



US Presidential Election

What scenarios for the world after Obama?

Eckart Woertz (coord.)



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INTRODUCTION

As President Obama's presidency draws to a close it is time to take stock of his legacy and assess the kind of continuities and changes we may encounter during the next. His potential successors are very different, not only in matters of style, but also in their policy prescriptions. Many expect a dose of hard-nosed realism from Hillary Clinton when it comes to issues such as Russian expansionism or the Iranian nuclear dossier, but overall she is running on a ticket of international cooperation and dependability. Donald Trump on the other hand has called long-term alliances such as NATO into question and professed admiration for autocratic rulers such as Vladimir Putin that strike many as naïve and dangerous. While his ostentatious "America first" stance often lacks detail and might not be clear to the candidate himself, it is safe to assume that a President Trump would usher in considerable changes to America's foreign policy, ranging from climate change, which he has portrayed as a Chinese conspiracy, to security and trade cooperation with Europe. Differences between the two candidates also span the domestic policy agenda, ranging from migration policies to reform of the prison system and healthcare.

Against this backdrop, this collaborative volume written by CIDOB researchers explores the legacy of the Obama administration and offers a speculative outlook on things to come.

Paula de Castro analyses the Obama doctrine, its preference for avoiding direct military involvements and its anticipated "pivot to Asia". In times of "leading from behind" and selective US engagement, the demands on European foreign policymaking have increased, right at a time when the continent's capabilities have been compromised by disunity and the eurozone and migration crises. She also sheds light on the checks and balances in the American system: the power of the US president is not as far reaching as sometimes perceived, especially if the future president continues to govern against a divided US Congress that is not dominated by her or his party.

Pere Vilanova turns our attention to a new, increasingly common, challenge for US policymaking. In a rapidly changing landscape of

asymmetric threats, newly assertive authoritarian opponents and failed states, new security strategies are being tested that have to rely on volatile alliances rather than the established cooperation patterns of the past. Besides NATO, ad-hoc cooperation with local proxies has played an increasing role in US foreign policymaking. Against this backdrop Vilanova explores possible combinations of hard and soft power tools in US foreign policy.

Oriol Farrés examines Obama's regional strategy of a "pivot to East Asia". The inexorable rise of Asia in world trade and the increasing political and military assertiveness of China in territorial disputes in Southeast Asia easily explains this pivot, yet the established foci of US foreign policymaking have either not gone away (e.g. energy security and the Middle East) or have regained a new sense of urgency (e.g. Russian defiance in the Ukraine and Syria). Asian countries have much to lose in terms of trade from a Trump presidency and important foreign policy issues like the North Korean nuclear dossier would likely see little progress.

Eckart Woertz shows how despite the shale revolution in the US leading to steep increases in American production of oil and gas, US interest in traditional producer regions is likely only to diminish slightly. While it has achieved self-sufficiency in natural gas, the US will continue to be a net oil importer, especially of the sour crude varieties from the Persian Gulf on which its refineries have come to rely in their feedstock mix. As oil is a fungible global commodity production shortfalls elsewhere would also affect US energy markets, even in the hypothetical case of complete oil self-sufficiency.

Eduard Soler then takes a more detailed look at the American allies and proxies in the Middle East such as Egypt, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Collaboration has become tense with these countries as they fear Iran's regional ambitions in the wake of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – the nuclear accord between the P5+1 and Iran (Israel, Saudi Arabia) – or feel that US criticism of domestic autocratic tendencies is misplaced (Egypt, Turkey).

Roberto Toscano analyses how the JCPOA agreement might fare during the upcoming US presidency. The agreement is the most salient legacy of the Obama administration, comparable in significance to the Obamacare healthcare reform on the domestic level. The JCPOA was no easy feat, given the tremendous impediments that had to be overcome, but Toscano is guarded about its future success, even under a President Clinton, given the strong opposition against it in American policy circles, among regional allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, and also by hardliners within Iran.

Emma Hooper examines how Obama's foreign policy has developed in Afghanistan and Pakistan and offers two vastly differing scenarios, depending on whether Clinton or Trump wins the presidency. While she sees continuity of policies under a President Clinton, she fears Trump could disrupt the balance of power in Asia, shifting it in favour of India, and might declare Pakistan a terrorist state, which would prompt the country to turn towards China and increase the likelihood of a nuclear conflict with India. Afghanistan, on the other hand, could slide into anarchy if a President Trump withdrew financial and military support.

Russia has developed into another international hotspot since its annexation of part of Ukraine in 2014 and its intervention in Syria in 2015. Nicolás de Pedro analyses how the Putin government has sought to influence the US election campaign and cosied up to Trump and the alternative candidate Jill Stein at a time when Russia is becoming increasingly assertive on the international stage and is using its media outlets such as RT to influence public opinion in the West.

Latin America's fate has been influenced over much of the post-war period by direct US political and economic interference. US interest has increasingly focused on other parts of the world since the 1970s, but interest in its southern neighbours has seen a revival in recent years with less confrontational approaches due to political changes in various countries on the continent. Anna Ayuso describes the new openness of the US to Cuba, Colombia and Argentina and how this might develop in the future. They might well herald what John Kerry called "the end of the Monroe Doctrine" in 2013; at the same time, increasing unrest in Venezuela since the death of Hugo Chávez and Brazil's slide into economic and political crisis may require increased diplomatic intervention by the US in the future.

For a long time trade agreements did not rank high among US priorities. Before NAFTA in 1990 no major agreement had been signed and since then most of the agreements have been on a bilateral basis with minor economies in the developing world (e.g. Morocco, Jordan). Recent efforts to sign other major multilateral trade agreements with Asia (TPP) and the EU (TTIP) could give a major impetus to international trade, but are likely to be dead on arrival if Donald Trump wins the elections. If TPP were concluded in the future, but not TTIP, it would lead to a considerable disadvantage for Europe and would weaken its position in world trade compared to Asia, as Jordi Bacaria outlines in his article.

Francis Ghilès directs our attention to Africa, which has been a forgotten stepchild of US foreign policymaking. African hopes that the first black American president might change that have been largely disappointed. The global financial crisis and diplomatic challenges in the Middle East and Asia proved to be higher on the priority list. In terms of development policies the Obama administration continued the Millennium Challenge Corporation agenda of his predecessor President Bush, but did not go beyond it. As jihadist threats in the Sahel have increased, so have American concerns in the region, but direct military intervention in, for example, Mali was largely left to France.

For a long time, Europe has been the closest and most important foreign policy partner of the US, but this importance might decrease, as Pol Morillas outlines. Principled partnership with Europe could give way to more pragmatic coordination on an ad hoc basis, as the US pivots towards Asia and manages fluctuating and volatile alliances. As before, such coordination would continue to focus on bilateral relations with individual nation-states rather than the European Union, which continues to lack teeth when it comes to hard security issues and foreign policymaking.

