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**THE NEW COLD WAR? CASES: SYRIA AND UKRAINE  
(2012 -2016)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This graduation research addresses a study of the current relations between Russia and the United States in order to analyze the existence of what could be a New Cold War. For this, the participation of these powers in the respective conflicts of Syria and Ukraine has been examined, using a timeline from 2012 to 2016. The analysis starts from a narrative of the historical rivalry between Washington and Moscow, which has reached levels of tension like in the Cold War, due to the appearance in the international scene of new alliances as well as new political leaders such as the former US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

## INTRODUCTION

On January 20, 2017, amid accusations by US intelligence agencies against Russia over a supposed hacking to influence the elections in favor of the republican Donald J. Trump, he assumed office as president of the United States of America. From the beginning of his campaign, Trump announced the re-establishment of relations with Russia as one of the main objectives in his government agenda, since in the administration of George W. Bush and with greater emphasis on the presidency of Barack Obama, the links between the White House and the Kremlin, led by Vladimir Putin, suffered a deep deterioration. This is how the confrontation between Washington and Moscow has triggered what it seems to be a New Cold War, which will be analyzed in this investigation.

To talk about the Cold War is to open a portal to the historical reality that marked the second half of the twentieth century, characterized by the division of two ideologies: capitalism, represented by the United States, and communism, embodied in the actions of the Soviet Union, today Russia. However, the current alienation is not only based on the ideological factor, but it embraces the ambition for absolute power within the global scenario. In this way, both the United States and Russia have expanded to new geo-strategic places for the fulfillment of their objectives, being Syria and Ukraine the ideal battleground for opposing their interests.

The cases of Syria and Ukraine originate from internal problems that were due to the discontent of the population by political, economic and cultural factors, turning both countries into fertile ground before the eyes of Obama and Putin, who did not miss the opportunity to exert their influence on the development of the respective conflicts. This is how from 2012 it has been possible to demonstrate a dispute between these two powers in order to become the protagonists of the Ukrainian and Syrian crisis, and at the same time to be winners in this struggle for power.

For this reason, the factors that apparently determine the existence of a New Cold War will be reviewed. Therefore, aware of the importance of History, an account of the most relevant events of the Cold War, between 1947 and 1991, will be made in order to establish a background to understand the current panorama between the

United States and Russia. In addition, relations between Washington and Moscow in the years after 1991 will be studied with the aim of defining a chronology of the most important events before the beginning of the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Subsequently, the internal conflicts of each case will be studied to finally examine the participation of the United States and Russia in them.

In this way, this investigation contributes to a better understanding of one of the major problems that International Relations currently go through given the importance of the powers, since their actions generate implications in an increasingly globalized world. In addition, the research and analysis of this type of political phenomena helps to the formation of criteria that allow opening discussion spaces with the aim of contributing with possible solutions.

## **CHAPTER 1: THE COLD WAR**

### **1.1 Background**

In August of 1945, after the nuclear attacks over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world witnessed the immense capacity of destruction of the atomic bomb, giving way to the end of a sad and painful stage in the history of mankind: World War II. Paradoxically, this outcome marked the beginning of a new and singular phase in the international order, characterized by an ideological confrontation between two social systems: capitalism, which defended democracy and freedom, and communism, whose ideals focused on the rhetoric of equality. This historical period is known as the Cold War, a topic that will be addressed within this chapter by describing the most relevant characteristics of this time to analyze possible similarities and differences with the current relations between the powers that led the conflict in the past.

History has been entrusted to adjudge the victory of World War II to the bloc of the Allied Countries, formed by the United States, the Soviet Union, France and the United Kingdom. However, these countries did not have a real affinity with each other, but shared a common enemy, Germany, which once defeated meant the disappearance of what they considered the main cause of the two wars that shaped the first half of the 20th century and that left behind a series of political, economic and social consequences that are reflected until today.

Once the winning side was established, the political circumstances changed for the world and a new scenario emerged, one in which the United States confronted the Soviet Union for the absolute leadership, leaving aside certain traditional actors, such as France and the United Kingdom, which until that moment had been essential in the configuration of International Relations and that also were victorious after the military conflict that took place between 1939 and 1945.

This gave rise to the term “Cold War”, initially created by an American journalist named Herbert B. Swope, who at one of the meetings of the United Nations (UN)



Atomic Energy Commission in 1946, referred to the “Cold War” simply as a differentiating term from World War II, which had been a “hot” conflict. From that moment, especially in the United States, the term was employed in order to talk about the relations that were emerging with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Anyway, the journalist Walter Lippman would be who popularized the term by using it when he graphically titled *The Cold War* to a series of articles that he published on the subject. In the strict sense, therefore, it can be argued that it is a simple concept of reference that does not constitute any figure recognized in the International Law nor is a term officially accepted by the world diplomacy. (Ruiz Jiménez, 2005).

Therefore, it is clearly settled that “Cold War” is the term used to refer to a stage of History in which two superpowers confronted each other over the multiple differences of their ideals and that despite having been part of the same alliance in the past, mistrust prevailed, since at the end of World War II the leaders of the Allied Countries watched over their own interests rather than keeping the spirit of unity alive.

One of the most famous historians of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis, was able to identify in his book *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947*, the main motivations that pushed each country to compete over supremacy:

Internal influences in the Soviet Union – the search for security, the role of ideology, massive post-war reconstruction needs, the personality of Stalin – together with those in the United States – the need for self-determination, fear of communism, the illusion of omnipotence fostered by American economic strength and the atomic bomb – made the resulting confrontation a hostile one (Fole, 2012).

Nevertheless, the ideological difference had already been marked since October 1917 when the Bolshevik Revolution instituted the Marxist-Leninist tendency, characterized by the pursuit of equality, the abolition of private property, the

collectivization of means of production, among others. In this way, they established the new political course of the czarist Russia, which from 1922 would be known as the USSR (Russian Federation, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). On the other hand, in the United States the principles of freedom and respect for individuality prevailed since independence, in both social and economic spheres, materializing what is known as capitalism.

Thus, ideology is an internal process of self-recognition that is subsequently reflected in the international action taken by each of the parties, and which contributes to identify potential allies but also enemies. For this reason, it can be said that in the context of World War II, the United States and the USSR, despite their ideological differences, found a point of convergence for their interests, which was reflected in the alliance that allowed defeating the group of countries that formed the Axis Powers.

Despite all the reasons the United States and the USSR could have in order to justify their participation in World War II, history has always taught the world that these countries do not intervene in conflicts unless they can obtain something in return. Therefore, it is understood that their particular interests were their motivation. The purpose was to defeat the common enemy and once the mission was accomplished, and being both part of the “winning” side, confronting each other for global leadership was the inevitable second step on the road to hegemony and domination.

However, it is no exaggeration to assert that once the war ended there was the need of finding in the new international arena a leader that could handle the uncertainty that this left in Europe and in the rest of the world. This was outlined, for example, by US President Harry Truman, who at the end of 1945 stated: “Whether we like it or not, we must all recognize that the victory which we have won has placed upon the American people the continuing burden of responsibility for world leadership” (Bolshakov, 1984, p. 18).

On the other hand, but within the same context, Joseph Stalin during a speech delivered in Moscow in 1946 also recognized the victory as a synonym of

responsibility, but above all as a proof of the success that, according to him, the Soviet system had. For this reason, he expressed: “Our victory signifies that our Soviet State system was victorious, that our multinational Soviet State passed all the tests of the war and proved its viability” (Ocaña, 2003).

## **1.2 Development of the Cold War**

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union became immersed in one of the most famous non-military conflicts in History: the Cold War. However, as we go back to that period, we inevitably wonder what the trigger for the rise of this war was.

The deterioration of the fragile alliance, victorious after World War II, was underlined, in fact, once the war had ended. Stalin’s impetuous figure and his utterly biased speeches towards an idealization of the Soviet system provided the world, especially the United States, the perception that the expansion of his ideology would be the driving force behind his future decisions. This fact aroused the interest of the leaders of the Allied Countries and prompted the statements made by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in March of 1946, when he stated:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe [...], all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow... (Ocaña, 2003).

In this way, the famous term “iron curtain”, used to refer to the imaginary border that divided the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, emerged, although it was not about a physical border, but about an ideological one. It was this expression that best defined the new configuration of the international scene.

It was 1947 when Truman, despite being on the other side of the world, began to feel the European reality and its possible consequences. Europe was no longer the same:

it was weak, destroyed, demoralized and vulnerable. It was definitely living the aftermath of a lethal war, which turned it into the perfect setting for its closest neighbor, the USSR, to make it an adept in the race to impose its ideology.

In this context, during the early years of the Truman administration (1945-1953), the idea of the Soviet threat reemerged strongly among the top American leaders: the “Red Scare” that Marx himself already considered at the time when he wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* as the “the spectre of communism”. Thus George Kennan, an American diplomat based in the USSR, elaborated a proposal in order to prevent the spread of communism, which was materialized in the so-called “containment policy”, considered by many as the basis on which the United States carried out its action plan until the end of its participation in the Cold War.

This policy was aimed at preventing the passage of communism and its approach to the West; otherwise this would have meant the gradual destruction of the premises that governed the American system. It was in this way that the containment policy served as the foundation for what is known as the Truman Doctrine, named after the president of the time, Harry Truman, who in 1947 asserted: “It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 233). That is to say, it was intended to exert influence in Western Europe in order to promote the idea of a “free world” and at the same time to restrain any attempt of Soviet interference.

However, in this dispute there are certain features that deserve to be analyzed, such as the American and Soviet “good intentions” with Europe, the interventionism, the creation of alliances, the arms race, as well as the policies applied by the long list of leaders of the Cold War. All this in order to establish a precedent to provide a better understanding of the current Russian-American relations.

### **1.2.1 “Good intentions”: the Marshall Plan and the Molotov Plan**

Undeniably, Europe suffered an instability that left it in a social and human crisis in the beginning, but that as time passed became a much bigger problem because the

debt caused an economic crisis never seen before, which crossed the limits of the capacity of payment of European countries during the postwar period.

The good intentions began to emerge in June of 1947, when as an initiative of George Marshall, American Secretary of State, the United States announced the proposal of the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan, that “unlike earlier aid, which was clearly part of aggressive economic diplomacy, mostly took the form of grants rather than loans” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 244).

However, while the program was economically inclined, for the United States it represented a defense mechanism against the increase in the Soviet area of influence. This was expressed, for example, by the French academic Gerard Bossuat, who stated that “Kennan thought that the difficulties of Europe were not linked to communism but to «hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. » Nonetheless, the fight against communism was a strong reason for the American aid to Europe” (Bossuat, 2008, p. 15).

The purpose was to improve the economic situation of those European areas that had been affected by the consequences of the war, and what better way to minimize the influence of the enemy than by establishing a friendship with all the “potential” supporters of its ideology. It should be noted that the European countries that received assistance from the Marshall Plan were not those from Eastern Europe, which had already entered the Soviet sphere of influence, but only Western Europe countries benefited from the US aid.

Although the program concluded a year earlier (1951), since it was initially planned to last four years, from 1948 until 1952, during the time it was under way, the construction of large industries was achieved in Europe, such as the steel industry in the Netherlands, to cite one example. Nevertheless, the European population was not the only favored, but the program was also very helpful to the own Americans, since their economy was dynamized through the exports towards Europe or through direct investment, thanks to the recovery of the purchasing power that supposed the Marshall Plan in the postwar period.

On the other hand, it can be mentioned that the Marshall Plan involved not only the flow of American funds to Europe, but also a great influence by the United States in its culture through the diffusion of customs, new ideas and Western thoughts, which began to be adopted in response to the assistance that the superpower was giving the Europeans to prosper. This reflected the affinity that with time the Western Europe countries showed towards the United States, situation that would lay the basis so that in the near future those countries enter the American sphere.

This issue caused fear not only within the domains of some European governments but also outside them, since even among the population there was the perception that in exchange for the aid in the economic area they put their autonomy at risk. It is enough to listen to the French president of that time, Vincent Auriol, who in 1950 stated: “The Americans give us money and we are paying by giving parts of our independence; that is dreadful” (Bossuat, 2008, p. 18).

Then came the Soviet response to the Marshall Plan, which was proposed by Stalin’s Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, reason why it received his name. The Molotov Plan was presented as an alternative option to the Marshall Plan. For this reason, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), linked to the USSR, also proposed to those affected by World War II an alternative of rebuilding their systems, as long as they agreed to join the Soviet ideals, which looked forward to stop the opening and diffusion of capitalist entities.

In addition, the Molotov Plan had as its objectives the promotion and impulse of relations within the group of socialist countries so that any kind of inconvenience could be solved between them, so that their interests could be protected and to close any space that could facilitate the US approach to the Soviet area of influence.

### **1.2.2 Interventionism: Germany, Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan**

Within International Relations theories, “political realism, *realpolitik*, “power politics”, is the oldest and most frequently adopted theory” (Donnelly J., 2005, p. 29).

Realism explains the international reality based on the primary interest of States to maximize their survival, security or power (as an instrument for the other two first objectives), both from the ultimate objective of the domination of other nations (Morgenthau 1986), or the characteristics of the structure in which they are inserted (Waltz 1988) (Pauselli, 2013).

It seems then that the *realpolitik*, under which the States act motivated by their own interests with the help of the power that they show, marked the proceeding of the superpowers when intervening in other countries. This is how neither the politicians in Washington nor those in command in Moscow (although the latter with more moderation) hesitated when they tried to intervene in external conflicts, in which their respective ideological interests were threatened.

Whether under the slogan of promoting a “free world”, leading countries to “democracy”, or supporting governments related to the “revolution”, both the USSR and the United States incurred in interventionism, defined by Hedley Bull as:

The interference by a sovereign State, a group of States or an international organization, involving the threat or use of force or other means of pressure, in the domestic jurisdiction of an independent State against the will or the wishes of its Government (Rojas D., 2012).

### **1.2.2.1 Germany**

With the German defeat, the territory of that country became the “trophy” that both the United States and the USSR sought to hold, not to feel pride of what the Nazi Germany represented at one time, but for whoever was in command of the common enemy was the hegemonic country, the one that had all the power to carry out its plans of ideological diffusion and propagation. It is due to this fact that Germany, specifically Berlin, is a key and singular landmark within the Cold War.

