: «Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera», <https://www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co/sites/default/files/24-1480106030.11-1480106030.2016nuevoacuerdofinal-1480106030.pdf>.



and the equitable social and economic development of the country», in order to address issues such as «land access and use ..., specific development programmes with a territorial-based approach ..., infrastructure and land adaptation, the most significant aspects of social development, stimulating agricultural production and a supportive and cooperative economy and the establishment a system of food security».<sup>77</sup> All this and more was enshrined in the August 2016 agreement, which stressed the purpose of fomenting «structural change in the countryside, closing the gap between rural and urban areas and creating conditions of well-being and quality of life for the rural population». The reform therefore «must incorporate all of the country's regions, contribute to the eradication of poverty, promote equality and ensure full enjoyment of the rights of citizenship».<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps one of the most interesting points is the establishment of a Land Fund for Comprehensive Rural Reform. The «new agreements» in this area include an explicit reference that «no part of the agreement will affect the constitutional right to private property»,<sup>79</sup> reflecting one of the main points called for by those who voted against the agreement in the October 2016 referendum.

ii) As for political participation, the idea is to establish broad new spaces to guarantee participation in Colombia's democratic system. The aim is that «after laying down their arms, the FARC will play by the rules of democracy, becoming a political party or movement»<sup>80</sup> This will give rise to «a comprehensive security system for exercising politics». One of the most salient measures is possibly the one which establishes that «After the signing of the Final Agreement and the laying down of arms by the FARC-EP, and in order to facilitate its transition to legal political activity and to ensure a situation to promote its ideological platform, the National Government shall put in place the constitutional and legal reforms necessary to ensure, on a temporary basis, the political representation in the Congress of the Republic of the new political movement or party, during two constitutional periods as from 20 July 2018».<sup>81</sup> The changes that have taken place with the new agreements have essentially consisted in reducing the funding of the new political party that the FARC becomes. It has also been deprived of the 16 seats it had been automatically granted in Congress.

<sup>77</sup> See «El Acuerdo General para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera», 26 August 2012; and «Cartilla pedagógica», *ABC del Acuerdo final acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera*, Colombia, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera, <http://www.eltiempo.com/contenido/politica/proceso-de-paz/ARCHIVO/ARCHIVO16682558-0.pdf>. Quoted from the English translation.

<sup>80</sup> «Cartilla pedagógica», *ABC cit.*, pp. 34 and ff.

<sup>81</sup> See «El Acuerdo General para la terminación del conflicto», *op. cit.* Quoted from the English translation.

iii) Regarding the end of the conflict, as is known, a number of commitments were established, particularly: a clear agreement on a bilateral and permanent ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities and, at the same time, the laying down of arms; reincorporation of the FARC into civilian life; and the establishment of guarantees of security and the fight against criminal organisations. In particular, it stated that «the reincorporation into civilian life shall be a comprehensive, sustainable process of an exceptional and transitory nature which takes into account the interests of the community of the FARC-EP, its members and their families, aimed at strengthening the social fabric across the country's territories as well as coexistence and reconciliation among the inhabitants; furthermore, it is aimed at developing and deploying socially productive activities and local democracy».<sup>82</sup> In this connection, on 28 December 2016 the Colombian Congress ratified the amnesty law for the FARC and military forces previously passed by the Senate, thereby implementing one of the points of the peace agreements that will make it possible to put an end to the conflict and likewise ensure political participation.

iv) The agreement also regulates both generally and in detail many aspects related to drug trafficking. «Peace-building requires a definitive solution to the illicit drugs problem,

which includes crops made for illicit use and the production and sale of illicit drugs», it states, adding that «to that end, a new approach is promoted to address the phenomenon of the use of drugs, the problem of crops made for illicit use and organised crime associated with drug trafficking, in a distinct and differentiated manner, ensuring a general human rights and public health, equity-based and gender-based approach».<sup>83</sup> This section of the revised agreement basically maintains the contents of the previous one, though it lays down a few more precise obligations for the FARC to provide information on combating this phenomenon and to clearly demonstrate their dissociation with criminal drug trafficking organisations.