The refugee crisis is a defining challenge for Europe. The US is only involved tangentially, as Elena Sánchez points out. Geographically, it is a

long way from the refugee flows and has only agreed to accommodate 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016. Yet, for a solution to the conflicts that cause these refugee flows the US will be indispensable.

President Obama has described climate change as “greatest threat to future generations”. He has softened the intransigent US negotiating position and conceded important commitments in the 2015 Paris Agreement, which will crucially rely on Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) and increased climate finance flows. While a President Clinton could be trusted to stick to such commitments and foster low-carbon private investments, job creation, and technology development, prospects would be much murkier under a President Trump, who would possibly jeopardise the progress made on climate change mitigation that was achieved in the Paris Agreement.

A Clinton presidency would promise a measured continuation of the Obama legacy in international as well as domestic policies. From a European perspective it would provide critical assurances and the continuation of a time-tested cooperation, albeit with shifting priorities. Needless to say, a Trump presidency would come with considerable risks and uncertainties; the only hope would be that the checks and balances of American democracy and the lack of convictions and focus of the candidate might help to avert the worst consequences.

Eckart Woertz

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THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE OBAMA DOCTRINE: CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?

Paula de Castro

Researcher, CIDOB



With a new period in US politics about to begin, discussion of the Obama Doctrine and its future is already underway. President Obama's administration has prized diplomacy over military confrontation, defence of the multilateral order and the mobilisation of international partners over unilateral action and has refocused the country's foreign affairs priorities. Now it remains to be seen to what extent the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, or the Republican, Donald Trump, will give continuity to his doctrine and legacy.

When President Obama arrived in the White House he received a country immersed in an economic crisis comparable to the years of the Great Depression, two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) and a weather-beaten international image. At that time, he could count on the political support of a Democratic majority in Congress and his priority was to strengthen the country internally and internationally. For this, he considered it necessary to reaffirm the country's economic and military capacities but, above all, to recognise its limits when handling international crises. His reading of his predecessor's history showed that using military solutions and unilateral action to face international crises had left the country in a state of stress.

Since that point, President Obama has given reconsideration to diplomacy as the solution to conflicts and defended the creation of international coalitions for handling international crises. For Obama, American exceptionalism must emerge from its capacity to influence the international agenda and to mobilise actors who, according to him, traditionally expect American leadership. This principle – which is today known as “leading from behind” – was what led the president to demand European partners participate in the Libya crisis (2011), to decide the troops should leave Iraq and forces should be reduced in Afghanistan, and to promote a diplomatic way out of the chemical weapons crisis in Syria, the nuclear issue with Iran and the forming of an international coalition against ISIS.

For Obama the time had come to redefine the country's strategic priorities. Regions like Asia, Latin America and Africa had become

synonymous with the future, but little had been invested in them by comparison with the conflict regions in the Middle East. For this reason, during his administration President Obama began the normalisation of relations with Cuba and sought to shore up relations with Asia through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

These principles, which are today becoming known as the Obama Doctrine, are the same that cost him support at home. For his detractors, the idea of an America that “leads from behind” is a role that is unfit for a global power like the United States. In their opinion, each time he apologised to the international community and avoided the military option when the red lines had already been drawn – such as in the case of Libya – Obama eroded the country’s credibility. These criticisms grew when President Obama lost Congress (2011) and the Senate (2014) to the Republican Party. Since then, ideology has been favoured over consensus, producing blockage of international laws and treaties, increased Supreme Court interference and more executive orders.

With the new presidency upon us, Hillary Clinton seems the most likely to maintain the Obama vision and legacy, although with marked differences. The Clinton formula echoes the defence of the multilateral international system and diplomacy as instruments of conflict resolution, but the military option seems less disposable. Her willingness to support the military intervention in Iraq (2003), her defence of military intervention in Libya (2011) and in Syria (2013), and her announcement that a firm hand would be shown with Iran if it did not comply with what was agreed in the nuclear agreement are proof of this.

Though Clinton has defended Obama’s tilt towards Asia and taken an active role in the negotiations of the TPP as secretary of state, it is an open question as to whether, as president, she would give continuity to Obama’s vision in the region. In fact, she has already cast doubt over continuing with the trade agreement with the Pacific partners. But Clinton has announced her desire to continue with other Obama initiatives such as the normalisation of relations with Cuba, the consideration of climate change as a risk to national security, the closure of Guantanamo and the fight against ISIS with international support.

While Clinton could represent continuity with the Obama Doctrine, Trump would be a definite break. For the Republican candidate, diplomacy and defence of the multilateral order must be subservient to more emphatic instruments such as unilateral action, economic sanctions, military intervention and the counterterrorist practices of the Bush era. Trump makes a clear defence in his programme of remilitarisation in Asia and the Middle East. In Asia, he intends to win a negotiating position for the United States against China and North Korea, in particular since the confirmation of the latter’s nuclear tests. In Syria, he would be prepared to negotiate an alliance with Russia in its fight against ISIS.

In his programme, Trump considers it necessary to realign the international alliances forged in recent years by President Obama. He points, above all, to those related with the nuclear deal with Iran, the trade agreement with Asia and the alliance with Japan and South Korea

in their fight against North Korea. What is more, Trump considers climate change to be a fiction and has made his commitment to fossil fuels clear. Finally, his policy of immigration and his xenophobic declarations on the refugee crisis have marked an agenda of restrictions, deportations and discrimination that goes against the welcoming, pluricultural vision of America put forward by Obama.

Ultimately, the United States decides on the future of the presidency faced with two antagonistic formulas and a Capitol Hill that is expected to remain divided. On the one hand, as has been seen, the Democratic option seems to assure the continuity of the Obama Doctrine and legacy. The difficulty is that Clinton has little sympathy in either house as a result of the scandal provoked by her management of email accounts and a crisis in Libya that ended with the death of four Americans. The Republican option before the country not only means a break from the Obama Doctrine and legacy, but also with the traditional principles of his own party, as many Republicans have demonstrated by withdrawing their support from their own candidate.

THE UNITED STATES: NEW ISOLATIONISM OR HEGEMONY WITH CHANGING ALLIANCES?