After the Potsdam Conference, celebrated in 1945, the three top representatives of the Allied Countries of World War II (Stalin, Truman and Churchill) decided the future of Germany. To begin with, they had decided to completely demilitarize

Germany and even divisions of the territory were drawn with the help of imaginary lines that would serve to identify the areas of influence of each of the winners. However, shortly afterwards the United States managed to unite the German territory that at that moment was under its command, with the ones of the United Kingdom and France. Once this maneuver was complete, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was born.

When the Soviet Union realized what the United States had done, it proclaimed as the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the entire area that had been adjudicated to it, which would be governed by the principles of the Soviet system that were in dispute with capitalism promulgated by the West. In addition, the USSR announced the Berlin Blockade, which would later cause problems and contradictions. Problems for the population that was threatened and cornered by a USSR completely determined to limit access to food, medicine, etc., and, contradictions for the USSR itself, since inadvertently the situation led to the direct encounter with the United States and with the military and economic superiority that the Americans had demonstrated until that moment.

Due to the Berlin Blockade (1948), the United States did not hesitate to propose an alternative to the chaos that this action implied. Therefore, with the help of the United Kingdom and France, a strategy was put in place in order to provide Western Berlin with everything it needed.

The immediate use of all available airplanes was requested and in the morning of June 25, just twenty-four hours after the start of the blockade, the so-called “Berlin airlift” began and the first two-engined aircrafts «C-47 Dakota» landed at Tempelhof Airport with load for the population. The most important humanitarian air operation in History had begun (Garzón, 2013, p. 67).

These actions are considered the first signs of American supremacy in the Cold War and it was for this very reason that the Soviet Union was forced to stop its operations and declared the end of the blockade in 1949. Nevertheless, what until that moment could have meant a relief to the constant deterioration of the relations between the two powers, it became a smokescreen that concealed the true intentions of what was



approaching, one of the most representative facts of this period of History: the construction of the Berlin Wall or also denominated by the West as the “wall of shame”.

When the United States began its intervention to save West Berlin from the blockade and its implications, the situation changed for this area. The economy saw an undeniable improvement and this was reflected in a lifestyle different from that of its neighbors, who during the years they had been under the rule of the USSR had become the “poor relatives”. Although it was a single territory, until then only separated by the interests promulgated by the allies of World War II, the situations that were lived were different.

The deficiency of the Soviet system imposed in East Berlin could not compete with a society of consumption and liberties that had been established by the United States in West Berlin. The situation for the East side was unsustainable to such an extent that the shortage and the long lines to buy what they needed were more frequent with time. It was for this reason that the population had to admit a reality that motivated thousands of people to leave that area, that is to say, to migrate and mobilize as soon as possible to the side where things did not seem so difficult.

The solution to this problem, which reduced the power and authority of the USSR, came through the building of a wall that prevented the passage and mobilization from the East to the West. The construction of the Berlin Wall is a characteristic feature of the Cold War because it clearly exemplifies the arbitrary interventionism by a power that attributed itself the right to build a wall that imposed unimaginable internal borders and that for almost thirty years plunged the population into the uncertainty of knowing when the war would end for them.

The cost of the Berlin Wall was not only economic but also social, as many people died in the attempt to cross it because they had to circumvent an intense security that turned them into prisoners of what once was their own home. Nevertheless, the USSR remained in the justification of its existence since it tried to separate the German Democratic Republic from capitalism.

### **1.2.2.2 Korea**

Like Germany, Japan, the other great loser of World War II, suffered the consequences of its defeat in economic, social and territorial terms. Korea had been part of the Asian territories that were under Japanese control, but after the fall of Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union entered to occupy Korean territory, thus originating a repetition of the partition made in Berlin. The American forces exerted their power over South Korea, while the USSR took charge of North Korea, agreeing that the boundary between the two zones would be the 38th parallel. This occupation was intended to be only temporary, as a future reunification was expected.

However, when troops of both sides withdrew between 1948 and 1949, two republics were proclaimed in Korea: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north, and the Republic of Korea to the south. The leaders of the two Koreas had the support of the two superpowers respectively, being the desire to legitimize their government throughout Korean territory their greatest concern after the creation of the republics. However, little time had passed since World War II, so both the United States and the Soviet Union seemed not interested in engaging in another military conflict.

In spite of this, with Stalin's "moral" support, Kim Il Sung's North Korea made an attack on South Korea on June 25, 1950, through which it managed to advance to take possession of this territory. At that time, the United States was collaborating with the reconstruction of Japan, turning it into an industrial base, so it was relatively easy to reach Korea through Japanese territory. Thus, thanks to the authorization of the UN Security Council, the United States intervened in Korea in order to face the new challenge ahead in the international order: the spread of communism in Asia.

The immediate involvement of the United States in the Korean War allowed it to regain the territories that the North Koreans had occupied in South Korea and even to counterattack and to begin with the advance towards the north in order to take possession of a part of that zone. However, to the surprise of the Americans, Chinese troops stormed to regain control of the invaded territory in the north. Despite the

military exhaustion, the war continued until 1953 when an armistice was signed, which allowed putting an end to the armed confrontations but that failed in the reunification of Korea.

Although the US involvement in this conflict was official, the Soviet Union did not formalize its intervention. Despite this, the use of Soviet aircrafts by North Korea evidences the “hidden” participation of the USSR. For Gaddis, the two superpowers committed a “cover-up” with the intention of preventing a direct war between them, as both the United States and the USSR knew that certain attacks came from “Soviet airplanes driven by Soviet pilots, over the Korean peninsula, where they found American fighters led by American pilots” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 56).

When determining the most intense moments during the Cold War, where the world was easy prey to the fear caused by a possible nuclear tragedy, most historians highlight the Cuban Missile Crisis as the closest event to detonate a real and direct war between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the Korean War cannot be excluded.

Following this line, the statements made by Truman during a press conference held in 1950 in the framework of the Korean War, provide a justification that would make it possible to assert that this war could have also led to the use of the atomic bomb. “We will take whatever steps are necessary to meet the military situation, just as we always have”, Truman said about the Korean War. After this, a reporter asked: “Will that include the atomic bomb?” The US president’s response was overwhelming: “That includes every weapon that we have. [...] The military commander in the field will have charge of the use of the weapons, as he always has” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 47).

Curiously, General Douglas MacArthur, the military commander in the field referred to by Truman in his 1950 statement, was dismissed in 1951 precisely for proposing the use of the atomic bomb against the offensive, a fact that was condemned by the UN, organization that had given the United States permission to lead the troops that aided South Korea in the war.

It is then worth analyzing a statement that Gaddis pointed out, and is that the Korean War set the precedent that “there could be a bloody and prolonged conflict involving nations armed with atomic weapons, and that they could choose not to use them” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 48). This corroborates Hobsbawm’s idea that the superpowers did not really plan to use their nuclear weapons, since this would have meant the “mutual assured destruction”. For this reason, “both trusted one another’s moderation, even at times when they were officially on the brink of, or even engaged in, war” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 232).

In any case, the Korean War again evidenced the power struggle between the United States and the USSR, manifested through a “proxy war” within other territories. It is estimated that at least 36.568 Americans and 600.000 Chinese soldiers died during the war years. As for the Korean civilian and military population, more than a million lives were lost. (Gaddis, 2011, p. 48).

### **1.2.2.3 Vietnam**

To refer to Vietnam is to bring to mind another of the most notable events of the Cold War, which occurred in the period between 1959 and 1975. This was the only occasion on which the United States had to lower its guard and openly acknowledge its defeat to the Vietnamese, who did not allow the American front to advance and take full possession of their territory.

At the time of the colonies, France was in command of Indochina, formed by what today is known as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Near 1940, certain independence movements that would later achieve the separation of Indochina arise in the zone. Consequently, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which at that time was already under the communist regime of Ho Chi Minh, was proclaimed.

Everything seemed to go well until 1949, when France decided to support the insurgent movements of *Bao-Dai*, opponents to the ruling regime. This was carried out due to the growing political differences between Ho Chi Minh’s Vietnam and France. Therefore, France granted full recognition to South Vietnam, giving way to a

territorial partition that would later be the ideal scenario for the USSR and the United States to fight for their interests.

In 1954, the Geneva Conference was held, which established a series of conditions for Vietnam, where the division of the territory in the 17th parallel had been admitted “temporarily”. However, the requirement of temporality was not met and, on the contrary, it fed the discord that left this territory separated in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of South Vietnam, this latter directed by Ngo Dinh Diem. Thus in the north communism prevailed, and in the south an affinity with a pro-American system had become apparent.

Within Vietnam, two large military forces were established for each area: in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (north) the *Vietcong* with its political arm, the National Liberation Front, and in the south the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The irruptions and tension between the north and the south began to occur more frequently and South Vietnam began to recognize that the guerrilla of *Vietcong* was difficult to defeat, reason why it requested the aid of the United States that immediately sent a political adviser named Maxwell Taylor, who would be the forerunner in most decisions that were made.

Initially, the United States provided assistance to the ARVN in the form of military advice. However, the support became a complete supply of arms that would defend the interests in the zone and that would strengthen the legitimacy of South Vietnam. With this, the US was betting on victory without realizing the difficulty of facing the *Vietcong*, as *Vietcong's* cunning led to the construction of tunnels inside the jungle to facilitate the hidden passage of its militants. In addition, a strategy of indoctrination to the peasants was carried out, situation that the United States could not foresee and that was decisive for the conflict.

As early as 1964, American President Lyndon Johnson began his involvement in the war by supplying weapons to South Vietnam as well as by constant attacks against the communist North. The strengthening of US troops in South Vietnam was inevitable, but the situation worsened when the United States expanded its offensive by using chemical weapons such as *Napalm* and Agent Orange, lethal substances to

humans and nature. The effects were devastating for the Vietnamese population, causing burns, mutilations (evident until today) and deaths.

In spite of the American armed forces and the preparation of its soldiers, they could not overcome the great resistance of the communists of the North, who, although they faced an increasingly complicated scenario, did not give up and always went ahead to respond to a troop that knew how to manipulate weapons but not guerrillas. The news of the Vietnamese conjuncture were not foreign to the world and much less so for the American population that never approved the intervention of its country in this conflict. It was for this reason that the American authorities began to understand that the resistance of the communists and the rejection of their own country to these events would cause that this war did not constitute one more victory.

In 1968, the North and South Vietnam armies began to apply their offensive strategies more frequently and intensely, but there was no sign that the United States would believe that Ho Chi Minh's troops would give way. This demoralized the Americans who, despite repeated attempts to defeat their rivals, could not achieve what they intended. That same year negotiations began in Paris in search for peace in Vietnamese territory, where the definitive departure of US troops was required.

With broken forces, human losses, rejection of its population, an inexorable resistance and the firmness of the northern communists, the United States decided to yield to its rival. In 1973 the negotiations were concluded and an agreement was reached, which would finally put an end to many years of war, and that also stipulated the US withdrawal from South Vietnam. With this historic fact, South Vietnam saw itself without the protection of who until then had been the defender of its interests and who faced the guerilla in its name. Due to this, in 1975 communism achieved its victory by advancing to the south, proving that any attempt by the United States was in vain and that from that moment it would no longer be about North Vietnam or South Vietnam but about the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam, proclaimed in 1976.

With the triumph of communism, the USSR added an additional adept to its ideology and set aside what the United States had tried to achieve in Vietnamese territory.

This was one of the few times in which the American power was subjected to a series of factors that did not allow it to win. After all, it was a contest involving a guerrilla group that finally imposed its ideals, thus achieving a victory for the communist bloc.

#### **1.2.2.4 Afghanistan**

The disputes raised in the “Third World” during the Cold War and in the aftermath of this have not been, at least for the West, subject to study and dissemination as it was the wars in Korea and Vietnam. Despite this, paying attention to what happened in the countries of the Far East, Middle East and Africa in the course of that time is the key to understand the roots of the current conflicts in these regions. In this sense, one of the most significant military clashes, or at least the best known in the Far East in the context of the Cold War, is the War in Afghanistan.

The Soviet Union had begun to weaken both in the economic aspect, because of the high cost of the arms race with the United States, as in the political, because satellite countries of the USSR, those that were within its sphere of influence, were increasingly taking distance from Moscow. Despite this, at the end of the seventies, Afghanistan provided the enabling environment so that the Soviet Union got involved, in words of Hobsbawm, “for the first time since the Second World War in a conflict outside its frontiers” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 450). And it is that as mentioned previously, Korea and Vietnam wars represented for the Soviets an unofficial intervention since its troops were not deployed in those conflicts.

In 1978, a communist group gave a coup in Afghanistan. Mohamed Daoud, Afghan leader at the time, was overthrown by a group of communist insurgents in the framework of the Saur Revolution, led by Nur Mohammed Taraki, who proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Different from the revolutions unleashed since the times of Lenin, whose motivation consisted in the oppression of classes, the communist struggle in Afghanistan did not face a class resistance but a religious one. This could be justified in part by the fervent attachment that this region keeps towards their beliefs, aspect that confronts the Marxist rhetoric of rejection of religion.

There was the perception that the communist ideals of the new leaders of the country would modify the traditional system that had prevailed in Afghanistan, a system in which the Islamic religion penetrated every aspect of the life of its population, including the political sphere, situation that continues to this day. Because of this, the new government did not have the acceptance of the Afghan population, which would incite the formation of a strong enough opposition to achieve internal instability of the country, causing a civil war. This discontent was greatly recognized by the Afghan government:

Do you have support among workers, the inhabitants of the cities and the small bourgeoisie? – The Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin asked the Afghan Prime Minister Nur Mohammed Taraki, in a secret phone conversation-. Is there still anyone by your side? Taraki's response was horrifying: "There is no active support from the population. It is almost entirely under the influence of Shia's slogans that incite to follow them instead of infidels" (Gaddis, 2011, p. 182).

The Soviet Union then took the decision to intervene in Afghanistan, sending its troops at the end of 1979. But, if the United States had Vietnam, the USSR had Afghanistan. The Soviet forces found the resistance of the insurgent "*Mujahedin*", Muslim guerrilla groups that began to receive economic, military and arms support from the United States and other allies such as Saudi Arabia. The role that Pakistan played within this conflict also deserves attention since the Pakistani territory served as a platform for the shipping of weapons from the United States with destination to Afghanistan.