v) One of the most delicate issues was the treatment given to the victims of the conflict. As the agreement states, «victim compensation should be at the core of any agreement».<sup>84</sup> It specifies that «the agreement creates the

---

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> VACAS FERNÁNDEZ, Félix, «Los derechos de las víctimas de crímenes internacionales como límite jurídico a la discrecionalidad negociadora de las partes en procesos de paz: el caso de Colombia», *Derechos y libertades: Revista del Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas*, year no. 18, no. 31, 2014, 191-226; «Los acuerdos entre el gobierno de Colombia y las autodefensas/paramilitares: proceso negociador, contenido e implementación, y derechos de las víctimas», *REIB: Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2014, pp. 8-41; and «Los derechos de las víctimas y la negociación», DÍAZ BARRADO, Cástor Miguel; FERNÁNDEZ LIESA, Carlos R.; and RODRÍGUEZ-VILLASANTE Y PRIETO, José Luis (dirs.). *Derecho internacional humanitario cit.*, pp. 67-75, pp. 541-76; and MONTERO LINARES, Pedro, «Derechos de las víctimas en el

«Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Repetition», which shall contribute to the fight against impunity, using a combination of judicial mechanisms that allow for the investigation and sanctioning of serious violations of human rights and serious infringements of international humanitarian law, with supplementary extra-judicial mechanisms aimed at clarifying the truth of what happened, search for loved ones who have disappeared and providing reparations for the harm and injury caused to individuals, groups and entire territories».<sup>85</sup>

This field has seen the most significant decisions pertaining to the so-called transitional justice. The new agreement modifies the previous position because these points were particularly criticised by those who refused to back the August 2016 accords. It essentially adopts the concept of «effective restriction» of freedom, which means that FARC members will not be sentenced to prison if they confess. It also establishes that the «Special Jurisdiction for Peace» will function for ten years and requests for investigation can only be submitted for the first two; it will also be compulsory for the FARC to «compile an inventory of all kinds of goods and assets included in what has been called war resources and report on them», and they will «proceed to repair victims materially, with the abovementioned goods and assets, in the framework of comprehensive reparation measures».<sup>86</sup>

It was also agreed that members of the state forces involved in crimes in the framework of the conflict should receive similar treatment to FARC members. The agreement states that «the waiver of criminal prosecution is a mechanism for differentiated special treatment with regard to criminal matters for agents of the state that forms part of the Comprehensive System whereby criminal actions, criminal responsibility and criminal sanctions are annulled. This is necessary for building up trust and facilitating the end of the internal armed conflict and must be applied in a preferential manner in the Colombian penal system to help achieve a stable, lasting peace.»<sup>87</sup>

The international community provided crucial support in negotiating the agreements, and rewarded the Colombian president with the Nobel Peace Prize.

If It succeeds in putting a definite end to the conflict, Colombia will embark on a phase of normality and new prospects for cooperation will open up in Latin America as a whole.

---

tránsito hacia la normalización judicial (la verdad, la justicia, la reparación y las garantías de no repetición)», in *Derecho internacional humanitario cit.*, DÍAZ BARRADO, Cástor Miguel; FERNÁNDEZ LIESA, Carlos R.; and RODRÍGUEZ-VILLASANTE Y PRIETO, José Luis (dirs.), pp. 67-75, pp. 577-89.

<sup>85</sup> See «El Acuerdo General para la terminación del conflicto», *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

### **The «heated» border dispute between Bolivia and Chile: 133 years of conflict**

Territorial conflicts are not absent from Latin America. Quite the opposite. For some time now Latin America has been immersed in settling conflicts relating to borders, both land and maritime, which often originate from the shaping of each of the Latin American states.<sup>88</sup> However, for some time now Latin Americans have opted for peaceful means of settling their differences. The region's recent history has been marked by territorial disputes which have progressively been settled through peaceful methods. The countries have turned to mediation, arbitration or the lawcourts, if not direct negotiations between the parties, to settle their differences. Examining one of the traditional conflicts of this kind provides an insight into these means and shows that a great deal of political will is required to put a definite end to disputes of this kind.