Pere Vilanova

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In February 2016, the renowned Munich Security Conference, known among experts as *Verkunde*, was held without managing to make much media impact. Nevertheless, an analysis of the list of subjects this conference has addressed each year since 1963 allows us to retrace the long evolution of the perceptions of global security over half a century. The limited media coverage of the latest conference focussed on Dmitry Medvedev and his denunciation of NATO and the West's culpability for leading us into a "new Cold War". This is one of many challenges for whoever succeeds Obama. But though it is true that under Vladimir Putin's presidency Russia increasingly seeks to act as "the other superpower", with falling oil prices, half of his economic balance sheet dependent on the European Union and the brutal devaluation of the rouble, how does Russia intend to fill its various deficits? The proof that we are not in a new cold war is that the United States and Russia have collaborated decisively on crucial issues of international policy and they have done so both in a bilateral format and, on occasions, in a discreet multilateral format: the 5+1 agreement on the Iran nuclear dossier and the six-way process to handle the drift of the regime in North Korea. The last condemnation of the country in the Security Council in September 2016 was voted for unanimously by all 15 members, including of course the five permanent members of the Security Council.

However, at the end of 2016 other issues fill the US security agenda as decisive presidential elections approach. Some are not, or do not seem to be, "hard security" issues. They are usually addressed using the parameters of military force, but are at the heart of the complex concept of security we face in the 21st century. Of course, climate change is also discussed. The real negotiation of the new routes opening up in the Arctic ice cap – particularly what is known as the Northeast Passage – has been ongoing for five years and only involves the countries that surround it: Norway, the United States, Canada and, of course, Russia. There is general agreement, in theory, to condemn the latest generation of transnational terrorism, but much more discretion on how to fight it effectively, discreetly and in a coordinated manner on a large scale. No need to go into detail on

the case of ISIS and how to fight it in Iraq and Syria. Coordination is confused or volatile but, in any case, vital in the short and medium term. We are faced with a highly volatile agenda due to the diversity of threats and the interdependences involved.

This translates, in the US elite, to two attitudes of differing types in the successive administrations. From Clinton to Obama via George W. Bush there have been significant differences relating, above all, to the respective global conceptions of the United States' role in the world (soft power or hard power, lead or impose, multilateralism or unilateralism). The first attitude, deeply rooted in the US isolationist tradition, strongly distrusts Europe and does not discount a strategy of relative disengagement based on the premise that the Europeans should take on their own defence obligations. This argument is above all about budget. This school of thought measures security capabilities in terms of military capability and this in terms of budget. Even by their own logic this leads to a fairly questionable equation. Of course the «Bush/Rumsfeld/Cheney version”, according to which the supremacy of US power is sufficient to govern the world alone, based only the US agenda of interests, has been eroded. Important American think tanks take this position, from the Cato Institute to the American Enterprise Institute via the Heritage Foundation.

A second, more centrist, cosmopolitan line, still pursuing the defence of the *national interest* (the real yardstick of all US foreign policy since F.D. Roosevelt), really concerns itself with multilateralism (a la carte, naturally) and relations with Europe. This school of thought would therefore like European progress on security and defence, including the improvement of their own capabilities in a way that is at once compatible – or even in synergy – with NATO. It also considers that NATO should be much more flexible so that on issues that are solely European all or some of the European partners are able to act by themselves (after consulting the Atlantic Alliance to check the United States does not feel that the issue lies outside NATO's agenda). Notable institutions like the Brookings Institution, *Foreign Affairs* magazine, the Rand Corporation (with some nuances) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace represent this version.

The well-known Samuel Huntington published an article called “The Lonely Superpower”¹ in 1999 (during Bill Clinton's presidency) that had little to do with the clash of civilisations. He analysed US foreign policy along the following line of argument: “Neither the Clinton administration nor Congress nor the public is willing to pay the costs and accept the risks of unilateral global leadership ... The American public clearly sees no need to expend effort and resources to achieve American hegemony. In one 1997 poll, only 13 percent said they preferred a preeminent role for the United States in world affairs, while 74 percent said they wanted the United States to share power with other countries (...) Majorities of 55 to 66 percent of the public say that what happens in western Europe, Asia, Mexico, and Canada has little or no impact on their lives. (...) In acting as if this were a unipolar world, the United States is also becoming increasingly alone in the world. (...) On issue after issue, the United States has found itself increasingly alone, with one or a few partners, opposing most of the

1. Huntington, Samuel P. “The Lonely Superpower”. *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1999) (online). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1999-03-01/lonely-superpower>

rest of the world's states and peoples. These issues include U.N. dues;² sanctions against Cuba, Iran, Iraq, and Libya; the land mines treaty; global warming; an international war crimes tribunal; On these and other issues, much of the international community is on one side and the United States is on the other.”

The United States is undoubtedly a superpower and, according to widely held opinion is *the superpower*. But, in our understanding, the past fifteen years have convincingly disproved the thesis of the unipolar world. According to that thesis, after the bipolar world we find ourselves in an international system ruled by the principle of a unipolar world under the hegemony of a single superpower. This thesis, we think, has been repeatedly disproved since 1991, and even more so since 2001.

But does anyone really believe that the complexity of US security is at the centre of the presidential election debates? And yet, nevertheless, it is in there one way or another.

2. It is well known that the United States was one of the largest donors and simultaneously the greatest defaulter but, surprisingly, those payments were revised in the weeks following September 11th 2001.

WHO'S AFRAID OF DONALD TRUMP? ASIA-PACIFIC, AMONG OTHERS



Oriol Farrés

Project Manager, CIDOB

November's US presidential elections will not only decide the occupant of the Oval Office. They will also measure the extent to which a large number of Americans are daydreaming in an atmosphere like the pre-Brexit one, drunk on Trump's emphatic rhetoric that puts feelings above facts and punishment (to the establishment) above scandals and the use of unvarnished language.

Although both candidates belong to the political/business elite their profiles are extremely different: Clinton's has been a long political career (which leads to criticism of her membership of the establishment), while Trump wields the language of an outsider, as direct in its manner as it is insubstantial in its content, appealing to the irrational part of the average citizen, to their guts and their pocket. His other two attributes are his supposed success as a business magnate and, above all, a great sense of spectacle that captures public attention. Another difference between them is their relationship with truth and lies. *PolitiFact*, the best-known fact-checking website in the United States, calculated at the start of October 2016 that three out of every four statements made by Donald Trump are partially, fully or flagrantly false. At 27%, Clinton's ratio is almost the opposite, which is better, though not perfect.

It is possible that the election result will also settle the future of Washington's strategy towards East Asia – the “pivot to Asia” – as well as the United States' image in Asia and the next stage of the 21st century's most important bilateral relationship, between Washington and Beijing. Clinton supports the pivot – a policy enacted during her time as Secretary of State – and has a comprehensive view of the relationship with China. This vision does not shun a controlled rivalry between the two powers, but it also admits that a symbiotic economic relationship exists between them (which some authors have defined as “mutually assured economic destruction”). For this reason Hillary Clinton has said that the relationship does not fit “neatly into categories like friend or rival”.