Thus, the formation and growth of rebel groups funded and armed by "friendly" governments had as result the little success of the USSR, which involved economic losses in the middle of a not so encouraging economy. On the other hand, in addition to the support given to the insurgents, the United States, took other measures against the Soviet action.

(Washington) imposed an embargo on the grains and the shipping of technology to the USSR, asked for a significantly increase in defense expenses, announced that the United States would boycott the Olympics of Moscow, and reported the



invasion of Afghanistan as “the more serious threat to the peace since the Second World War” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 184).

But the protruding aspect of the War in Afghanistan is the formation and growth of fundamentalists guerrilla groups, supplied with weapons in the majority of cases by the United States, aspect that would make them so powerful that they could even tip over against his former allies. Such is the case of Al Qaeda, whose former leader Osama Bin Laden was actively involved in the War in Afghanistan, coming to be regarded at the time as an American ally. It can also be mentioned the Taliban, who later would continue sowing terror both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. So, it can be said that this was the starting point for the emergence of extremist groups that have spread around the world, thus creating “the first international Islamic brigade of the modern era” (Faraminan Gilbert & Pardo de Santayana and Gómez de Olea, 2009).

In this context, the inevitable retirement of troops of the USSR was reflected in the Geneva Accords of 1988 that made the Soviet forces evacuate the Afghan territory in 1989. Once again it was shown that the wars fought outside the two superpowers left destruction in other countries, being the social aspect one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged factors. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union ended its intervention in the country, in the following years the chaos continued reigning, from which the population has been unable to retrieve.

Afghanistan gives many examples, perhaps too many, of the difficulties that must be faced when a power uses military force in a country with a hostile geography, very complex elements in the social and cultural sphere and a long tradition of resistance to foreign military presence (Forigua-Rojas, 2010).

### **1.2.3 A bipolar world: NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the enemies and allies**

During the first two wars of the 20th century, the diversity of the actors included the traditional powers of the old continent, Asian empires of China and Japan, as well as the United States. Even some Latin American countries expressed their position regarding the conflicts, with higher grade during the Second World War, especially

by joining the United States. Hence, the term “world war” was used to refer to conflicts where there was participation from all over the world.

Contrary to what happened during the two world wars, the scenario of the Cold War had two opposite poles, the United States and the USSR, suggesting a new configuration of the world system: the bipolarization of the world. In this way, the next forty years were marked by a structure where it could not be conceived an American or Soviet absence, since the public interest was directed towards the struggle between these two systems. However, it can be mentioned as exception the crisis of the Suez Canal in 1956, which was the last try of France and the United Kingdom in order to gain international attention and keep their colonial power.

Even though the United States and the Soviet Union were the main actors in a bipolar world, they formed coalitions that represented a shield to face the other bloc and also to guarantee the spread of their ideologies. In this way, the creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact contributed to the constitution of two antagonistic blocs that confronted each other in the Cold War, becoming the basis on which different alliances were solidified. However, those who preferred to stay neutral formed the Non-Aligned Movement, same that endures to the present day.

It was the year 1949 when the need for a greater power in relation to the security and defense of the United States and its allies materialized through a multilateral treaty. The American aid to Europe had focused on economic reconstruction. However, the fear of expansionism by the Soviet Union remained dormant and was increasing, especially after the Berlin Blockade. In this way, on April 4, 1949 it was signed the North Atlantic Treaty between “Belgium, Canada, Denmark, USA, France, Netherlands, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom” (Salvat Editores, 2004, p. 11374). The political-military alliance evolved towards the creation of an institution that carried out the stipulations of the treaty: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Thanks to the institutionalization of the agreement, the United States could strengthen its bloc of allies, which meant a break for the Americans because thanks to this union they could then proceed to the installation of air bases in Europe in

order to deal with any eventuality generated by the Soviet action. In subsequent years other States joined NATO, thereby generating a wider cohesion for the American benefit.

In regard to Soviet operations aimed at the strengthening of alliances, the first strategy was more based on support to communist regimes that were gaining ground in Eastern Europe than in confronting the American threat. Despite this, on May 14, 1955 the Warsaw Pact was signed, which was the Soviet equivalent to the treaty signed by the United States and its allies in 1949. Between the contracting countries were the USSR, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, Hungary, Albania, Bulgaria, Poland and Czechoslovakia (Salvat Editores, 2004, p. 15482).

Contrary to NATO that still lingers, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved at the end of the Cold War, mainly because in the last years of the USSR the discontent of its satellites was so significant that even caused the changing sides of some of them at the end of the conflict. A clear example of this is the joining to NATO of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (part of the former Czechoslovakia) at the end of the century.

However, the existing frictions within the Soviet side in its final stage were not a surprise for the USSR. Apparently, in the game between allies and enemies the Soviet Union had no greater advantage compared to the United States because it lacked a sufficiently consolidated bloc, tough and loyal to Moscow and its leaders. Perhaps the most representative cases of this situation are Yugoslavia and China, communist governments to which the USSR could not convert into puppets of his power even when it was its desire.

He (Stalin) was almost certainly surprised in 1948 when the Yugoslav communist leadership, so loyalist that Belgrade had been made the headquarters of the reconstructed Cold War Communist International (the Communist Information Bureau, also called COMINFORM) only a few months earlier, pushed their resistance to Soviet directives to the point of an open breach, and when Moscow's appeal to the loyalty of good communists over the head of Tito met with next to no serious response in Yugoslavia. Characteristically, his reaction was to extend

purges and show-trials to the remaining satellite communist leaderships (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 395).

In relation to the “Third World”, it should be noted that while the countries classified under this heading were not considered as satellites for the powers, the slogan of struggle for an equitable world, without oppression of classes and with a strong modernizing character attracted the leaders who had the task of governing the new States after the decolonization.

In this way, the bipolarization left no space for the possible rise of a new power, since at the end of the Cold War there could only be one winner between the two superpowers, given the duty of directing the world that was “granted” to them after the Second World War.

#### **1.2.4 The arms race**

The rivalry between the United States and the USSR during the Cold War was mostly ideological. However, that was not an impediment to expand the limits of their dispute in order to determine who had a greater scope in terms of creation, production and distribution of weapons, as well as technological advancements at that time. For this reason, they undertook an arms race to obtain the hegemony also in this area.

By 1945, the United States had already incurred in the use of the atomic bomb, causing a fatal outcome for the locations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that were the victims of this event. But this was not enough reason to make their ambitions end, on the other hand, the United States continued with the process of innovation of nuclear war material. Four years later, in 1949, the Soviets obtained their own atomic bomb, event that as Stalin said, was achieved thanks to the fact that they were able to “take advantage of Russian and Nazi scientific talent and all the resources of the security forces of the KGB to achieve a fast end to the American atomic monopoly” (Szulc, 1984).

The fact that the USSR entered to the arms race with the development of its atomic bomb was a shock to the United States, since initially it underestimated the expertise and scope of the Soviets, who quietly had already taken their first steps to compete in the international arena. Tad Szulc confirmed it in an interview about the USSR as an arms power, stating that “the Russians already had three centers for nuclear research in the early years of the thirties, two in Leningrad and one in Kharkiv, and that Soviet scientists kept close relations with Western researchers” (Szulc, 1984).

#### **1.2.4.1 Missile Crisis**

When telling about the memories of the Cold War, the Missile Crisis is considered the point where history perhaps would have taken a different course. This event exposed the mistrust in the relations between the two superpowers, when in October of 1962 Soviet missiles heading towards American territory were found in Cuba, while in Turkey there were found American missiles in direction to the USSR. In that moment it was known that an attack could have been possible and in case this happened it would end the “coldness” characteristic of this war, risking the stability of the whole world, which would be destroyed.

In Cuba, already with Fidel Castro at the power and with an ideology completely related to the Soviet regime, it was established a strategic military base to keep the USSR missiles, aspect that in words of US President John F. Kennedy, represented “an explicit threat to the peace and security of America” (Graell Santacana, 2012). This fact was understood by the United States as the rupture of the commitment and the word of Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin’s successor, of no intervention or approach to American territory in any way. However, Kennedy ran a spying operation in Cuban territory, where many photographs that contradicted what Khrushchev had ensured long ago were taken.

The photos revealed a flagrant contradiction: the missiles were in Cuba, they belonged to the Soviets, they had an offensive nature and could reach a target located at a distance of 1,100 nautical miles. In other words: Washington, Dallas, Cape Canaveral or St. Louis were targets for an attack of dreadful consequences (Graell Santacana, 2012).

Kennedy's policy sought options to avoid World War III, concept already handled at that time. Therefore, the United States thought about the idea of a blockade which would prevent the passage and the arrival of Soviet ships to Cuba, from where according to Kennedy, they were brewing an attack against American territory. However, the USSR and the United States began a solid negotiation in which the Soviet representative requested the withdrawal of the US missiles deployed in Turkey, while the American also aspired to the Soviet military dismantling in Cuba. The situation was increasingly hostile between the two superpowers that during this time they experienced the possibility of contemplating a war with no precedents.

Determining who would be the first to give up became a difficult question to answer. However, Khrushchev accepted Kennedy's proposal, establishing the withdrawal of the Cuban missiles and the promise of not invading the island. Kennedy's response also revolved around the US withdrawal of the missiles in Turkey. This generated expectation in the international community that from every corner began to identify with the events of the moment and to take side for one of the two opposing blocs.

#### **1.2.4.2 The Salt Agreements (*Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*)**

A decade later, in 1972, with Nixon and Brezhnev in command of the US and the USSR respectively, the SALT Agreements were signed. These agreements had been the result of negotiations to limit the number of anti-ballistic missile systems and other offensive weapons. The first block of these agreements is known as SALT I (*Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*), which, as Gaddis mentions, "reflected the recognition by both superpowers that a continued arms race could only make them less secure" (Gaddis, 2011, p. 176).

Despite the momentary pacifism generated by the agreements, there were still some gaps that did not allow to fully guarantee peace and much less the disarmament of the two superpowers.

They (SALT I) did not impose restrictions on long-range bombers, in which Americans enjoyed long-term superiority, or the short-range bombers and missiles

they had placed on aircraft carriers and with NATO allies, or on the nuclear capabilities of England and France (Gaddis, 2011, p. 177).

Although the SALT I Agreements had been the beginning of a new period of conversations that denoted tolerance, at least in words, this was not enough to equate the differences between the Soviets and the Americans. In some cases the agreements left the United States in advantage, while in other aspects they favored the USSR. Finally, the situation remained complicated but at least with the intention of improving it, and for this reason “now the negotiators would have to find a way, nevertheless, to impose equivalent limits on arms systems that were not equivalent” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 177). For this purpose in 1979, the SALT II Agreements were adopted as a SALT I evolution, establishing the type and the quantity accepted for the production of intercontinental nuclear missiles.

The SALT II Agreements tried to ensure a tolerant and respectful coexistence, as far as possible, between the USSR and the United States. US President Jimmy Carter even went so far promising that he would do everything possible to “move towards the full elimination of nuclear weapons” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 178). However, Carter's initial intentions could not be met because with the problem that was looming in Afghanistan, everything that had been worked for was abandoned. Carter's change in his position of wanting to end the Cold War was radical, to the point that he decided to withdraw the SALT II Agreements from the Senate.

Finally, with the rise to power of Ronald Reagan, the United States applied a new foreign policy that did not agree with what the SALT Agreements had promoted, shortening any attempt to resume the negotiations. This was due to Reagan's strong position in order to replace the SALT Agreements by what he called START (*Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*).

### **1.2.5 The leaders of the Cold War: From Truman and Stalin to Reagan and Gorbachev**

The role played by the leaders from both the USSR and the United States during the Cold War gives the guidelines to answer many questions that may arise around this

time, because when undertaking plans of action against the enemy, the combination of ideology and personality of the leaders determined the success or failure of the strategies employed.

Thus, from the time of Stalin in which the Soviet Union became involved in the Cold War, until the end of the conflict in which Mikhail Gorbachev contemplated the inevitable fall of the USSR, the doctrines, policies and tactics proposed by those who were in command developed in a changing sphere, moving from moments in which the chaos reigned to those where the “good” coexistence was such that a possible solution could be expected. From the American perception exactly the same happened. The years from the Truman administration to “Reaganism” were a constant change in the way in which relations with the USSR were being shaped.

Under the leadership of Truman (1945-1953) and his successor Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961), Americans lived through the most stressful moments, as World War II had only recently ended, plunging the world into a still unsettling atmosphere. The occupation of Germany as well as the Korean War and the beginning of the conflict in Vietnam further complicated the relations with the USSR, which suffered a loss in the internal sphere from which it was difficult to recover: Stalin’s death in 1953. For Hobsbawm, “the political breakdown of the Soviet bloc began with the death of Stalin in 1953, but especially with official attacks on the Stalinist era in general” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 396).

Stalin’s administration, characterized by strong repression of opponents and dissidents of Bolshevik ideology, is remembered in History as one of the most frightening in terms of human rights. This, along with the despotism towards its satellites, could have been one of the reasons why the USSR lost power within its own bloc. However, it was his steadfast personality that was able to cope with the beginning of the Cold War, because perhaps under another direction, the United States would have attained supremacy immediately without the need of a prolonged contest for power.

After Stalin’s death, the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (1958-1964) and the American President John F. Kennedy (1960-1963), despite some discrepancies



caused by the Missile Crisis, instituted a new phase in their relations, based on “peaceful coexistence”, which had been threatened by the accelerated arms race. This is known as “*détente*”.

This new period would extend until the end of the seventies, when the USSR invaded Afghanistan, thus generating an involution to what appeared to be the road to peace. In any case, during the years that it lasted, the *détente* allowed an economic approach between the superpowers. However, Hobsbawm states that this situation was negative for the USSR since the Soviet economy was not prepared for an interaction with capitalism because it was notoriously less dominant. Thus, “the paradox of the Cold War was that what defeated and in the end wrecked the USSR was not confrontation, but *détente*” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 255).