As is well known, in the second half of the nineteenth century two neighbouring countries, Bolivia and Chile, became involved in a border quarrel that developed into the longest-standing conflict in Latin America: 133 years. The matter was recently brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) when Bolivia filed a lawsuit demanding that Chile negotiate granting it access to the sea. Chile insists on the need to revise the border treaties, over which the court of The Hague does not appear to have jurisdiction. Both countries continue to be distant neighbours in the twenty-first century.

It all goes back to 1862, when tension between Bolivia and Chile mounted, developing into the so-called Pacific War 17 years later. This armed conflict drew on for four years, from 1879 to 1883, and ended with Bolivia's defeat and the consequent loss of the Atacama Desert and its access to the Pacific Ocean. Far from marking the end of hostilities, it ushered in the longest and most turbulent period of the conflict with numerous clashes and the breaking-off of diplomatic relations at some points in their bilateral history.

It is therefore an embittered dispute that is difficult to settle, but the parties are seeking ways of doing so. Legal means are insufficient to reach an agreement that will put an end to the conflict for once and for all. Once again, the conflict shows that in Latin America solutions to territorial disputes and arrangements provided by third parties on the basis of legal considerations also require predominantly political components that involve both sides making concessions. A number of considerations are central to the conflict.

On the one hand, the conflict is the result of a long historical process. The first stage of the post-war period, 1883-1904, ended with the signing of

---

<sup>88</sup> For an interesting historical survey of the conflicts see GARCÍA PÉREZ, Juan, «Conflictos territoriales y luchas fronterizas en América Latina durante los siglos XIX y XX», *Norba Revista de Historia*, 2005, vol. 18, pp. 215-41.

the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1904, an agreement on boundaries that entailed Bolivia's official loss of its access to the sea. This agreement put an end to the armed conflict, delimited the new borders between the two countries and guaranteed free trade by allowing people and goods to circulate. In particular, it established «the construction of a railway between Arica and La Paz and specified the facilities Chile must grant Bolivia to give it access the Pacific Ocean. These are precisely the main reasons put forward to this day by Chilean diplomats to argue that Bolivia has access to the sea but without sovereignty».<sup>89</sup> This is partly the crux of the matter. Indeed, the treaty of 1904 is not accepted by both parties as the most useful means of settling the conflict and, accordingly, it does not satisfy all claims.

Bolivia's loss of its access to the sea undoubtedly opened a wound that has been impossible to close to date. Indeed, the peace agreement was not conducive to an appropriate relationship between two neighbours with shared interests during the twentieth century, owing above all to Bolivia's hopes of recovering its coastal territory amid increasing Chilean opposition to any kind of concession.<sup>90</sup> This situation continues to the present day and it currently seems very difficult to find a formula that is convincing to both countries and their citizens.<sup>91</sup> Without political concessions, it will not be possible to put a definite end to the conflict using these means alone.

Bolivia has made several attempts to revise the treaty of 1904, to no avail: it brought the question before the League of Nations in 1920 and before the

---

<sup>89</sup> MOLINA MONASTERIOS, Sergio, «Disputa marítima o cuadratura del círculo. Los vaivenes del conflicto boliviano-chileno», *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 256, March-April 2015, p. 21; COCHA ROBLES, José Miguel, *Iniciativas chilenas para una alianza estratégica con Bolivia (1879-1899)*, Plural Editores, La Paz, Bolivia, 2011; GARAY VERA, Cristian, and CONCHA, José Miguel, «La alianza entre Chile y Bolivia entre 1891 y 1899. Una oportunidad para visitar la teoría del equilibrio», *Revista Enfoques*, vol. VII, no. 10, 2009, pp. 205-34; MAIRA, Luis and MURILLO, Javier, «El largo conflicto entre Chile y Bolivia. Dos visiones», *Estudios Internacionales*, no. 148, January-March 2005, pp. 87-93. BULNES, Gonzalo, *Guerra del Pacífico*. Santiago. Editorial Andujar, 1999; and BURR, Robert, «The Balance of power in nineteenth-century South America: An exploratory essay», *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 37-60.