For his part, Trump sees China as an unfair competitor that he accuses, among other things, of dumping and of manipulating the value of the yuan to keep it low (which, by the way, is not an up-to-date argument),

and promises a direct confrontation with his country's main trading partner. According to the Japanese finance group, Nomura, after Mexico, China would be the country second most affected by Trump's protectionism, which would also damage other Asian economies like those of South Korea and the Philippines.

In security terms, the Republican candidate intends to increase the US military presence in Asia and demand that allies like Japan and South Korea pay more of their security bill on the threat of troop withdrawal.

When it comes to North Korea, Clinton supports the multilateral negotiation and sanctions, with the necessary participation of China. Trump, for his part, has offered bilateral dialogue that sounds more like a challenge to a duel than a negotiation and has spoken of preventive attacks to stop the nuclear programme. He has also stated that as president he would force China to stop its puppet ally, a vision that errs on two counts: China would not bow to his pressure and it does have total control of North Korea, as Trump seems to believe.

What to expect the day after the election

On the one hand, a Clinton victory should not significantly change Washington's strategic focus, which will continue to administer peace and security in East Asia and promote the containment of China. This would keep the incentives for allies like South Korea and Japan to seek military autonomy low. Possibly, she would continue to defend the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – although she has distanced herself from the final text – and, in general terms, a political vision of international trade agreements subject to the United States' global leadership. For curricular consistency, human rights should be important in her political narrative, which could temporarily strain relations with China. Likewise, Clinton would probably demonstrate greater capacity for proportionality in her reactions due to her less volatile and combative nature, a positive element when facing potential future "accidents" in the South China Sea. She would, similarly, continue the fight against climate change, which would benefit the regions of Asia most threatened by environmental catastrophes.

By contrast, the scenario after a Trump victory looks more unclear and dependent on the credit earned to implement his electoral discourse, including within the Republican ranks. The literal translation of his ideas into foreign policy would have an impact on the military alliances with Japan and South Korea, which would be strongly incentivised to increase their defence autonomy, thereby transforming – for good or for bad – the regional security layout. In Japan, this would accelerate the reform of the constitution with a view to giving the country conventional armed forces, which would intensify the social and political tensions with the opposition. In Korea, anti-American voices would also grow louder, intensified by Washington's threats. A loss of US popularity in the region would be a breath of fresh air to China just as its image is in the doldrums due to its rough behaviour in the maritime conflicts.

The idea of bilateral dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang would have little chance of success beyond the symbolic. Excluding the neighbours from the negotiation table would mean losing the key to handling other conflicts in the Korean peninsula and the rest of the region in the medium term. It is also unclear that North Koreans would enter into direct negotiations with Washington before reaching a position of strength and much less with nothing in exchange.

Given his demonstrated scepticism about the threat of climate change (going as far as to state that it is a Chinese invention for its own benefit), Trump could withdraw from the Paris Agreement (COP21), thus fatally hobbling a possible joint stance by the international community. Unexpectedly, this would open up a space for China to lead the incipient climate governance structure in the near future despite – or perhaps thanks to – having made a late start in many areas.

What is certain is that the decision belongs to the voters and that, in this, the Asian community in the United States does have a voice. It is the fastest growing community in 2016 and according to surveys made by Asian Americans Advancing Justice its members define themselves as Democrats (47%) or do not identify themselves with either of the large parties. Their support for the Republicans is small (15%) and opinion of Trump is highly unfavourable (61%). This has undoubtedly been earned by his racist comments and his vision of immigration and Islam, as, it should be recalled, 62% of the world's Muslims live in Asia.

If Trump wins it is likely that a great contradiction would soon emerge: the vision of the "Great America" to which he aspires – that would become even more coercive than seductive – in a global, interdependent world like the present one, is neither easy nor much more economical.

HAS THE SHALE REVOLUTION REALLY LED TO US DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE MIDDLE EAST?



Eckart Woertz

Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

The United States' reliance on Middle Eastern oil producers has ostensibly declined in the wake of its unconventional oil and gas revolution, and the Obama administration declared in 2011 that its foreign policy would pivot towards Asia. Yet the US still deploys a majority of its aircraft carriers to the region. As oil is a global fungible commodity that affects the global economy on which the US and others rely, the Middle East is of continued strategic importance, even though US direct import dependence has declined.

US strategic interest in the Middle East dates back to World War II. The US produced a whopping 63% of global wartime supplies at that time. Its "energy tsar" Harold Ickes was concerned about peak oil and overt international reliance on US oil. In the search for alternative supplies Saudi Arabia came into focus. In 1943 it was declared "vital to the defense of the United States" and a government delegation was sent to the country. Upon its return a US official confided that oil from the Persian Gulf was indeed the "greatest single prize in all history". When President Roosevelt met the Saudi kingdom's founder, King Abdul Aziz, on a US warship in the Red Sea in 1945 this was later widely regarded as the beginning of a strategic partnership: security guarantees for oil supplies, which were badly needed for European reconstruction.

The US itself was not in need of Middle Eastern oil at that time: it only became a net oil importer in the 1970s as its domestic production peaked and was outstripped by demand growth. This augmented its strategic interest in the region. For a long time it had relied on its "Twin Pillar" policy, which used Iran and Saudi Arabia as proxies to enforce stability in the Persian Gulf. But after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 the more important pillar of this strategy fell and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was perceived as a direct threat to the world's most important oil region.

In reaction to these events the Carter Doctrine was formulated. It aimed to forestall any Soviet bid for hegemony in the region and stated unequivocally:

“Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”

In later years US involvement grew. In the wake of the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991, the US stationed troops permanently in the region. Today its Central Command (Centcom) is based in Qatar and its Fifth Fleet is stationed in Bahrain. Having grown accustomed to the informal security guarantees that come with such involvement, the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are increasingly disconcerted by what they regard as a deviation from a proven and necessary *modus operandi*.

With great dismay they watched the US giving up on their fellow autocrat Mubarak in Egypt and noticed that it was only prepared to “lead from behind” during the Western intervention in Libya. This dismay turned into measurable indignation when Assad used chemical weapons against his own people, crossing a red line with impunity that President Obama himself had set. Worse, the Iran nuclear deal led to fears that it could embolden Iranian ambitions for more influence in the region. An interview with Mr Obama in *The Atlantic* reinforced such fears. Under the headline “The Obama Doctrine” the US President suggested that Saudi Arabia and Iran should “share” the region, instead of drawing it into proxy wars in a competitive bid for regional hegemony. He criticised the negative influence of Saudi Arabia’s state religion, Wahhabism, and its proliferation in countries such as Indonesia and called Gulf countries “free riders” of US security policies. The only issues that might justify direct US intervention, he said, would be an existential threat to Israel, a nuclear Iran or Al-Qaeda activities. In a similar vein, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has argued that Saudi Arabia would not exist without US security guarantees and that it should pay for them.