Regarding John F. Kennedy, in foreign policy matters his participation in the Cold War was a success. It must be remembered that during the Missile Crisis, faced with the “threat” posed by the Soviet arsenal in a place as close as Cuba, Kennedy’s negotiating capacity prevented a nuclear war. If the United States at that time had had a less prudent leader, History would be different.

On the other hand, Leonidas Brezhnev (1964-1982) assumed power in the USSR after the departure of Khrushchev. His period, the longest after the Stalinist administration, was a contradictory behavior in times of *détente*. A short time had passed since the Missile Crisis, which is why continuing the arms race was the least viable way to keep the spirit of *détente* alive. Despite this, Brezhnev increased his arsenal to such an extent that “as a result, the balance of military strength between the two superpowers moved in a favorable direction for the Soviet Union” (Bialer, 1986, p. 46).

The US leaders during the period of *détente*, with the exception of Kennedy, did not play a transcendental role in the context of the Cold War. Therefore, the administrations of Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Carter do not appear as keys for the course of this conflict. However, the overview would be about to change with the arrival of Ronald Reagan to the US presidency in 1981.

Seweryn Bialer, a well-known “Sovietologist” during the Cold War, argued that the fact that the Soviet Union had reached the United States in terms of armament generated “psychological trauma” for the American population.

This trauma, he writes, provoked two kinds of reaction. The first was to try to structure USSR-US relations based on combining collaboration, emulation and regulation of the arms race. This was called *détente*. When for many reasons the attempt failed, “Reaganism” came. This second reaction represents the attempt to consolidate US security and forget the alluded trauma by inflating the military potential, exaggerating the anti-Soviet rhetoric of the leaders in favor of it and taking a tough stance towards the Soviet Union (Bolshakov, 1984, p. 23).

Ronald Reagan had come to power with the conviction that the war had been prolonged for a long time, so it was necessary to end the *détente* so that finally the United States could be proclaimed victorious, incurring in an anticommunist “crusade”. Thus, long before his candidacy was officially established, his position on this subject was already stated: “Is not that what a farmer does with his turkey, until the day comes to eat it in Thanksgiving?” (Gaddis, 2011, p. 188).

It is important to remember that the Vietnam War meant the greatest defeat for the United States during the Cold War, which generated a deep sense of humiliation for the Americans who saw in Reagan the hope of claiming, since from the beginning of his administration he expressed that “humanity is writing the last pages of the chapter of its history called communism” (Bolshakov, 1984, p. 3).

Four years after Reagan’s rise, Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the power of the Soviet Union and with a reformist plan, aware of the internal political cataclysm that the bloc was suffering as well as of the economic stagnation in which the USSR was due to high arms spending, he started reforms aimed at reconstruction, a policy known as “*perestroika*”. Thanks to this an improvement in relations between the powers could be given, because the Soviet Union seemed to finish its isolation from the West. However, internally the policy failed, a situation that was reflected in the discontent towards the government, triggering the departure of Gorbachev.

In any case, the figure of Gorbachev, considered by many communists as weak, was decisive in ending the Cold War. From the outset he had demonstrated his intentions to end the conflict, so he began negotiations with Reagan, as “it was probably easier for a Soviet leader to take this initiative than for an American, because the Cold War had never been seen by Moscow in the crusading terms common in Washington” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 253).

### **1.3 The end of the age**

In establishing the reasons that led to the end of the Cold War, it could be pointed the loss of Soviet influence on its satellites, the fall of the Berlin Wall which consequently led to the reunification of Germany and the disintegration of the USSR because of reformist pressures.

By 1985 Gorbachev received a Soviet Union whose authority over its satellites had declined significantly. The fact that the economies of these countries did not accord the same standard of living as the West to its inhabitants, coupled with the low diversification of their exports, since they were mostly exporters of *commodities* such as gas and oil, meant a clear delay for them, which led to widespread disappointment. Thus, “between August of 1989 and the end of that year Communist power abdicated or ceased to exist in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, with no single shot, except in Romania” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 482).

The communist defeat in the German Democratic Republic allowed the reunification of Germany by October 3, 1990. However, the event that had taken place in the present German capital a year earlier is perhaps one of the most emotive and symbolic among all the events of the Cold War: the fall of the Berlin Wall. The night of November 9, 1989 will be recorded for History as the day on which the USSR touched the reality that had feared: the Soviet system would soon see its end.

Likewise, within the USSR the economic overview was not very encouraging. The time before Gorbachev was known as “the era of stagnation” due to the high military spending that severely damaged its finances. It should be mentioned that the

discontent came not from the masses but from the reformist wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) itself.

The common inhabitants of the USSR were at ease in the system (Zinoviev, 1979), that provided a guaranteed livelihood and comprehensive social security at a modest but real level, a socially and economically egalitarian society and at least one of the traditional aspirations of socialism, Paul Lafargue's "right to idleness" (Lafargue, 1883) (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 474).

Concern for reforms to improve the economic situation of the Soviets would soon move to the political sphere. Some time ago, in fact since the Stalinist era and especially after the death of Stalin, that within the same CPSU the spirits began to modify that extremely centralized and bureaucratic system, whose power was shown by a single party. In this sense, it would be Gorbachev himself who proposed, in addition to *perestroika*, the policy of *glasnost* (transparency), which would imply greater freedom of information. However, his political figure would not be strong enough to maintain such centralization, reason why the power that Moscow formerly held over other members of the USSR would gradually decline.

On the other hand, after several attempts that were ultimately unsuccessful and unfinished in the field of arms, the signing of the Washington Treaty was given, in which the possibility of true nuclear disarmament of the two powers was raised, with the aim of guarantee peace, security and stability to the whole world. In addition, the START negotiations continued and concluded with George Bush (father) in command of the US.

Under these conditions, nationalist groups began to form in the Soviet republics in 1988, and these, together with the radical reformists, whose most representative figure was embodied in Boris Yeltsin (Russian leader), would be laying the groundwork to the official disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on December 25, 1991. This change in the Soviet *status quo* meant its decisive weakening at the international level, this dissolution was considered as the milestone that marked the end of the Cold War.

With the impending fall of the USSR, the United States claimed the victory of an ideological race that had taken over the international arena for more than forty years. However, it would be unfair to award the American victory to its own action, because it would be the internal weakening and conditions of its system that would destroy the Soviet Union and its communist rhetoric. Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new world order in which the United States relegated the USSR to the background, becoming the first world power and exerting the much-desired hegemony.

## CHAPTER 2: FROM THE OLD TO THE “NEW COLD WAR”

### 2.1 A new world order

In the summer of 1989, two years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama, an American author, wrote an article entitled *The End of History? Was American capitalism finally defeating Soviet communism?* It seemed that the fall of the USSR and the extinction of the system that had ruled that territory for over seventy years were nothing more than a time bomb. However, the possible implications that this new scenario would bring generated an environment of uncertainty not only for Moscow and Washington but also for the whole world.

Fukuyama asserted that the world was not facing the end of the Cold War but facing the end of History. The triumph of the West implied the victory of political and economic liberalism, which in turn meant “the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama, 1989).

These notions came from the economic reforms that the Soviet Union was going through thanks to Gorbachev's *perestroika*, as well as the reforms that began in the late 1970s in China under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping with the aim of transforming its system into a market economy. Everything seemed to indicate that the leaders of these countries had finally accepted that the Western system provided better living conditions for its inhabitants, upholding Fukuyama's thesis. Two years later, in December of 1991, the Soviet Union finally dissolved, thus establishing a new world order.

The traditional notion of the world order refers to an agreement explicitly or tacitly set between the dominant powers, generally after a major conflagration, about the role each of them has to play and the principles, laws and institutions that will govern the relations between all the actors in the global scene during a determined period (Palacios, 2011).

In this way, the new world order established in the post-Cold War era was determined by the dominant role of the United States, which from then on could play as the only power free from any threat by any other international actor, becoming the undisputed leader of the world stage, or at least that was the interpretation of many at that time. Thus, the bipolarization of the world that had characterized the Cold War was transformed into the idea of the “unipolar moment”, promulgated by Charles Krauthammer. For this writer, the United States was “the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself” (Krauthammer, 1990).

However, despite conceptions about the end of History and the unipolar moment that claimed the American victory and placed the country as the supreme world leader, History neither came to an end nor the unipolar moment prevailed for eternity. Other factors that seemed to have been left out of the new world order were manifested on the scene in later years, again altering the geopolitical map that had been enthusiastically set after the collapse of communism.

In the first place, the phenomenon of globalization contributed to the emergence of new powers in the economic, technological and industrial field. That is the case of countries in the Asian region such as China and Japan, whose accelerated economic growth positions them today as important competitors for the United States. In addition, regional and non-regional integration processes would result in the emergence of supranational entities with strong political and economic weight in the international arena, such as the European Union (EU) and the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), to cite two examples.

On the other hand, despite attempts to reduce nuclear proliferation after the Cold War, new players became part of the so-called “nuclear club”, including Iran and North Korea. In this regard, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS)* published in 2007, following the conduct of nuclear tests in North Korea, a report in which it stated: “We stand at the brink of a Second Nuclear Age. Not since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has the world faced such perilous choices” (Campbell, MacKinnon, & Stevens, 2011, p. 357).

The Cold War had left as a balance a world completely saturated with weapons, thus giving rise to what Krauthammer called *Weapon States* to refer to those countries possessing large amounts of weapons. For this reason, he suggested that the post-Cold War era should be called “the era of weapons of mass destruction”. Nevertheless, the states were not the only ones that during the Cold War and after the end of the conflict achieved a broad acquisition of arms. Insurgent groups have also played an important role in this regard, since thanks to their armaments they have gained ground as international actors, because although their causes and actions are not framed in the norms of International Law, these have generated worldwide consequences, as it will be seen later.

Therefore, it is clear that although the United States was for many years, after the fall of the USSR, the only hegemonic power, the unipolar moment was ephemeral. Over time, other actors weakened its *status quo* on the international stage, whether in the political, economic, technological, industrial or military field, thus forming a multipolar world.

## **2.2 From the USSR to Russia: the newborn democracy**

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the future of the fifteen republics that had once formed it was totally uncertain. Although new and better times were predicted, the Soviets knew of no other form of government than the authoritarian one, for both in the time of the Czarist Empire and during the long communist period, the population had lived in a system of repression that was completely unaware of democracy. Although expected, the dissolution of the USSR had caused shock among the population.

In Russia, the Soviet political center, the reformist Boris Yeltsin, who until 1990 had been an active member of the Communist Party and later became one of the most fervent supporters of Gorbachev’s departure, took power, becoming the first president of the Russian Federation. The future of Russia would depend on that crucial moment in which the political and economic direction of the newborn democracy would be decided.



The urgency of forming a government team that could direct Russia towards a real change led Yeltsin to call a group of Russian economists who were related to the ideas of Milton Friedman's economic liberalism, known as the "Chicago Boys", who would convert the country in a "liberal democracy". The first economic reforms came a week after the departure of Gorbachev. The plan included the liberalization of prices, the implementation of free trade policies and the privatization of the large number of public institutions in Russia (Klein, 2007, p. 223).

In her book *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein suggests that during periods of instability and public shock, whether due to natural disasters or predetermined circumstances, liberal governments take advantage of the situation to pass laws or economic reforms that would not be accepted by the population if there was no such shock. According to Klein, this is what happened in Russia.

In order for Yeltsin to solve the Russian economic crisis, the Parliament granted him a year of special powers. Thus, Yeltsin could approve laws by decree without the vote of the Parliament. However, the economic experiment carried out did not give the expected results. Instead of assuring a better quality of life to its inhabitants, what happened was that the middle class lost a large amount of its savings due to the weak value of money and the crisis could not be remedied. Because of this, in March of 1993 the Parliament decided to end the special powers granted to the president.

But not only were the promises of change in economic matters vanished for the Russians. The promised democratic system was overshadowed when Yeltsin, months after the Parliament's decision, declared its dissolution, which resulted in the majority decision of the parliamentarians to remove him from power. By October of 1993, the situation was aggravated when a wave of civil protests prompted Yeltsin to order the armed forces to take over Parliament, so the legislators had to leave the building, being out of the way for the economic program to be applied without impediment. Shock therapy was then induced again: "the communist state was simply replaced with a corporatist one" (Klein, 2007, p. 231).

The conflict unleashed between the legislative and the executive power apparently came to an end when a new Parliament was elected in December and a new

constitution was approved. Later, in spite of his low popularity and his failure to take Russia towards modernization and democracy, Yeltsin gained the presidential elections of 1996, remaining in power until the end of 1999.

On the other hand, because of the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the corruption that took root in the country, former Communist Party members, foreign investors, members of the government and even Yeltsin and his family increased their fortunes, giving rise to a new social class in Russia: the oligarchs. Nevertheless, the economic and political difficulties that Russia was undergoing in its transition to democracy were not the only concerns of the government. Internally, independence groups began to generate tension, especially in Chechnya, which caused a war between 1994 and 1996 and later between 1999 and 2009.

The internal chaos of Russia did not allow the country to regain its strong position, characteristic of the Cold War in the international arena. On the contrary, the American victory left the Russians practically out of the world panorama during Yeltsin's years. Anyways, Russia already had enough problems to engage in new battles outside its borders.

However, this situation would be about to change in 1999. In August of that year, Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister, who until then had served as Director of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. It was clear that Yeltsin had seen in Putin a figure imposing enough to meet the internal and external challenges of Russia. He transmitted this idea when announcing Putin's appointment:

I have decided to now name the person who is, in my opinion, able to consolidate society and, drawing support from broadest political forces, to ensure the continuation of reforms in Russia. He will be able to unite around himself those who are to renew Great Russia in the new 21st century (RT, 2015).

But Putin was ahead of the renewal of Russia sooner than planned. Yeltsin, without achieving his promises, resigned on December 31, 1999, giving the power to Putin, who was proclaimed interim President of Russia. The Kremlin welcomed the new millennium with a different leader, who would alter the pre-established world order.