<sup>90</sup> Cf., CARRASCO, Sergio, *Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales Chileno-Bolivianas*, Editorial Universitaria, 1991; CONCHA, José Miguel, *La política boliviana. Iniciativas del Ejecutivo Chileno para una alianza estratégico con Bolivia (1879-1899)*. Santiago de Chile: BE Brickle ediciones, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Bolivia's malaise can even be perceived in its education system, which still teaches children that it is essential to regain access to the sea. The Bolivian constitution of 2009 declares «the undeniable and imprescriptible right of the Bolivian people over the territory that grants them access to the Pacific Ocean and their maritime space». In addition, in recent years it has been very common at events for the «Himno al mar» to be played, an anthem demanding that the territory lost in the Pacific War be recovered. CRUZ, Nicolás, and CAVALLLO, Ascanio, *Las Guerras de la Guerra*, Editorial Aconcagua, Chile, 1980; *El Libro del Mar*, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de Bolivia, La Paz, 2014; and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2014, «Land Boundaries», *The World Factbook*, 2014.

OAS in 1979.<sup>92</sup> However, despite the lack of agreement, diplomatic efforts were kept up and violence was not resorted to. In this regard the ratification of the Pact of Bogota (American Treaty on Pacific Settlement) attests to a firm wish. It should not be forgotten that in this treaty the American states undertake not to use force either in international relations or in conflicts with their neighbours, and so it has been in practice in this conflict. Bolivia has been using solely diplomatic and legal means in its efforts to regain access to the sea.<sup>93</sup>

The start of the present century, amid complicated bilateral relations, saw a failed attempt to negotiate a solution. During Ricardo Lagos's term in Chile (2000-6) «the possibility of granting Bolivia a sovereign enclave was explored, which involved infringing the treaty of 1929, because it would be in Chilean territory (previously Bolivian, not Peruvian)».<sup>94</sup> The subsequent negotiations between the two presidents, Evo Morales and Michelle Bachelet (first term), raised certain hopes. In particular, the jointly drafted 13-point agenda of 2006 suggested that an agreement would be reached for the first time. The efforts were in vain. In 2010 the negotiations sank into a quagmire and the states returned to hostile arguments, as witnessed at the Cadiz Ibero-American Summit in 2012, to cite an example of an important event, and again at the Summit of the Americas held in Panama in 2015.

The Bolivian president pressured Chile into holding talks. As it was impossible to progress, and bilateral relations were growing increasingly complex, Evo Morales announced he was taking the long-standing territorial dispute to court and in 2013 he filed a lawsuit with the ICJ.

As has been stated, «after the treaty of 1904, Chile entered into a series of commitments with Bolivia to grant it a strip of sovereign territory with access to the sea».<sup>95</sup> Specifically, «they appear in many agreements and unilateral declarations of the past decades which have acknowledged the obligation to negotiate it as a matter independent from the text of 1904».<sup>96</sup> Chile claims that the ICJ lacks jurisdiction to rule on this conflict. According to the Argentinian legal expert Mónica Pinto and her British colleague Samuel Wordsworth, «the ICJ's lack of jurisdiction over this dispute is likewise determined by the Pact of Bogota of 1948». Article VI excludes matters which have been settled

<sup>92</sup> TÉLLEZ, Eduardo, *Historia general de la frontera de Chile con Perú y Bolivia 1825-1929*. Santiago, Instituto del Patrimonio Territorial, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, 1989; MONTENEGRO, Walter, *Oportunidades Pérdidas. Bolivia y el Mar*, La Paz, Los Amigos del Libro, 1987; and PONCE CABALLERO, Jaime, *Geopolítica chilena y Mar Boliviano*. La Paz. Cuarta Edición, 1998.

<sup>93</sup> *La Gaceta Jurídica*, 25 May 2012.