Adding to the worries of Saudis is the 9/11 bill passed by the US senate in 2016, which would allow 9/11 victims to sue Saudi Arabia for alleged sponsorship of Saudi nationals who participated in the terror attacks. The bill was vetoed by President Obama as he was afraid that it could set a dangerous precedent for the United States’ own sovereign immunity rights in foreign countries. Yet Congress struck down his veto and the bill may be turned into law. It was the first time one of Obama’s vetoes had been turned down by a notoriously divided Congress. This does not bode well for Saudi Arabia, which is increasingly viewed negatively in American public discourse. Donald Trump would likely be less favourable to Saudi concerns than Hillary Clinton, although she endorsed both the bill and the Congressional veto override. Hillary Clinton is clearly the candidate of choice of many governments in the Middle East, not only because of Donald Trump’s anti-Muslim rhetoric, but also because of his reckless geopolitical statements. But how real is the pivot towards Asia and the relative neglect of the Middle East in the wake of the shale boom, really?

Instead of being an LNG importer, the US has become self-sufficient in natural gas and is developing its LNG export capacities. It has dramatically increased its oil production and is a major exporter of

refined petroleum products and Natural Gas Liquids (NGL). And yet it still is a net importer of crude oil and its refineries are geared towards handling a certain percentage of heavy and sour crudes from the Gulf. Gulf producers have lost little market share in the US: it is rather African light oil producers such as Nigeria, Algeria and Libya who have suffered. Reliance of the US on the Middle East and its main export commodity will persist also because oil is a fungible global commodity whose price is affected by developments elsewhere. If Middle East oil supplies to Asia and Europe were disrupted, it would affect oil prices in the US as well.

All of this serves as a note of caution. Middle East oil will remain important for global supplies in the foreseeable future – the US is still a net importer of crude and of sour crudes from the Gulf in particular. As a world power and guarantor of global commerce it would also be affected by oil crises elsewhere, which would affect the prices and supplies at home. US disengagement from the Middle East will likely remain limited.

TURKEY, EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL: OLD FRIENDS OR UNTRUSTWORTHY ALLIES?



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In the Middle East it is not always easy to distinguish your allies from your rivals. Rather than solid blocs there are informal alliances that are pliable depending on the issue. Also, in a matter of days, a change of alignment can cause a domino effect that rips the complex fabric of alliances and counter-alliances woven in this region. The United States does not escape this dynamic. Although an external actor, it is a power in the Middle East and, therefore, participates fully in these dances of alliances. And what has happened in recent years is a crisis of mutual trust. Washington has seen allies as sources of instability and they, in turn, have started to doubt they have the security guarantees that have sustained this alliance.

In an attempt to calm the situation, Obama is ending his mandate with promises of renewed military aid for Egypt, Israel and the Gulf states. But he also has to listen as media supporting the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, accuse the United States of disloyalty during the attempted coup d'état of July 15th 2016, and watch as the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, shows his defiance (all will recall his speech to Congress on March 3rd 2015 in which, allied with the Republicans, he criticised the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme). All of this while various traditional allies have made efforts to build bridges with Moscow and Beijing, whether to diversify their alliances or as a warning sign. It may be said that a large number of region's leaders are eager to see Obama leave the Oval Office.

It is habitual to hear members of the Republican Party say that Obama leaves behind a more unstable Middle East with fewer friends. But assuming that the responsibility fundamentally lies in the decisions taken by the White House over the past eight years is a biased, partial vision. There is broad consensus around the idea that the 2003 invasion of Iraq represented both the peak and the limit of North American power. It is also seen as the key to understanding the spiral of sectarianism devastating the region, along with the emergence of the "Islamic State" organisation as a challenge with global reach. Neither is it convenient to forget that Obama has seen his room for manoeuvre reduced by having to coexist, for much of his mandate, with a hostile Congress. Lastly, and

no less important, is the fact that the United States' alliances in the region have been weakened not only as a result of US foreign policy in the region but also because of the events taking place and the decisions made in Cairo, Riyadh, Jerusalem and Ankara.

Similarly, over the coming years, US policy on alliances will depend not only on presidential will but, also, on how the conflicts in the Middle East evolve and how the regional powers position themselves. But what is certain is that the next president of the United States will have to decide whether their opening gambit is to rebuild the alliances and return to the status quo ante or whether they opt, as the countries in the region have done, to diversify and reduce their importance. And, above all, they will have to decide on their policy framework: strong involvement in Middle East conflicts (understood as a vital issue for US strategic interests and as a test of its condition as global superpower), or containment and gradual disengagement that allows it to focus on other geopolitical spaces that are considered more decisive and concentrate its efforts on domestic issues.

A Clinton victory seems likely to favour a more interventionist policy, while Trump, whose priority would be to reduce the exposure to regional conflicts, would opt for a policy of outsourcing of responsibilities. In other words, Trump's message may be that the Middle East should sort out its own problems (with one exception: Israel). Clinton, by contrast, continues to mention issues like the rule of law and fundamental freedoms that may introduce tensions to relations with her allies. If she reaches power she will certainly nuance this appropriately, but it is likely that among those who advise her the conviction holds that the current levels of repression and the absence of reforms ensure higher levels of future instability. Trump, by contrast, does not hide his sympathy for strong leadership and drastic decisions. He has recently displayed this in his meeting with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in New York and his support for how Erdoğan has handled the attempted coup d'état.

US allies in the Middle East look at both candidates as risks, but also as opportunities. And this is the Trump paradox: despite his clearly Islamophobic discourse, leaders of Muslim countries may think they could get more support (or less criticism) from him than if Hillary Clinton wins. This is probably one of the main differences with Europe, where there is an almost unanimous preference for a Clinton victory. And it is in Brussels and the major European capitals that the belief is held that a Trump victory could raise the levels of insecurity in the Middle East and, above all, increase the defiant attitude of the regional leaders. If this coincides with a weakening of the transatlantic alliance, Europe could find itself left alone to face the threats emanating from an even more unstable Middle East.



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It is more than likely that Barack Obama will be missed whatever the outcome of the imminent presidential elections. Definitely, if the shameless bully Trump is elected, but also in the case that Hillary Clinton becomes the next president of the United States. It is true that, compared with the hopes and enthusiasm that his first election to the White House unleashed, his tenure as president has been marked by a lot of disappointment, and yet he will be remembered for his commitment to more justice as well as his awareness of the limits of American power.