### 2.2.1 “Putinism”

With the resignation of Boris Yeltsin, presidential elections were called for March of 2000, where Vladimir Putin claimed himself as president of the Russian Federation after winning the elections. Likewise, in 2004 he was re-elected to hold the position for four more years. In 2008 he did not present his candidacy since he could not constitutionally seek a third consecutive presidential term, but he expressly supported candidate Dmitry Medvedev, who was victorious in the elections. In spite of this, Putin did not retire from Russian politics, since during Medvedev’s administration he held the charge of Prime Minister. Four years later, Putin was elected for a third term until 2018, as from the 2012 election the presidential term would extend for six years.

To bring Putin's Russia to discussion involves an analysis of multiple factors, both internal and external, which many call “difficult to understand” due to the very complexity of the Russian system and its geographical location, far removed from the reality of the common citizen of the West. However, the features of this environment foster an interest in understanding a country that in less than a century experienced three different periods of political organization: the Czarist Empire, the Soviet Union and finally the Russian Federation.

To begin with, Russia has been, since before achieving its independence, a *sui generis* subject because of its location on both the European and Asian continents, which has created uncertainty as to the sense of belonging of its citizens. Culturally, it is more distant from its Asian neighbors than from the Europeans, but geographically its territory is in greater proportion in Asia. On the other hand, during the long communist period, its interests as well as its political and ideological structure and direction were totally distanced from those of the European countries, at least of those that were not part of its sphere of influence.

But after the dissolution of the USSR, with the implementation of a liberal economy it was believed that Russia would adopt the European identity and therefore the Western one. In fact, “the vast majority of Russians feel Europeans, although with a complex of inferiority and insecurity because they have not been accepted as such”

(Milosevich, 2013). This insecurity has been reduced by Putin's policy, which has reinforced Russia's patriotism and the need to stand out again as a decisive player in the international arena.

Replicating what happened with Ronald Reagan after the American trauma caused by the defeat in Vietnam, Putin came to restore the optimistic and hopeful spirit after the shock that meant to the population the Soviet defeat and the subsequent chaos of the nineties. According to Putin, strengthening Russia's position on the world board is essential to regain the influence lost with the disintegration of the USSR. It is not in vain that he described this event as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century". In this way, its internal and external policies revolves around actions to enhance Russia as a nation independent of other states, having its sovereignty in international action and the ability to autonomously govern the interior as the cornerstone of its government plan.

Internally, the greatest achievements of "Putinism" have been in the economic field. In 1999, the Russian GDP was around 195.906 billion dollars. With the arrival of Putin to power, the economy of the country experienced a great growth until reaching its highest point in 2013 with a GDP of 2.231 trillion dollars. Although the economic crisis that hit the world in 2008 also affected the Russian economy, it achieved a considerable recovery only a year later. Nevertheless, since 2013 the Russian economy has entered a recession, mainly due to the sanctions imposed by the European Union in 2014 after the Ukrainian conflict and the fall in oil prices, the main pillar for the Russian economy (World Bank, 2015).

In spite of what has been achieved in economic matters, Putin's Russia still lags behind the old Soviet era. According to a report by *The Economist*, despite the fact that today the State no longer dominates people's lives, the high propaganda campaign and threats of repression have been restored. In addition, the military industrial complex, characteristic of the Cold War, has increased again (The Economist, 2016). Furthermore, the organization *Reporters Without Borders* placed Russia in the 148th position of 180 countries classified according to their degree of freedom of press, calling the Russian situation "difficult" (Reporters Without Borders, 2016).

Between 2011 and 2013 a series of protests arose due to the discontent of the population with the results of the parliamentary elections of 2011. The approval of Putin decreased, but after the annexation of Crimea to Russia in 2014 the numbers increased around a 20%. Nowadays, Vladimir Putin is approved by an 84%, according to a survey conducted in October 2016 by the Levada Center, a nongovernmental Russian organization (Levada Center, 2016).

As for the international arena, Putin has been critical of the unipolarity imposed by the United States and the world order established after the Cold War. He has expressed this on several occasions, as for example in his speech given in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference:

What is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within. And this certainly has nothing in common with democracy. Because, as you know, democracy is the power of the majority in light of the interests and opinions of the minority (RT, 2015).

Likewise, when intervening at the Valdai International Discussion Club in 2014, he indirectly spoke against the United States, when he stated: “In a situation where you have domination by one country and its allies, the search for global solutions often turns into an attempt to impose their own universal recipes” (Ruiz González F.J., 2014).

On the other hand, in relation to the behavior of both States and international organizations in the global spectrum, for the Russian president respect for International Law and its basic principles must be fundamental. Publicly, he has always maintained the position that every State is sovereign and therefore no other country must interfere in its internal problems. In addition, the use of military force should be a decision taken exclusively by the United Nations, and not by other

organizations such as the European Union or NATO, since International Relations must be conducted under the UN Charter.

However, there are certain inconsistencies regarding this position. A clear example of this is what happened in 2008 when, according to author Oliver Bullough, the president sent troops to Georgia without the authorization of the Security Council. In that year, Russia and Georgia were confronted by independence problems within Georgia, a country that accused the Russian government of fomenting separatism. Similarly, in 2014 Russian intervention in the Ukrainian conflict and the consequent annexation of Crimea to its territory showed that Russian anti-interventionist rhetoric contradicted its own actions. Thus, “Putin has espoused principles, then dropped them when they proved inconvenient” (Bullough, 2014).

In security matters, the Russian vision of NATO is perhaps the major engine of the policies taken by Putin. The Russian president has criticized the constant expansion of the organization, especially the installation of military bases in countries bordering Russia. In 2007, Putin acknowledged in Munich that “the potential danger of the destabilization of International Relations was connected with an obvious stagnation in the disarmament issue”. In spite of this, the increase in the Russian armament arsenal has regained attention in recent years. The justification has been the total disrespect for International Law by some countries, especially the United States. This situation generates insecurity, so having the necessary military resources to deal with eventual conflicts is a defense rather than an attack mechanism.

Finally, one of the most important issues today is the fight against terrorism. Within its borders, Russia has had to face the independence movements of the North Caucasus. In fact, in September 1999, a terrorist attack, allegedly perpetrated by Chechen separatists, created the enabling environment for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to be recognized as the undisputed guarantor of Russian security, when he ordered a counterattack in response. This action made it possible for Putin to become Yeltsin’s successor three months later.

Likewise, Putin has expressed determination and zero tolerance when it comes to dealing with terrorism outside its borders. In his speech at the Valdai International

Discussion Club forum in 2016, he addressed those actors who have financed and armed terrorist groups. “The extremists are cunning, clever and stronger than you, and if you play these games with them, you will always lose”, he said (RT, 2016).

This is how Putin’s policies have positioned him, in the opinion of many, as one of the most influential leaders of the twenty-first century. *Forbes* magazine has placed Putin as the most powerful man in the world for four consecutive years, leading the ranking in 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016. According to the magazine, “from the motherland to Syria, to the US presidential elections, Russia’s leader continues to get what he wants” (El País, 2016). For his part, in 2015 his American counterpart, Barack Obama, was set in the third place of the *Forbes* list, while in 2016, during the last year of his administration, he descended to the position 48th.

### **2.3 The world order or disorder?**

While the beginning of the twentieth century brought for Russia the emergence of a leader who would direct the country to a new era in the redefinition of the world order, for the United States it would mark the end of that state of things that John Lewis Gaddis would establish in 1991, stating that with the American victory “no single great power, or coalition of powers, posed a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States” (Gaddis, 1991).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Samuel Huntington, who in 1993, through a well-known *Foreign Affairs* article, “*Clash of Civilizations*”, stated that the war for ideologies was over and that future conflicts of humanity would be motivated by cultural differences between the different civilizations that exist. For this, he classified the world into seven or eight civilizations: Western, Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, Japanese, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African (Huntington, 1993).

This thesis would be about to find, for some, its greatest confirmation years later, when Western and Islamic civilization would be confronted by a historical landmark that would completely alter the international scenario, not only for the United States but for the whole world: the 9/11 attacks.

On that day, two planes crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, a third against the Pentagon and a last one would fall into an open field in Pennsylvania, leaving around 3000 people dead. These incidents were immediately classified as “terrorist attacks”, which were adjudicated to the group Al Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden. This fact would generate a shift in the US *status quo*, making the “war on terror” the cornerstone of the future action of the United States.

With the attacks of 9/11, the position of the United States as a guarantor of global stability, due to its military power, was greatly weakened. If within its territory the United States was not able to guarantee security for its inhabitants, how would it do it for the rest of the world? On the other hand, the appearance of a new enemy, of whom unlike the USSR little was known, generated uncertainty and public hysteria since in the beginning the motivations that had led Al Qaeda to commit such acts were not clear. Over time, rejection towards the West and its “interventionist” practices, especially in the Middle East area, echoed in the media around the world as the possible reasons that would lead the group to commit the events of 9/11.

Consequently, a strong discriminatory reaction against the Arab and Muslim population was evidenced in some areas of the world, although with greater force in the United States. According to Edward Said, a critic of the “*Clash of Civilizations*”, one of the main causes of stereotyping and misrepresentation of the Muslim population as “terrorist” is the creation of labels such as “Western” or “Islamic”, characteristic of Huntington’s work. For Said, the hate speech reinforced after 9/11 is due to the lack of understanding of the true causes of the conflict, a situation that generalizes Muslim culture as a supporter of terrorism (Said, 2001).

The international reactions to 9/11 were not long in coming since the UN Security Council expressly condemned the attacks and even accused the Afghan regime of an alleged cooperation and protection given to the terrorists. For its part, the United States, with the support of several countries of the international community, mainly the United Kingdom, began its military operations in Afghanistan only a month after the attacks, under the excuse of its legitimate defense against the offensive received. Later, in 2003, although without the support or authorization of the UN, it would invade Iraq alleging the “war on terror”.



### 2.3.1 US foreign policy after 9/11

Given the critical circumstances that the United States was undergoing as a consequence of 9/11, and with George W. Bush in power since January 20, 2001, a radical change was implemented in the foreign policy that until then the country was conducting. To fight terrorism in any corner of the planet became the engine that propelled the actions of the United States, a country that was decisive and determinant in the search for Osama Bin Laden. The US president was very emphatic in dividing the world into two groups: those who supported his “fight” and those who did not.

George W. Bush defined the attacks as “acts of war”. A week later, he told Congress that every nation “has to make a decision: they are on our side, or they are on the side of the terrorists. From now on, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be considered a hostile regime by the United States” (Cambio Cultural, 2004).

One of the most representative strategies of the United States was the “preventive action” or “preventive war”, which focused on undertaking an armed confrontation to drive away any potential attack. The problem with this figure was to understand if the “attacks” were going to be perpetrated, whether they were real or if they were simply an excuse to justify interventionism and gain advantage in the international arena. For Bush, “the US defense could no longer rely simply on the “containment” and “*détente*” strategies used during the Cold War against the Soviet Union” (Cambio Cultural, 2004), but instead a stronger element was needed to fight what they considered as imminent irruptions between terrorism and the American force.

In Bush’s words, the country had to prepare itself and everyone had to “be ready for preventive action when it is necessary to defend their freedom and their lives” (Cambio Cultural, 2004). To these constant statements about “preventive action” it could be added the fact that the United States intended, although unilaterally, to decide how to confront terrorism and what steps to take in order to seize Osama Bin Laden. Practically, the United States had launched its darts warning of what was to come.

### **2.3.2 The invasion of Afghanistan**

The first reaction after 9/11 was to invade Afghanistan, since it was believed that this country housed the terrorist group Al Qaeda. However, the situation would not be easy for the United States because the Afghan territory was under the command of the Taliban, who were directly blamed by George W. Bush and his advisers for providing strategic hideouts to Osama Bin Laden and other members of Al Qaeda. It should be emphasized that, paradoxically, it would be the same Americans who years ago trained and supported the Taliban, who would later offer refuge among their lines to US greatest enemy.

The scope of the Taliban regime and Osama Bin Laden was already known by US intelligence since the administration of Bill Clinton, who did not order their capture and underestimated the power that Al Qaeda would slowly reach in the Far East. The Taliban and Bin Laden shared their Islamic vision of superiority and self-defense, placing the West as the contiguous enemy of the Muslim world. It was for this reason that they joined forces and began the recruitment and concentration of insurgents, who would later become terrorists.

Therefore, with the certainty of the support that the Taliban gave to Osama Bin Laden and his followers, the United States promoted the operation “Enduring Freedom”. On October 7, 2001, thanks to Pakistan’s free passage granted to the United States, the consequences of 9/11 began to be felt in Afghanistan, when, in alliance with the United Kingdom, the United States bombed Afghan territory. The decision had already been taken and “in a letter to the Security Council, the US advanced that it could have to attack other terrorist groups and countries to defend itself” (Cambio Cultural, 2004).

The defeat of the Taliban was not only the result of the American attacks but also of the collaboration of the Afghan Northern Alliance, an opposition group to the regime that took Kabul and Kunduz. But despite the “success” of their operations in Afghanistan, the Americans still had to conquer the south of the country, which was more complicated due to the presence of Taliban leader Mullah Omar and his support to Bin Laden. Finally, the Taliban regime was deposed but the search for Bin Laden

did not stop. While planning a new way to find him, the United States did not miss the opportunity to establish a new order in Afghanistan by implementing changes, policies and even governments within that country.

### **2.3.3 The invasion of Iraq**

When the United States decided to launch a global war against terrorism, it made it clear that it did not care where it would have to intervene, with or without support from the international community. With the justification of eradicating terrorism, the United States resumed its interest in confronting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, accusing him of promoting the creation of nuclear weapons, a situation that would put global stability at risk. As a result of this “preventive action”, Iraq, Iran and North Korea were placed on the “Axis of Evil” list for the United States.

In the case of Iraq, it is believed that the motives that attracted the US interest in that country were economic and political, as well as the alleged Iraqi interference in the production of weapons of mass destruction, since in 2002, the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London “ensured that Iraq was able to manufacture atomic weapons if it received the necessary supplementary material from outside” (Sánchez Hernández, 2006).

Regarding the economic issue, it should be noted that the 9/11 attack changed the weight of the US budget by allocating generous amounts of money to the fight against terrorism, an aspect that forced to extend the military campaign that the government had already undertaken (Sánchez Hernández, 2006). Therefore, the United States would have to find a way to prolong its participation in a different war to the one of Afghanistan to continue feeding the military industry of its country. In addition, in the political arena, the United States showed interest in the capture of Saddam Hussein, who had been under his radar for some years.