<sup>94</sup> MOLINA MONASTERIOS, Sergio, «Disputa marítima o cuadratura del círculo. Los vaivenes del conflicto boliviano-chileno», *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 256, March-April 2015, p. 24.

<sup>95</sup> At [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/04/actualidad/1430744745\\_182951.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/04/actualidad/1430744745_182951.html). Accessed 4 November 2016.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

in previous agreements, as is the case of the current dispute. According to Pinto, «in the Pact of Bogotá, both states agreed to this type of peaceful solution to their differences».<sup>97</sup>

In this regard, Santiago stresses that Bolivia must respect the peace treaty of 1904. Chile seems to be clear about this and argues that the conflict ended with this agreement. It also claims that its neighbour has full access to the sea via Chile's ports and that Chile grants Bolivian freight preferential treatment worth dozens of millions of dollars yearly.<sup>98</sup> In this connection, Felipe Bulnes Serrano, Chile's ambassador in the United States, has stated that Bolivia «wants this court to rule not only that Chile is obliged to negotiate, but that it must concede a maritime sovereignty that we can by no means accept».<sup>99</sup>

The countries' stances are very distant and it is only possible to implement political and diplomatic mechanisms to settle the conflict. On 24 September 2015, the court of The Hague declared it had jurisdiction to consider lawsuit brought by La Paz, though not to issue territorial rulings in this case.<sup>100</sup> The court ruled that the states have the obligation to negotiate, based on two main positions:

- In paragraph 34 of the judgement, which states that «that the subject-matter of the dispute is whether Chile is obligated to negotiate in good faith Bolivia's sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean, and, if such an obligation exists, whether Chile has breached it».
- In paragraph 50, on asserting that «the matters in dispute are matters neither settled by arrangement between the parties, or by arbitral award or by decision of an international court» nor «governed by agreements or treaties in force on the date of the conclusion of the [Pact of Bogotá]». The conclusion reached is thus that «the Court finds that it is not precluded from ruling on Chile's objection at this stage».

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* See «El Chile que quiere mar para Bolivia». Selection of articles by several Chilean authors, 2014, at:

<http://www.alainet.org/images/El%20Chile%20que%20quiere%20mar%20para%20Bolivia-3.pdf> Accessed 6 December 2016.

<sup>98</sup> MOLINA MONASTERIOS, Sergio, «Disputa marítima o cuadratura del círculo. Los vaivenes del conflicto boliviano-chileno», *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 256, March-April 2015, p. 20.

<sup>99</sup> [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/04/actualidad/1430744745\\_182951.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/04/actualidad/1430744745_182951.html). Accessed 4 November 2016. According to Chilean government sources in The Hague, the seat of the ICJ, «all border disputes have a legal component, but taking them to court is not always the answer». Therefore, a year later, in 2014, Chile submitted a preliminary objection to the court to attempt to get it to rule against the lawsuit submitted by Bolivia to claim access to the ocean which it lost after the Pacific War, CONCHA, José Miguel, and GARAY, Cristian, *El tratado de 1904. Negociaciones e intereses involucrados*, Plural Editores, La Paz, Bolivia, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> CASAS, Alba, and MOLINA, Fernando, «Chile y Bolivia enrocan sus posturas por el conflicto marítimo», [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/10/06/actualidad/1444164412\\_859569.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/10/06/actualidad/1444164412_859569.html). Accessed 12 December 2016.

The court's ruling has driven the countries even further apart, and their stances are more fiercely opposed. The lawsuit filed by Bolivia has evidently complicated bilateral relations. The ICJ's decisions have not calmed either of the parties and nor have they paved the way for a future solution. The conflict over access to the sea is becoming increasingly complicated and is poisoning relations between the two states. Therefore, in the midst of the main dispute, a new crisis broke out over a watercourse with its source near the border and Chile's establishment of a military base 15 km from Bolivian territory. La Paz has already stated that it is preparing a new lawsuit to have Santiago acknowledge a «million-dollar debt» for the «illegal and abusive use» of the waters of the Silala basin through artificial channels built a century ago. According to Chile, the treaty of 1904 established the international nature of the river Silala, and Bolivia accepted this until 1997, whereas Santiago considers that these waters, «which rise in the Bolivarian region of Potosí, only 4 kilometres from the border between the two countries, are international because the river flows into the Pacific basin».<sup>101</sup> This is further proof that the crisis requires much greater political will to reach an agreement.