But what about concrete achievements? One could focus especially on two: internally, the health reform, giving coverage to millions of citizens who had previously been left to fend for themselves in a situation of forbidding health costs; internationally, the Iranian nuclear deal.

Now that an agreement has been reached with the 2015 JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), it is difficult to fully appreciate the huge difficulties that had to be overcome in order to reach that goal. Not so much technical difficulties – though it did indeed take a lot of highly professional work in order to define all the complex details – but rather political difficulties. If one focuses on what Iran's positions were during the Khatami years (i.e. until 2005, when Ahmadinejad was elected) it is very clear that the main stumbling block was the fact that the US was not willing to admit that Iran had the same rights, as far as the enrichment of uranium was concerned, as any other country. Washington (and, following Washington, the Europeans) continued

for years sticking to a dogma: zero enrichment. Since the Iranians were not budging on that point (unacceptable for all Iranians: the nuclear issue has always been perceived as a national, not a regime issue) tensions were high, and Washington continued repeating, very ominously, that all options were on the table, meaning that a military attack against Iran was possible and conceivable. The reasons for this uncompromising hostility toward the idea of treating Iran as a "normal

country” were several: there was the historical trauma of the hostage crisis, but the most of all was the pressure of Washington’s allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia, very much aligned), who were bent on keeping Tehran in a corner if not achieving regime change. The goal of non-proliferation is a serious one, especially in the Middle East, although the glaring “Israeli exception” (Israel has an undeclared but well-known nuclear arsenal) renders it lopsided and scarcely credible.

It should be added parenthetically that the whole discourse on non-proliferation is indeed highly problematic, and not only in relation to the Iranian question. The problem is that the Non-Proliferation Treaty – NPT – is being applied in a highly unbalanced way, in the sense that the nuclear powers behave as if its only purpose is to prevent the accession of new members to the nuclear club, whereas that is only one of the three aspects of the treaty. The others are peaceful nuclear cooperation (which Iran has in vain tried to obtain from the West, being forced to accept Russian cooperation as second best) and, in particular, disarmament. The NPT has been applied as if it was designed to freeze the difference between the nuclear “haves” and the nuclear “have nots”, forgetting that the countries who have nuclear military capacity should embark on gradual nuclear disarmament. No sign of that: nuclear countries (from Russia to the US to the UK) are now starting major modernisation programmes.

The Iranian nuclear issue has not only been about international rules, but also about strategic realities. The very fact that Israel could attack Iran with scores of nuclear warheads makes the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran attacking Israel less than credible, given its evidently suicidal outcome.

The nuclear issue was instrumental for both sides: Washington (in particular the US Congress), Israel and the Gulf countries, headed by Saudi Arabia, intended to use it to prevent Iran from leaving its condition of isolation, both economic and diplomatic, whereas Tehran was defending the right to a non-discriminatory set of rules, but was also using the nuclear issue to obtain the recognition of Washington as a direct interlocutor. It is significant that when Foreign Minister Zarif returned to Iran after the signing of the JCPOA he was greeted at Tehran airport by an enthusiastic crowd chanting: “Zarif, you are the new Mossadeq” (alluding to the prime minister who nationalised the oil industry in 1951) – thus confirming the nationalist essence of Iran’s policy.

Reaching an agreement required a lot of effort on both sides: a new president in Iran, Rohani (a centrist rather than a reformist), and another centrist, Obama, in Washington, and first-class diplomatic skills on the part of Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Zarif.

Will the agreement stand after Obama leaves the White House?

A lot of people hope it will not: in the US Congress initiatives to sabotage the JCPOA started cropping up soon after the agreement was concluded. Israel and the Saudis have never reconciled themselves to the idea that Iran could have a regional role as a normal player within a realist framework of containment/dialogue.

The hardliners in Tehran have been pointing out that the economic benefits of the agreements have been few and are using this widespread disappointment to weaken Rohani, hoping that he can be defeated in next year's presidential elections.

Perhaps the agreement will be maintained in its basic contents, but –with the end of Obama's presidency – it is quite foreseeable that things will become more difficult and more tense, with the danger that another crisis will be added to the already dismal Middle Eastern situation.



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As well as incredulity, the prospect of a Trump presidency in the United States must be sending shivers down the spines of the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan. But the situation in the region is such that it will not be an easy ride under a President Clinton, either. Whatever comes, the region is likely to face tough times. But one president would unquestionably be worse than the other.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the government and the state's survival is dependent on donor budget support. The conference on Afghanistan in Brussels on October 4th and 5th was intended to provide a platform for the government of Afghanistan to set out its vision and track record on reform. For the international community, it was supposed to be the opportunity to signal sustained political and financial support for Afghan peace, state-building and development. Europe appears to still be committed to upholding the institutionally and militarily weak Afghan state, though with a repatriation deal at the expense of Afghan refugees as a quid pro quo for aid assistance. The US reiterated its commitment to continued funding levels for civilian programmes (about \$1.5 billion this year). However, it is likely that this possibility, and certainly the United States' security support in particular would be at risk under a Trump presidency. The candidate's sheer volatile unpredictability, bigoted racism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and statements on withdrawing support from NATO are creating ripples around the region. And Afghanistan would be likely to be directly affected.

The aim of the NATO summit in Warsaw on July 8th this year was for the US and its allies to raise \$15 billion to fund Afghan security forces through 2020. At the summit, which noted NATO's enduring commitment to Afghanistan, the US pledged to maintain 8,400 troops there beyond 2016 (it has requested \$3.45 billion for Afghanistan in the 2017 national budget), and President Obama also promised that he would recommend to his successor that the United States continue to seek funding for the ANDSF at or near current levels through 2020. A future President Clinton can be expected to honour these pledges. A future President Trump cannot.

Trump's mercurial and at times contradictory statements include saying that if elected on November 8th, he would demand that NATO members pay their defence contributions of 2% of GDP or else pay for their own security. This has severely rattled both NATO allies and many US national security experts – as well as the government of Afghanistan. President Ghani, under the all-too-real threat of the return of the Taliban, has recently resorted to making a controversial compromise peace pact with the notorious Afghan warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (known as the “Butcher of Kabul”), perhaps as a hedging strategy. Peace will be a tall order. Indeed, Afghanistan's dependence on the US is likely to increase, not decrease, particularly in the areas of defence and diplomacy – required to address the continued threat of terrorism and to protect them from its neighbours beyond the 2017 troop drawdown date. There is a real danger that the Afghan army could collapse without US military support and commitment. Therefore if you take away US support for the economy and security, which is likely to be needed for years to come, it does not take much to imagine the possible outcomes for peace in Afghanistan.