It was then that the United States in alliance with Australia, Poland and the United Kingdom decided to enter Iraqi territory in March of 2003. Although it did not have an easy task due to the great resistance of the Iraqi forces, the result was the overthrow of Hussein’s regime, who was captured at the end of the same year. Later,

his death sentence (hanging) was decided by an Iraqi court in 2006, when after more than two years of trial he was convicted of crimes against humanity.

After years of suicide attacks, assassinations and hundreds of human rights violations by US military personnel towards Iraqi civil society, in February of 2009, with Barack Obama already in the White House, it was announced that the mission of the United States in Iraq would end in 2010 and that the troops would leave in 2011. This fact was well received by the international community, who saw in Obama a different politician, since he began his presidency with the right foot when fulfilling one of his most sounded campaign proposals: the end of the war in Iraq.

#### **2.4 Barack Obama: towards a new foreign policy**

With the culmination of the presidency of George W. Bush, characterized by his hostility with the Middle and Far East, the first president of African American roots, Barack Obama, arrived at the White House. This American politician and senator became the 44th president of the United States after a fierce contest with John McCain. The democrat Barack Obama began his term with the firm intention of distancing his policies from those implemented in the Bush era.

Initially, American popular opinion saw in Obama the possibility of a new beginning in international politics. To begin with, it was a president who in several speeches showed himself tolerant and open to dialogue. However, what for many was an obvious sign of change, for others it was a symbol of weakness. But, despite being one of the presidents who sought to get involved in “less” conflicts, the situation was complicated by the expansion of terrorism, which was increasingly difficult to control due to the technological tools and the amount of armament that these insurgent groups have.

One of the axes of Obama’s foreign policy was the National Security Strategy:

That took away the vision of a United States dedicated to the transformation of its environment through proactive, often belligerent leadership, and instead

emphasized the need to undertake an ambitious internal renewal, both economic and political, and in the possibility to lead by example (Powell, 2015).

According to Obama, “no nation, no matter how powerful it was, could alone respond to the global challenges it faced” (Powell, 2015). This statement prompted the US president to reform an obsolete system that was not working well for the United States, since the idea was to transform the functioning of Diplomacy so that any problem could find a solution through “dialogue”.

As for NATO, Obama stood by the idea of its expansion and reinforcement, since that would be a great help to meet the challenges of new global alliances and the imminent resurrection of Russia at international level, a country that has also become the Achilles’ heel of the American fort because of the imposing political figure of its top leader, Vladimir Putin. Although at the outset, Obama’s intentions were to re-establish friendly and cooperative relations with as much country as possible, according to their interests, logically, the situation with Russia was dulled.

Obama came to the White House with the intention of reversing the deterioration of the relationship with Moscow that had occurred during the Bush era as a result of the Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008, the tension arising from the future deployment of the American anti-missile shield in Eastern Europe, and Kosovo’s declaration of independence (Powell, 2015).

Obama’s foreign policy focused on giving a new start to relations with Russia, which under Dmitry Medvedev had allowed an approach with the United States. However, the return of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency destabilized the initial proposals of the United States. Putin, who “diplomatically” joined hands with Barack Obama, is now one of the biggest challenges for US foreign policy because of the marked expansion of his influence on key issues for this country that historically has unilaterally addressed most of them, having now as a difference the multipolarity that previously did not exist and which represents an obstacle to the maintenance of world hegemony.

Last but not least, there is also the conflictive situation in the Middle East, aggravated by the rise of increasingly radical and extremist insurgent movements such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State. It should be noted that the Arab Spring was also important in determining the beginning of what could be a New Cold War on the agenda of Obama and Putin. The United States chose to take a “pro” human rights and freedom position, which caused hostility with Russia and makes it difficult to restore stable relations between the two countries.

## **2.5 The Arab Spring**

On December 17, 2010, the so-called Arab Spring began, which consisted in a series of drastic revolts that altered the political, economic and social panorama of many countries of the North African and Arab zones such as Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Djibouti, Iraq, Somalia, Bahrain, Libya, Kuwait and Morocco. The main reasons that led to the different populations of each of the countries in the area to protest were linked to corruption of dictatorial governments, lack of democracy, restriction of freedoms, violation of human rights, unemployment, poverty, inequality, rising food prices, social injustices, among others.

The beginning of this period was the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor that tired of the economic, political and social crisis that his country was going through, as well as of the arbitrariness with which police and other authorities were abusing their positions, set fire to himself as a sign of protest. This event had a “domino effect” in the rest of the region as the neighboring countries began to identify with the Tunisian situation caused by the government of Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. In the case of Tunisia, President Ben Ali chose to leave the country, which caused a disturbing political instability. In the first instance, a provisional government took office, which lasted until October of 2011, when the opposition politician Moncef Marzouki came to power, whose term lasted until the end of 2014 when Tunisian lawyer Béji Caïd Essebsi took office.

Another case that was not long in coming was the one of Algeria, country that did not have a diversified economy or an equitable distribution system. The problem that

led Algerians to be part of the process of the Arab Spring was the precariousness of their economic situation that triggered serious unemployment rates. The protests began at the end of 2010, when citizens came out to demand changes that would allow them to improve the situation they were going through and for which the government of Abdelaziz Bouteflika had to respond.

On January 25, 2011, popular protests took place in Cairo's Tahrir Square in Egypt, an area of great geopolitical interest to the international community because of its proximity to the Red Sea and Israel. In the context of the revolts that were already being replicated in the area, President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt for more than 30 years, resigned and after an electoral process, Mohamed Morsi took over the presidency, who also failed in breaking free from the protests motivated by violence against women, the high costs of living and the fall of tourism in the country. Morsi was overthrown and later brought to trial.

For its part, Yemen also followed the same path due to social and economic injustices caused by terrorism and corruption. It is for this reason that on January 27, 2011 demonstrations began against the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in power since 1980. The needs of the people were linked to the restructuring of a political system as well as economic demands. Saleh came out of power after suffering an attack, leaving Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi in charge.

On February 4, 2011, protests for civil and political freedoms began in Bahrain. This led to strong repression against civil society by order of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Meanwhile, on February 20, 2011 in Morocco similar riots broke out, for which King Mohammed VI was forced to announce some constitutional reforms in favor of education, inclusion and development. Even so, the monarch preferred to call new elections to avoid the riots.

One of the most representative cases of the Arab Spring is what happened in Libya, when the opposition protests against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi began on February 16, 2011. His dictatorial government had plunged the population into despair to fight for their rights, which was repressed by the militants of that government, triggering a brutal civil war. The conflict resulted in the intervention of

NATO and the anger of Russia for such participation. Finally, the situation in Libya was drastic and the end of the Gaddafi era came when he was executed by a crowd that longed for a change after more than 40 years of dictatorship.

As for the process inside Syria, since March of 2011 several demonstrations took place due to the economic depression that the country goes through until today, besides the internal displeasure with the government of Bashar al Assad, who clinging to the power has found in Russia one of his greatest allies against the daily insurrections.

After the events of the Arab Spring, Russian and American help to “resolve” the conflicts in Libya and Syria was not long in coming. Although in Syria, as in the other countries where the revolts took place, an early solution to the problem was expected, this was not the case. The antagonism in the positions of Russia and the United States regarding this conflict has not allowed it to find a definitive end. On the contrary, it has led both countries, motivated by their differences and by the deterioration suffered by their relations in previous years, to face each other in a silent war, understood by many as a New Cold War.

## **2.6 The “New Cold War”**

The Cold War set the precedent for the complexity of relations between the United States and Russia. During the years after 1991, the United States saw Russia as that part of the USSR that was forgotten, but that gradually regained its ambitions to return to the global stage as a leading, strong and influential power in international affairs. The emergence of new political leaders, alliances and conflicts has caused friction in US-Russia relations, renewing the extinct tension between the two countries.

In Moscow, the figure of Vladimir Putin has acquired great importance during the last years, especially now while exerting its third term, in which its firmness and resistance to the constant pressures of the American government have helped to change the image of Russia before the world, projecting itself again as a decisive actor in international affairs. On the other hand, during the early years of Barack



Obama's administration, Washington attempted to reestablish cordial relations with Russia, a claim that could not be fully accomplished because of the difference of opinions on most issues of global concern, such as the disarmament of Iran, the fight against terrorism, the war in Syria, the role of NATO and the Ukrainian conflict.

Russia has been looking for new alliances that will allow it to reconfigure the international politics for the respect of multipolarity in response to the unipolarity that the United States held after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. According to Jesús M. Pérez, "Russia is the agglutinative element of a bloc of national-populist governments hostile to the West and Israel" (Pérez J.M., 2015). According to Andrew J. Bacevich, the United States has become "prisoner of a national security ideology that results in an expansionist stance that practically justifies the armed intervention of the United States in any part of the world. All this with the excuse of defending freedom and democracy" (Borja Tamayo, 2009).

One of the most sensitive issues in the development of relations between the White House and the Kremlin is the role of NATO, whose scope has been frowned upon by Putin's government, reason why in 2014, he expressed:

NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance deployed as at home near our fence or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would have to travel to Sevastopol to visit the NATO sailors. Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to go to Sevastopol as guests, rather than the other way around (RT, 2014).

But the hostilities between Russia and NATO are not recent. With the collapse of the USSR, those alliances that during the Cold War era had provided security to countries that were under the Soviet or American sphere of influence would no longer be necessary, at least for the eyes of the nascent Russian Federation, because the threat of a real war between the two blocs had disappeared. Thus, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991 as the countries that formed it had distanced themselves from Moscow a long time ago. However, the Atlantic Alliance, contrary to what happened with the Warsaw Pact, instead of disappearing, expanded.

The first NATO enlargement took place in 1952 when it incorporated Greece and Turkey. Germany and Spain later adhered, but it was not until 1999 that the increase in the number of NATO members meant a first low blow for Russia with the accession of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, countries that had belonged to the now defunct Warsaw Pact. In 2004 Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the Alliance. Finally, in 2009, Croatia and Albania entered, forming an organization of 28 countries.

Regarding the most significant discrepancies between Russia and NATO, during the first years of the post-Cold War period the greatest moment of tension was in 1999 when NATO began its bombing in Serbia in the framework of the Kosovo War, situation that upset the Kremlin because of its historic alliance with that country. Later, when Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, the positions of Moscow and Washington were antagonistic as the United States gave its recognition to the new State while Russia did not.

However, with the arrival of George W. Bush to the US presidency, relations between Russia and NATO deteriorated, especially as in 2002 the United States unilaterally abandoned the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), which was signed with the former Soviet Union in 1972. This allowed the United States to announce at the beginning of 2007 its intention to place ten interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic as a method of prevention and defense against possible attacks from new actors who had gained significant weight in the arms industry: Iran and North Korea.

The Kremlin took this as a threat to its security due to the proximity of Poland and the Czech Republic to the Russian borders. However, in 2009, Obama announced the suspension of Bush's anti-missile defense program to give way to a restructuring of the same, thus reducing tensions with Moscow. In fact, Russia expressed its intention to cooperate with NATO through the development of a single shield, a proposal that was rejected by the organization.

Over time and to a greater extent as a result of the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts, relations between Russia and NATO have not been able to reach a stability that

allows both actors to maintain mutual trust. Following the annexation of Crimea to Russia in 2014, NATO suspended cooperation with Russia in civil and military matters. In addition, NATO continued its expansion in Romania and Poland, while Russia deployed missiles in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

The relationship between Obama and Putin changed from direct letters between the presidents to intense looks at international summits, from alleged calls to verbal attacks in which their positions on issues of common interest were different, thus complicating the relations between the United States and Russia. Although neither of the two leaders publicly acknowledged that the world is facing a scenario similar to that of the Cold War, a “small” big change emerged in the speech from the Russian side, in which Prime Minister Medvedev stated: “Speaking bluntly, we are rapidly getting involved in a period of a New Cold War. [...] Sometimes I get confused, are we in 2016 or in 1962?” (Pérez J.M., 2016). In addition, some analysts argue that the current situation could become worse than in the past. As Stephen Cohen argues:

We had never come to such a clear confrontation between the United States and Russia since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 [...] so it is not unimaginable that there could be a war between the US-led NATO armies and Russia. Actually, the situation is even more dangerous now than then (Navarro, 2014).

Although Russian-US relations in the period between 2009 and 2011 showed signs of improvement, the tensions could not be eliminated. The facts that made those two years of conversations to have an end could be listed. Events such as NATO actions in Libya, US interference in Russian parliamentary elections of 2011, the rise of Russian nationalism, Mitt Romney’s statements about Russia as “the greatest threat to the US national security”, the anti-Russian campaign promoted by members of the United States Tea Party, references of Obama as a weak leader, the expulsion of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) from Moscow in 2013 and the asylum granted to Edward Snowden in Russia, have been the events that worsened the deal between Washington and Moscow (Pérez Benítez, 2016, p. 119).

## **2.7 The Libyan precedent**

As mentioned earlier, one of the events that revived the tension in Russian-US relations was what happened in Libya during 2011 when the effect of the Arab riots started in Tunisia reached the Libyan government in early February of the same year. The protests erupted because Fethi Tarbel, a lawyer defending political prisoners in Libya, was arrested by the police of that country accusing him of urging the disorder as a result of the fire in the Abu Salim prison. For this reason, relatives, friends and other citizens took the streets and demanded Tarbel's release, which led to a direct confrontation between civilians and the Libyan police, all this a day before February 17, "Day of Wrath", for which a call had been made through social networks with the aim of protesting against the Gaddafi regime.

Immediately, the reaction of the international community became noticeable due to the serious human consequences that the war was leaving within Libya, a country that had split between the government forces and the opposition. The position of Russia and the United States once again differed as to possible ways of resolving this conflict. As Russia strengthened its position against any kind of armed intervention, the United States already considered the possibility of participating in a military operation in Libya.

That is when, on March 17, 2011, the UN, through the Security Council, approved Resolution 1973 calling for an immediate ceasefire, authorizing Member States to take all necessary measures to protect civilians, establishing a ban on all flights in the airspace of Libya with the exception of flights for humanitarian purposes, ordering the freezing of the financial assets and economic resources of Muammar Gaddafi and his government circle, among other measures (Security Council of the United Nations, 2011).