The bitter border disputes between the two countries continue and no solution to the territorial conflict that has pitted Chile against Bolivia since the end of the nineteenth century can be envisaged in the near future. The only solution involves dialogue and cooperation leading to a peace based on shared sovereignty and Bolivia's access to the sea.

### Final considerations

It is not easy to predict the immediate future of Latin America and the Caribbean. Naturally external factors influence regional developments, but it is essentially internal causes that determine the paths followed by the various Latin American countries. The expression «Latin America» cannot be said to express a single reality. Indeed, fragmentation of political stances and the economy is going to be the most characteristic feature of developments in this part of the world. The Latin American and Caribbean reality is becoming more and more complicated and heterogeneous by the day.

Integration in the continent is being obstructed by an array of factors that the region's leaders have not been capable of eliminating. The thriving nationalism that still inspires the policies of the Latin American states is an obstacle that is difficult to overcome. Similarly, excessive zeal for creating an integration scheme embodying the wish for integration has subsequently spawned a host of overlapping and disorganised integration efforts. Every new integration initiative is greeted with unusually high expectations which

<sup>101</sup> *El Mundo*, 9 May 2016. *El País*, 7 October 2016, at [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/10/06/actualidad/1444164412\\_859569.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/10/06/actualidad/1444164412_859569.html). Accessed 5 November 2016. CASAS, A., and MOLINA, F., *op. cit.*



are often subsequently dashed. The Pacific Alliance emerged in recent years as a scheme that stood a good chance of success, as it focused on economic and trade issues and paid attention to other areas too. Unasur is at something of a standstill. It needs to address its economic organisation and convergence as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Mercosur and the Andean Community are gripped by internal crises that can only be overcome in a framework of South American integration.

Political instability in Venezuela is a circumstance that illustrates very well the developments in relations in Latin America as a whole. The leadership this country enjoyed for a time has been weakened very significantly and it has been plunged into a deep internal crisis. In other respects, the region is being shaped by the recent political changes in Argentina and Brazil, which are going to determine part of its future.

We are starting to glimpse an end to some of the conflicts that have blighted the continent, which once again is seeking to settle disputes using peaceful means. The advent of Donald Trump to the US presidency brings many unknown factors, but the re-establishment of Cuban-US relations marks a significant step forward nonetheless.

The peace deals between the Colombian government and the FARC have put an end to many years of armed conflict and reveal, above all, many countries' ability to stabilise their institutions and boost their economies. Similarly, although the decision to place the territorial dispute between Chile and Bolivia in the hands of the court has not «calmed» the political debate, it has at least transferred it to framework of the ICJ. Though this move has not settled the matter and nor has it so far been conducive to an understanding between the two states.

## Composition of the working group

*Coordinator:*

**FELIPE SAHAGÚN**

*Permanent lecturer in International Relations,  
Universidad Complutense, Madrid  
Journalist*

*Member and secretary:*

**IGNACIO FUENTE COBO**

*Artillery Colonel (General Staff College graduate).  
Senior analyst, Instituto Español de Estudios  
Estratégicos*

*Members:*

**SHAUN RIORDAN**

*Senior Visiting Fellow, Clingendael Institute*

**CÁSTOR MIGUEL DÍAZ BARRADO**

*Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid*

**MARÍA SAGRARIO MORÁN BLANCO**

*Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid*

**JOSÉ MARÍA MARTÍNEZ FERRER**

*Artillery Colonel (General Staff College graduate)  
Director of the Academia de Artillería and Military  
Commander, Segovia*

**VICENTE PALACIO DE OTEYZA**

*Director of the Observatorio de Política Exterior  
Española  
Fundación Alternativas*