Either a Clinton or a Trump presidency will see Afghanistan facing the challenge of how to become less dependent on external assistance, whilst simultaneously facing an increased threat to peace and stability, and lacking the institutional mechanisms to address the issue. Clinton is likely to maintain (or maybe even increase) Obama's commitment to Afghanistan, recognising the danger of the consequences of renegeing.

Times will be tough, therefore, either way, but much tougher under a President Trump, who has openly stated that he would withdraw US troops from Afghanistan and “rebuild the USA” instead.

Pakistan

Trump's rallying cry of “America First” augurs ill for much of the world. His foreign policy is unclear, relies on sound bites, bigotry and on whipping up anti-Muslim sentiment. He has stated that he “may seek India's help on Pakistan's unstable nuclear capability”. At a time when Pakistan is becoming increasingly isolated diplomatically and regionally due to its ambivalent stance on terrorism and India's pro-active outreach to countries in the region, such a position could provoke Pakistan into an overreaction in the increasingly tense situation with India. However, Trump – true to form – has also said: “But Pakistan is semi-unstable. We don't want to see total instability. It's not that much, relatively speaking. We have a little bit of a good relationship. I think I'd try and keep it.”

Trump's other election pledge to bring back a substantial number of lost manufacturing jobs to the US could only be achieved through offsetting Asia's (and especially China's) labour cost advantage in manufacturing with a combination of tariff and non-tariff barriers. In the zero-sum “great game” of Asian powers, China's loss is India's gain. And China stands to lose big under a President Trump. This will not go down well in Pakistan (China's key ally, and India's key enemy), or in China itself.

Indeed, the Pakistani government was provoked to react to Trump in recent days over his call for the release of Shakil Afridi, the doctor who

reportedly helped the CIA hunt down Osama Bin Laden. The minister of the interior accused Trump of “ignorance”. Relations between the US and Pakistan have been improving of late, and it is rare for Pakistan to comment on US domestic politics. Trump has clearly touched a nerve.

Whilst Hillary Clinton has expressed fears of another (military) coup in Pakistan, and of terrorists obtaining control of the country’s nuclear weapons, she is nonetheless likely to continue Kerry’s policies towards Pakistan. However, she has publicly warned of the consequences of an emerging nuclear arms race, naming Russia and China, as well as Pakistan and India. She is likely to get tougher on terrorism emanating from Pakistani soil, and would likely take steps to try to calm the rising tensions between Pakistan and India, given the former’s nuclear capacity (which it is reportedly racing to increase).

In early September, prior to the attack in Uri, Kashmir, John Kerry had stated that “pretty intense blowback” made it hard for Pakistan to act against terrorist groups. But he also chastised Pakistan for failing to make a distinction between “good” and “bad” terrorists. Post-Uri, and with the escalation of India-Pakistan tensions, the US State Department has issued a direct message to the Pakistani authorities that they have a clear responsibility to exercise restraint regarding nuclear weapons and missile capabilities.

Future scenarios

President Trump: Disrupts the balance of power in Asia, shifting it in favour of India; declares Pakistan a terrorist state; cuts off US aid; Pakistan turns to China for support; the likelihood of a nuclear conflict with India increases; withdraws US financial and military support for Afghanistan; Afghanistan slides into anarchy and bloodshed, becoming a failed state; the Taliban return in force; the Daesh presence in both countries increases.

President Clinton: More of the same as under Obama/Kerry; continued support for NATO and for Afghanistan to avoid state failure and a relapse into Taliban control; but gets tougher on Pakistan’s stance on terrorism; mediates between India and Pakistan to avoid a nuclear conflict.

THE KREMLIN'S SHADOW OVER THE US ELECTIONS



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Putin is not a candidate for the White House, and yet Russia has been so present in this campaign that at points it may have appeared otherwise. It is difficult, in fact, to imagine US elections in which Russia was more present. Not only as an issue for debate between the candidates, but also as a potentially destabilising element. The hacking attacks on voter records in Arizona and Illinois, along with various Democratic Party bodies (like the National and Campaign Committees) and individual members have set alarm bells ringing. The traces of some of these and other highly notable recent attacks on institutions point unequivocally towards Russia. This has led some journalists, analysts and intelligence services to speak of insurgency and even of a Russian attempt to undermine the elections. All of this in a context marked by tension and distrust of bilateral relations heightened by the successive failures to achieve a ceasefire in Syria, the constant skirmishes in eastern Ukraine and the effect of the Euro-Atlantic sanctions for the annexation of Crimea.

The Kremlin and its media apparatus – led by RT television, the former Russia Today, and the Sputnik agency – have shown their clear preference among the candidates and, in line with their general discourse, have fed the doubts about the integrity of the electoral process. In fact, this aspect is more relevant or at least more clearly identifiable and constant when seen as part of the Russian disinformation campaigns about the United States and the West. The logic of these campaigns is not so much to promote the virtues of Russia or its allies as to question the integrity of values that the West considers their own – political systems of a democratic nature, primacy of the law, equality of opportunities, etc. In any case, Donald Trump and President Putin have paid each other compliments, with the Republican Party nominee, in particular, praising the Russian leader as representing a model of strong leadership that inspires him. No surprise, then, that those Russian media organisations, which the Kremlin uses to project influence abroad, treat him in such a friendly way.

With his off-key declarations and unpredictable character, Donald Trump has earned the distrust if not the rejection of a large part

of the Republican Party “apparatus”. During the campaign, Trump has questioned the preservation of basic pillars of US foreign policy and security such as NATO. Trump bases his criticism on the lack of budgetary commitment made by most European members (something that Hillary Clinton agrees with) but has linked this issue with the applicability of article 5 – the automatic nature of response based on the premise that an attack on one is an attack on all. The credibility of article 5 determines that of the alliance as a system of collective defence. So everything that introduces uncertainty on this point contributes to the erosion of the organisation. Trump has, similarly, suggested that if he wins he will propose the sanctions are lifted. Which is to say, the Republican candidate is (at least for the time being) in clear harmony with the Kremlin’s main demands. Nevertheless, Trump is unpredictable for the Kremlin too, and some Russian analysts remain sceptical about his agenda if he finally reaches the White House. Even so, greatest concern in the United States in terms of national security surrounds the apparent links between Russia, including its intelligence services, and some members of his team and even with Trump himself – something Hillary Clinton has certainly not missed the chance to question him on.