In response to this resolution, Susan Rice, the United States ambassador to the UN, stated that "the future of Libya must be decided by the people of Libya", anticipating that "the United States would be with the Libyan people to support their universal rights" and that the only intention of the Security Council was to protect innocent civilians. On the other hand, Vitaly Churkin, the representative of Russia, argued that

his abstention in the vote on the draft resolution was due to the fact that “the text had provisions that could open the door to a large-scale military intervention”, making responsible of humanitarian consequences and of the destabilization of North Africa and the Middle East to all those who adopt the intended measures.

A few hours after the adoption of the Security Council resolution, between March 19 and 20, the United States began the bombing of Libya (Telesur, 2016), having in response the Libyan offensive led by Gaddafi's army, which further aggravated the situation within the territory. However, it was March 24 when NATO “officially” assumed the command of operations in Libya through the implementation of an operational plan “to support the monitoring of compliance with the arms embargo on Libya imposed by the UN Security Council” (United Nations News Center, 2011). During April, bombings continued in Libya, resulting in the death of the youngest son and the three grandchildren of Gaddafi.

A month later, in May, as the International Criminal Court issued the arrest warrant for Gaddafi alleging crimes against humanity, NATO continued its attacks in Tripoli. By June 13, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressed the international community by suggesting the recognition of the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the legitimate government of Libya, a fact to which the response was favorable by the Arab League and the United Nations Organization, which in turn on September 20 hoisted for the first time the flag of the NTC.

NATO operations continued in September and October of 2011, resulting in the departure of Gaddafi, who was subjected to popular lynching, resulting in his death and that of his son Mutassim Gaddafi (Telesur, 2016). This fact is considered as the symbol of the end of the war in Libya and apparently another achievement of the United States, which through NATO was able to overthrow a dictatorial regime that endangered the safety of civilians and was ending life of hundreds of them. At least that was the argument with which they broke into Libyan territory, backed by what Resolution 1973 had stipulated.

However, in 2015, about 3000 e-mails from a private server of Hillary Clinton, which detailed the true interests of the United States and her friendly country,

France, in Libya came to light. According to the Foreign Policy Journal, Sidney Blumenthal, Clinton's informant, had confirmed her Gaddafi's "intentions" for the creation of a Pan-African currency that could compete with the dollar and the euro, an aspect that would not suit the economic, financial and monetary "stability" of the United States.

One of the e-mails revealed that "the government of Gaddafi kept 143 tons of gold and a similar amount of silver" (Hoff, 2016). In addition, a "source comment" stated that "according to experts in the subject, the amount of gold and silver is valued at 7 billion dollars" (Hoff, 2016), which would have been the reason why Nicolas Sarkozy, French president during that year, decided to intervene in the war. Also, within the same mail, called "The customer of France and the gold of Gaddafi" identified the reasons why Sarkozy was interested in supporting the overthrow of Gaddafi:

To obtain a greater share of Libya's oil production, to gain greater influence of his country in the region (North Africa), to internally increase his popularity, to reaffirm the power of the French army and to prevent Gaddafi's plans to exert influence in the Francophone Africa (Hoff, 2016).

The leak of the Clinton-Blumenthal talks once again calls into question the American speech to support humanitarian causes as the main reason for its intervention in Libya, a fact that displeased the Kremlin because of the "arbitrariness" with which NATO interpreted Resolution 1973, breaking into a sovereign State with a legitimate government according to Putin, who also assured during a press conference in Italy in 2015 that the disintegration of Libya as a State is the result of the military intervention of 2011 (Hispana TV, 2015 ).

Military interference in Libya did not have the end that the international community longed for. NATO intervention contributed to the fall of Gaddafi's dictatorial regime, but his death was not the end point of the conflict, as instability and the presence of terrorist groups have been increasing in a country that, according to many has become ungovernable. After this events, Obama stated in April of 2016 that his

“worst mistake” was made in Libya, but not precisely referring to the intervention but to the lack of planning on the “day after” Gaddafi’s debacle.

Although the situation in Libya was one of the most representative cases regarding the new course of Russian-American relations, this was not the only one that has faced the White House and the Kremlin, since the cases of Syria and Ukraine are the turning point in the configuration of the new geopolitical map that creates expectation within the international community.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE SYRIAN CONFLICT IN THE “NEW COLD WAR”**

After the Arab Spring, in some countries where the revolts took place, new processes of democratization and transition of governments were evident. However, in the case of Syria, what began as a collective grievance triggered a bitter civil war that accounts for more than 470.000 people killed according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and more than 4.800.000 refugees (Esparza, 2016).

The impact of the war on Syria has transcended borders and has stopped being merely a regional issue. The internal dispute was internationalized because of the participation of old enemies who have seen in Syria the opportunity to carry out certain political movements, to look for strategic alliances and to establish a new world order far from that one that the fall of the USSR left. The interests at stake within this territory have caused a confrontation between the United States and Russia, as it was in the past, creating the idea of a New Cold War. Added to the internal chaos is the presence of these two superpowers that, together with their allies, have undertaken a struggle disguised as support for the opposition and the Syrian regime respectively.

Although the United States and Russia are the two international actors most insistently involved in the prolongation of the war in Syria, they have not been the only ones since Saudi Arabia and Iran, Sunni and Shiite powers respectively, have also played an important role in the conflict. For its part, the United Nations has not waited to react to the Syrian social meltdown, which it has described as “the greatest humanitarian disaster since the massacres and the Rwandan exodus in 1994” (Romero, 2016, p. 22).

The dissenting relationship between Russia and the United States has hindered the search for political solutions to the conflict. Any kind of measure coming from the West that contributes to the end of the war is seen by Russia and China as hypocrisy and the veto is inevitable. In addition, the emergence of extremist fronts of Islam makes it increasingly difficult to get out of trouble. Although combating new terrorist groups is apparently the only goal shared by Russia and the United States, this has



serious consequences for civil society, which is always responsible for assuming the implications of bad political decisions.

### **3.1 Factors of the Syrian conflict**

Syria is a country condemned by geopolitics. Its strategic location within the Middle East, bordering Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon has aroused the interest of several of its neighbors and even those who are geographically further afield, such as Russia and the United States. It would seem that his privileged position on the map would represent multiple friends, but the world political game teaches something different. However, its complex location is not the only differentiating element in the Syrian conflict as there are other internal and external factors that aggravate the situation and place Syria in political “check” (see Appendix 1).

#### **3.1.1 Internal factors**

##### **3.1.1.1 Historical factors**

The Ottoman Empire, which expanded after 1299, spanned territories in Europe, Asia and Africa, including Syria. By 1914, when World War I broke out, the exertion of its power was in decline due to the “westernization fever” that shook territories of great geopolitical weight for the Ottoman giant, such as Egypt, Sudan and Lebanon, reason why its end was beginning to glimpse. During the war, its position was in favor of the Triple Alliance formed by Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy. With the defeat of the Triple Alliance and the imminent victory of the Triple Entente of France, the United Kingdom and Russia, the Ottoman Empire was reduced to the peninsula of Anatolia, today Turkey (Segura, A., 2016).

The cost that the Ottoman Empire paid for being on the losing side was very high, since the Sykes-Picot agreement was secretly signed on May 19, 1916, named after its predecessors Sir Mark Sykes of the United Kingdom and François Georges-Picot from France. This agreement was the result of a pact between France and the United Kingdom, which contemplated the division of territories that until that moment were part of Ottoman Empire and Persia. Consequently, the agreement left Lebanon,

Palestine, Iraq and Syria under the will of the Franco-British alliance (BBC News, 2015).

It is important to take into account that among the possessions of the Ottoman Empire was Arabia, an area in which a pro-nationalist sentiment began to be infused, which became the Achilles' heel of Ottoman interests. It was then that the United Kingdom and France took advantage of this situation and seized the opportunity to offer to an area of conflict and dependence, an independent Arab State in exchange for an uprising against the Turks.

After the First World War and with the Sykes-Picot agreement as a precedent, in August of 1920 the Treaty of Sevres was signed. This agreement was the hallmark of unfulfilled promises to the Arab people, for instead of achieving their complete independence, the territories of Palestine, Iraq and Transjordan would be under the command of the United Kingdom, while Syria and Lebanon would be under the dominion of France (Segura, A., 2016).

The importance of the Sykes-Picot and Sèvres agreements lies in the imaginary division that France and the United Kingdom caused within the zone. They separated the territories according to their interests, without realizing the instability they would cause in those countries. The mandates ordained by the League of Nations fomented and accentuated the differences between nations that did not ask to be manipulated and that suffer until now the consequences of a randomly distribution.

The interests in this area lie in the richness of its territories, subsoil and also in the multiple connections of passage that represents one country with another. However, the nationalism that once provoked the uprising against the Ottomans resurfaced on April 17, 1946, when Syrian resistance, after years of French domination, succeeded in getting the troops out of their territory, destroying what up to that time was considered as samples of colonialism and betrayal to the promise of an Arab Nation.

### 3.1.1.2 Political factors

Following a coup in 1970, Hafez al Assad assumed Syrian power with the Ba'ath Arab Socialist party, which had emerged in search of the “rebirth” of a United Arab Nation promised and unfulfilled by the Franco-British alliance. Nevertheless, his thirty years of government were marked by authoritarianism and the corruption of the closed group of power that led the destiny of Syria. Upon his death in 2000, his second son Bashar al Assad took office as a result of a “political legacy” that displeased the population (Tutino & DerGhoukassian, 2010).

Contrary to what is expected of the preparation of a politician, Bashar al Assad had no antecedent that shows interest in the exercise of this position. In fact, he is a doctor by profession and was in London continuing his studies when, on the death of his elder brother, who would be the “natural heir” of power, he received his father’s order to return to Damascus, the capital of Syria, full of responsibilities that shortly afterwards he would face alone, when Hafez died.

Although Bashar was not old enough to hold the presidency of Syria, Parliament unanimously endorsed a constitutional amendment process on this requirement. The minimum age to be president according to the Constitution was 40 years, so this condition was reduced to 34 years, Bashar’s age at the time. Simultaneously, the Syrian General Command promoted him to the rank of General, and later presented his “nomination” to the presidency. Assad was finally able to fulfill his task thanks to the constitutional arrangement that was approved by the Parliament and ratified by national referendum on July 10 of the same year, winning with 97.29% of the votes (Tutino & DerGhoukassian, 2010).

The beginning of his presidential term is known as the Damascus Spring, in which Bashar al Assad projected a flexible image and even a pro-Western trend according to many analysts. Among the measures taken on his arrival to power can be mentioned that he “released hundreds of prisoners, opened the country to foreign investment, reduced censorship of the press (also Internet cafés multiplied), and allowed a more active participation of opposition parties to Syrian political life” (Tutino & DerGhoukassian, 2010). However, soon after, repression and censorship

began again, to which was added the problems inherent to the Arab Spring that began in 2011.

The discontent of the Syrian population, in addition to being encouraged by the euphoria of its neighbors, was motivated by the resistance of Bashar al Assad to government alternation. Society has been reluctant to believe in the “Assad dynasty” in power, but the beginning of the riots was hampered by violent government repression that ignored the needs and demands of its people.

Another cause of protests in Syria was linked to the limitations in political participation. Although Assad offered the possibility of forming new political parties, these were not really independent since at the end of the process and depending on the fulfillment of specific requirements, they were adhered to the National Progressive Front NPF, which is headed by the Ba’ath party. In other words, everything returns to the same place where discontent arises, “Ba’athism” continues to lead political participation but not in a democratic form but in an imposed one.

It is then Assad’s rejection of the demands of government alternation, the authoritarian and violent regime that has oppressed the masses who revolt daily not only against the government but against international interference, the perpetuity in power of the leaders, the corruption and nepotism, which has put an end to Assad’s little “good image”, who despite the protests refuses to leave the presidency, as happened in neighboring countries.

Bashar al Assad entrenched position remains the focus of criticism and protest. However, it is not only his resistance to them that keeps him in power but also the great allies that he has won along the way, such as Russia, and that today support his defense arguing that his departure would contribute to strengthen terrorist groups that seek to seize this territory.

### **3.1.1.3 Ethnic and religious factors**

Another of the determinants within the Syrian conflict is the ethnic and religious segregation that internally exists. According to Montserrat Abumalham, a professor

at the Department of Arab and Islamic Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid, “there is indeed a basis for thinking that the current confrontation inherits some of the tensions that have existed between Sunnis and Shiites over the centuries” (Zibell, 2012).

The problem between Sunnis and Shiites is a pending issue for more than a thousand years, originated from the death of Mohammed and the uncertainty of knowing who would be his successor. The Shiites are convinced that Mohammed’s successor had to be a direct descendant, being Ali the son-in-law and cousin of the prophet who had to assume power over the caliphate. While for the Sunnis this should not necessarily be a direct descendant of Mohammad but could be chosen by the Muslim community. This is the argument that separates one of the most professed religions of the world into two branches: Sunni with 87% representation in the Islamic world and Shiism with the remaining 13% (RT, 2015).

It is essential to understand that Syria is a country mainly defined by the Islamic confession of its citizens. The 87% of the society is Muslim, the 10% is Christian and the 3% is Druze (The World Factbook CIA, 2016). Of the followers of Islam, 74%, that is, the majority of citizens, belongs to the Sunni branch, while Shiism accounts for only 13%. Paradoxically, the leadership of power is in the hands of the religious minority of the country, since the Assad family is of Alawite confession, one of the fractions of Shiism.

From the time of Hafez al Assad to the current Bashar government, the privileges enjoyed by the minority to which they belong have been considerable, such as the concentration of wealth and high positions in the public sector, to mention just two examples. This has caused resentment and rejection in the Sunni majority of the country, which demands the departure of a government that in their opinion does not represent the interests of the people.

On the other hand, Syria also faces an ethnic dilemma because in the country 90.3% of the population is Arab, while the remaining 9.7% is formed by Kurdish, Armenian, among other groups. The Kurds, mostly adherents of Islam, fight a historical conflict in their search for the creation and recognition of a State of their

own that would welcome more than 40 million people. Although the delimitation of their borders is imprecise and this further complicates their identity problem, they are known to be present in “Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Armenia, being Turkey and Iraq the countries with more Kurds” (Moreno Bermejo, 2016, p. 273).