Nevertheless, Trump is not the candidate to whom the Kremlin’s media gives the most favourable coverage. That is Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate. Stein, whose presence on RT is habitual, endorses the Kremlin’s whole narrative on the supposed “coup” to topple the regime in Ukraine, NATO’s policy of “encircling Russia” (one of Russian propaganda’s favourite myths), the downing of MH17 as a “false flag” operation, and greets the growing presence of RT on the US media landscape as a “step towards real democracy”. The ecologist candidate has no chance of winning, but this is illustrative of the convergence on both sides of the Atlantic between certain sections of the left and the right when it comes to Putin’s Russia.

There can be no doubt that the Democratic Party’s candidate, Hillary Clinton, is the option the Kremlin likes least. The animosity is manifest. In Putin’s eyes, Clinton, in her phase as secretary of state, is directly linked with two events that are fundamental to understanding the evolution of the Kremlin and the current bilateral context: the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and the wave of protests in Moscow, both of which took place in 2011. In relation to Libya – and this goes a long way to explaining the Russian focus on the Syria question – the Kremlin insists that France and the United Kingdom committed an offence by abusing the Security Council mandate (Resolution 1973) and going far beyond the establishment of a no-fly zone to end up decisively contributing to the fall of Gaddafi. With regard to the protests, which play a central role in the ideological reconfiguration of the Putin regime, Moscow was profoundly irritated by the explicit backing given by the then secretary of state. In the Kremlin’s eyes, it all forms part of a grand plan orchestrated by Washington that seeks nothing other than a “Maidan in Red Square”, which, in turn, also explains Moscow’s reaction to the events in Kiev. All told, what is concerning is the apparent conviction of the Russian establishment that a Hillary Clinton victory would be the prelude to an open conflict. For the think tank run by Aleksandr Dugin (the influential Neo-Eurasianist ideologue) the electoral choice is nothing less than “Donald Trump or nuclear war”.

OBAMA'S LEGACY IN LATIN AMERICA: HINDRANCES FROM THE PAST, UNCERTAINTIES IN THE FUTURE



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Latin America received Barack Obama's arrival in the White House with expectation. After the two terms of the Republican George W. Bush, who categorised the continent into friends and enemies and contributed to inflaming the anti-American discourse of the left-wing governments led by Venezuela and Cuba, Obama arrived on the scene with an idealistic discourse. He proposed a new more neighbourly association inspired by the four liberties of Roosevelt's 1941 State of the Union address: freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear. But his narrative found no better predisposed audience than the Nobel Prize committee.

Speech meets reality

Some months after his swearing in, at the fifth Summit of the Americas held in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009, Obama declared that no Latin American country was now considered a threat to the United States. But his conciliatory speech came up against the refusal of the "Bolivarian Axis" (led by Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua) countries to sign the final Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain out of solidarity with the absent Cuba, subject of the US embargo. To remind him of history the Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, gave Obama Eduard Galeano's book *Open Veins of Latin America*, which tells the story of the United States' past complicity with totalitarian regimes in Latin America. Lula da Silva, the Brazilian president, whom Obama had greeted "that's my man!" at the G20 summit weeks earlier, reminded him that Latin America aspired to a new way of overcoming differences.

Obama's first official tour of the region (neighbouring Mexico apart) did not come until March 2011 and was much less historical than the White House intended. Choosing Chile, Brazil and El Salvador provoked displeasure across the Andes in Argentina. He didn't make Brazil happy either, which waited in vain for a statement in favour of its aspirations of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The Speech of the Americas, given at the Palacio de la Moneda, where president Salvador Allende fell victim to a military coup, did not dispel the sense of an

attention deficit towards the region as Obama struggled with the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and military intervention in Libya, and awaited the outcomes of the nuclear disaster in Japan and the negotiations with Iran. Obama praised the region's democratic transitions and economic growth and called for the page to be turned on the "ideological battles" of the past.

It was there that he said the words that would travel around the world years later when he announced the restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba on December 17th 2014: "We are all Americans". There, he also recognised the United States' responsibility in the region's security issues resulting from the drugs market and arms trafficking, and he committed to seeking solutions to the problems with US migration policy. But he did not make significant progress in any of these areas.

From idealism to pragmatism

The disagreement between the United States and the "Bolivarian Axis" grew with the polarisation around the coup d'état in Honduras on June 28th 2009. The radicalisation of the revolution in Venezuela and the empowerment of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) group in the Organisation of American States (OAS) blocked the room for the US to manoeuvre. Brazil, engaged in consolidating its sphere of influence in South America, promoted organisations like the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in order to counter the influence of the OAS and become the arbiter of regional tensions. Brazil also aligned itself with the BRICS in international forums like the G20, and in the Security Council on the resolutions on Libya and Syria. China, for its part, has been undermining the economic influence of the United States in percentage terms. Nevertheless, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the percentage of US global trade that is with Latin America and the Caribbean has grown in the past ten years from 19.3% to more than 22%. Although concentrated in Mexico and just a few other countries, the region remains an important economic partner for the United States, which has attempted to consolidate this with bilateral treaties. Not even the conflicts with Venezuela have led to a break in trade.

The phone tapping crisis that affected President Dilma Rousseff and the Snowden affair contributed to the growing criticisms of the Latin American left and to weakening US influence. The sixth Summit of the Americas in Colombia in 2012 – from which most presidents of the ALBA countries were absent – ended with the threat of break-up if Cuba was not included. This was a turning point that accelerated with the midterm congressional elections in 2014 when, free from electoral pressures, Obama decided to take the step of re-establishing relations with Cuba after 55 years of rupture. The seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama on April 10th and 11th 2015 was an exercise in pragmatism in the strategy with Cuba, but it did not stop the dissent. Obama once again heard voices rejecting US sanctions on Venezuelan officials accused of violating human rights. His response consisted of declaring that pragmatic rapprochement did not mean the United States was giving up on the principles of the liberal order.

The Americas: a new global playing field

Despite the remaining ideological dissent, there has been evolution in US hemispherical policy. The reinitiation of relations with Cuba and the signing of peace in Colombia (sponsored by Havana) are the two main events that illustrate Secretary of State John Kerry's claim in a speech at the OAS in 2013 that "the era of the Monroe Doctrine is over". The backyard has become a playing field for global games. But the end of the Obama presidency coincides with a change in the economic and political cycle in the region that has brought in governments of a more moderate bent. Growing instability in Venezuela after the death of Chávez, the weakening of Brazil after the fall of the Workers' Party and Macri's Argentina seem to present a scenario that is increasingly conducive to more fluid relations. This could be the case if the Democrat, Hillary Clinton, becomes the new occupant of the White House, being more of a realist than idealistic Obama. By contrast, Donald Trump's anti-Latino discourse, built for domestic consumption, is a liability in the relations that could dynamite the bridges built, even with allies as strong and strategic as Mexico.