Within Syrian territory, the main Kurdish force is the YPG (People’s Protection Units), the armed wing of the PYD (Democratic Union Party), forming an alliance that receives support from both Washington and Moscow (Laborie, 2016). The Kurds demand political and diplomatic recognition in order to continue their goal of creating an autonomous area in Syria, an idea that has been rejected not only by Assad but also by the opposition. However, taking into account the circumstances of Syria, these increasingly take advantage of the chaos and spread their territory, worsening the internal problem (BBC News, 2016).

#### **3.1.1.4 Socioeconomic factors**

The recession caused by the economic crisis of 2008, originated in the United States, not only affected the American market but also other corners of the planet, which due to the multiple processes of globalization opened the way to the American giant, that after falling dragged all of its partners and even those who were not to a depression reflected in the quality of life of its citizens. In the case of Syria, the replicated Great Recession, despite having significantly affected its economy, did not represent the genesis of its conflict.

As Inmaculada Szmolka, a professor of the Department of Political Science and Administration at the Universidad of Granada, says, in Syria and in most of the countries involved in the Arab Spring riots, the socioeconomic crisis is more a structural situation than a circumstantial one. In other words, the problems that the society face are not closely related to what has happened since 2008, but it is their own circumstances that have further deepened the economic weakening.

The restrictive nature of trade has limited expectations of economic growth, adding in this case what the International Monetary Fund considers a “bureaucratic spider

web” that prevents the effective and efficient course of any kind of process that contributes to the development of the country’s economic system.

To the gradual economic decline that began to deepen due to the absence of exports to markets such as the European Union, which were directly affected by the crisis of 2008, added unemployment, causing a feeling of confusion in the population that did not glimpse a social depression. Analyzing unemployment is important considering that the average age of the population does not exceed 22 years and that being mostly a relatively young society and with 6.3 years of schooling, what is most needed to contribute to Syrian development is that which is scarce: work.

Human Development Indicators place the Syrian Arab Republic in the 134<sup>th</sup> place out of 188 countries. In addition, the Human Development Index to 2014 was 0.594 (United Nations Development Program, 2014), which placed the country in the middle category of downward trend development for years to come. According to data from the World Bank, another fundamental aspect is the life expectancy that is becoming smaller due to the war that has ended with the existence of more than 470.000 people until today. In 2006, life expectancy was 74.43 years, while for 2014 this was reduced to 70.07 years (World Bank Group, 2015).

Finally, it is also necessary to take into account the technological factor. Before his administration, Assad offered a better connectivity system that was reflected in Internet access and social networks, which later served to organize and develop opposition groups that maintain effective communication through them.

### **3.1.2 External factors**

#### **3.1.2.1 The geopolitical value of Syria and the interests of the powers**

As explained in previous sections, Syria has an essential geopolitical location to exert dominion over the Middle East. Its close position to countries like Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel has awakened a contest between the interests of Russia and the United States. The United States proposes as a solution to the conflict the departure of Assad through a process of democratization in which he does not lose

hope of finding a new ally that allows it to protect Israel and to block Iran's activities in complicity with Hezbollah in Lebanon. It is also a logistical issue as Syria, through its direct exit to the Mediterranean Sea, could facilitate access for the United States and the European Union to the Middle East region, which is rich in energy resources.

On the other hand it is the interest of Russia which, in addition to maintaining a close historical alliance with Syria, has a naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, which has been used since 1971 mainly for logistics and maintenance of ships and that is located near to two key points: the Strait of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. According to Alberto Morales González, author of different opinion documents from the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Tartus "is the port of destination for all shipments of military equipment from Russia" (Morales, 2013) (see Appendix 2).

Syria-Russia relations date back to 1944, when Russia was still part of the Soviet Union. However, it was in the 1960s that cooperation programs between the Soviets and the emerging socialist Syria intensified thanks to the rise of the Ba'athist party. Shortly afterwards and with Hafez al Assad in power, Syria and the USSR began to support each other, especially through technical cooperation from Soviet experts who contributed to Syria's road, electrical and even educational development.

Initially, Cairo and Damascus represented "allies" for the Soviet Union but the signing of peace between Egypt and Israel in 1979 was a political coup that affected the Soviets and confirmed that the only remaining friend in case of seeking to exert influence within the Middle East was Syria. Consequently, the USSR and Syria signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1980.

To this it could be added the economic, social and moral crisis of Russia after the fall of the USSR, as the country had to face negative figures in its trade balance, which led it to increase the production and sale of arms, which later would be offered to Syria. However, "it was not until the end of 2003 that Syria and Russia approached openly" (Tawil, 2009) because of Syria's estrangement from the United States and the European Union as well as the growing tension between Moscow and Washington (Tawil, 2009). A year later, the alliance was strengthened mainly in



military matters between Damascus and Moscow, trying to exert pressure as a power in the Middle East and to recover a hegemonic image respectively.

On the other hand, for the United States the presence of Bashar al Assad in power represents the main cause of the Syrian problem. However, it is not only the regime that bothers the American power but also its circle of support, where Russia is the main ally. However, Damascus also finds it difficult to relate to Washington, as it is the protector of its historical enemy: Israel.

It is important to mention that the United States protects the integrity of Israel, which is threatened by the resistance of Hezbollah, an organization that was born as a political party in Lebanon and that still stands thanks to the support of Iran, which forms part of the “Shiite Trident” of the region, along with Iraq and Syria. It is therefore logical to understand where Syria is in this situation, facilitating the passage of a contingent of support across its territory for Hezbollah to stop Israeli expansionism.

Syria’s position on the map is the source of its conflict and the convergence of participations motivated by different causes, as “Syria is for the United States the bridge between Europe and the Middle East, since it is necessary to cross Damascus to reach Iran. If the US wants to take the fight against China, it is a strategic zone that it cannot renounce to” (Jiménez Pereyra, 2016). To this factor is added the economic one that is also important in the analysis of the pretensions of the United States in Syrian territory, where the natural gas provided by the Russian giant has formed a monopoly that hinders the US intentions to venture into that business.

In addition, Assad’s “Four Seas Strategy” would apparently be the real reason behind the interests of the powers in Syria. Making this country the central axis as a trade route for oil and gas between the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Caspian Sea would harm the rest of the countries in the area that base their economy on this type of resources. The signing for the construction of the “Shiite gas pipeline” would transport Iranian gas to Europe, crossing Iraqi and Syrian territories. The project of more than 10 billion dollars would give Syria the power to “open or

close the pipeline” on its way to Europe, leaving Middle East petro-monarchies out of the way, thus breaching US ambitions in the zone (RT, 2013).

### **3.2 The internal conflict in Syria (2011)**

After observing the fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia, Syrian civil society also joined the wave of protests and demonstrations against the Assad regime. Initially, a large part of the international community perceived the situation in Syria as a temporary matter, which, although was not an easy case to solve, it could have a “political solution”. However, over time civil war in Syria has not reached that point of “political solution”, on the contrary, it has intensified its effects and figures as one of the worst humanitarian disasters in History.

Bashar al Assad seized power in 2000 promising a package of reformist changes that evidently encouraged the people to believe in the idea of a new stage in Syrian political life. However, Assad’s reformist aura was not enough to contain a population that began to feel tired of the government’s imprecise promises and of the entrenched political oppressive system maintained by Hafez al Assad, which motivated the Arab Spring riots.

One of the internal aspects that afflicted the Syrian society was the Emergency Law that had been in force in the country since 1963 and that restricted the freedom of assembly and displacement. In addition, it gave the government the power to order the detention of those people it considered a threat to internal security. Another cause that concerned the citizens was the existence of the Supreme Court for State Security, which had been founded in 1968 and that had diverted its objectives towards the political persecution of people that according to the government were an imminent danger to stability.

To the popular discontent it can be added another factor that despite having always been of collective knowledge, also divided the country. The Assad family’s affiliation to the Alawite minority was an impediment to an approach between the government and the Syrian population, which mostly belongs to the Sunni branch of

Islam, since a minority ruling over a majority would inevitably cause friction between the two sides.

In other words, the Syrian internal conflict was basically motivated by laws that appeared to be written on stones and government entities that facilitated political persecution. In addition, ethnic and religious segregation, corruption, the complicated socio-economic situation, inequality and restriction of freedoms were the triggers of the protests convened through Facebook by the group “The Syrian Revolution 2011” during March.

On March 18, the Syrian civil war broke out with the arrest of a group of students who had written anti-government slogans in some walls of the city. Their arrest sparked the anger of the population that immediately took the streets to demand their release, the lifting of the State of Emergency, as well as reforms for the creation of political parties, to which Assad said that “reforms have been delayed but not detained” (El Mundo, 2011), as a way to appease the enraged society.

Concentrations were quickly replicated in other cities of the country, such as Latakia, Homs, Baniyas, Hama, Deir Azzo and Damascus, where the rough coercion of the army and the police did not cease the protests. The struggle between government forces and the people on the streets became daily news, a fact that shocked the regime and deserved the first statements of Assad on the matter, in which he acknowledged that “Syria is not isolated from what is happening in other parts of the Arab world” but that in its case it was a “great conspiracy” motivated by “social networks and by foreign media” (El Mundo, 2011).

With the internal imbalance in Syria, President Bashar al Assad tried to moderate the masses by announcing changes that from the point of view of the demonstrators had already come late. To begin with, the resignation of a large part of the cabinet was reported, and a new group of ministers was set up, that according to Assad had been appointed to “explore ideas for implementing a multi-party system and ensuring greater press freedom” (Wallace, 2011). Subsequently, the repeal of the Emergency Law was announced. However, Assad’s efforts to contain the protests were useless because hostility continued under the slogan “God, Syria, Freedom” (RT, 2011).

The debacle for Assad's government was aggravated by the "Great Friday" of April 22, whose aim was to recruit as many citizens as possible to announce that "they lost their fear of the Ba'athist dictatorship" (El Mundo, 2011). As a result, the regime's forces acted using the repression of demonstrators through the use of fire and tear gas that triggered the conflict in Daraa, Homs, Latakia, Camishli and Damascus, leaving at least 88 dead and hundreds of wounded (El Mundo, 2011). The events in Syria alarmed the international community, which saw a greater scope in this problem than in the other countries of the Arab Spring. It was then that sanctions began to arrive for the Assad government, mainly from the West.

Despite the economic and political impact of the package of sanctions on the Syrian leadership, the conflict did not end for two reasons. First, the regime could not curb the demonstrations even with the reforms it announced and second, the opposition was increasingly divided but no less determined to get Assad out of power. Contrary to the idea of a unified opposition, in Syria the situation is more complex since it is not a single war in the territory, because simultaneously in the opposition rebel wings arose motivated not only by the deficiencies of the regime but by its particular interests.

The opposition is formed by:

- The Syrian National Coalition formed by Sunni groups, groups of intellectuals, young groups, the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria and the Syrian National Council. In addition, there is also the participation of the Free Syrian Army, the armed wing of the conflict (Ghotme, Garzón, & Cifuentes, 2015).
- The most radical and violent branches of Islam, denominated by the West as *ihadists*, who "have become the dominant and most dangerous element for the West in the civil war" (Gutierrez Espada, 2015) and that also share a "common goal, the establishment of an Islamic State in Syria" (Gutiérrez Espada, 2015). They are divided into:
  - The Al Nusra Front, a branch of Al Qaeda in the territory.

- The Islamic State (IS), made up of a group of rebels who have declared a caliphate led by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.
- The Islamic Front that welcomes different groups of armed rebels.

In spite of the conflictive situation in Syria, in 2014 Assad won the elections with 88.7% of the votes (El Mundo, 2014), a process that was described by the opposition as a “parody of democracy” (El Mundo, 2014). Also in the race were Hasan al Nuri and Maher Abdel Hafez Hayar, who obtained 4.3% and 3.2% of the votes respectively. According to Mohammad al Laham, President of the Parliament, citizens had played a responsible role in choosing the most capable person to rebuild Syria (El Mundo, 2014). At least 73.42% of the Syrian citizens who were registered could vote in a process that the West called the “great farce” of the regime to continue its atrocities in the country.

As it has been shown, the conflict in Syria arises from the disgust towards Bashar al Assad, who ended up “deepening the regime’s authoritarian legacy” (Ghotme, Garzón, & Cifuentes, 2015). The dimensions of this conflict have crossed borders, catching the attention of the international community on a daily basis. The unshakable help of the allies to the regime and the formation of an opposition backed by the West have not been able to find a political solution to the problem. On the contrary, the war has lasted for more than six years, not only due to internal factors but also to the participation of the United States and Russia that “have intervened in the Syrian civil war through several diplomatic and strategic mechanisms” (Ghotme & Ripoll, 2014).

Many of the events that have arisen in the context of the war in Syria respond to the “liberal-realistic” political decisions (Ghotme & Ripoll, 2014) of the United States, which has felt the right and obligation to intervene and to express its position in the conflict due to the hegemonic principles that govern it. Meanwhile, Russia has shown a “sovereign” presence (Ghotme & Ripoll, 2014), arguing that sovereignty as an element of a State is something unbreakable in order to achieve internal stability.

In the incessant conflict in Syria, a new panorama of power can be seen in which not only the Russian-American interests converge, but also those of countries like

Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and China, that despite having their own motivations to get involved in the conflict, have aligned themselves either to the White House or the Kremlin to exert greater weight in what it seems to be a New Cold War.

### **3.3 The Syrian conflict in the “New Cold War”**

It was not long after the protests began in March of 2011 that certain countries of the international community began to enlist their official positions on the events that killed at least 4.000 people during their first year of development. As soon as the conflict broke out in Syria, the place became fertile ground for the United States and Russia to begin an active participation in its development, taking advantage of structural failures in Syria and generating circumstantial consequences due to their influence in the conflict.

While the United States has sought to regain its lost prestige due to its mistakes in the Middle East, Russia has intended to reappear as a key player on the world political board, being Syria the example of the differences of the White House and the Kremlin not only at the political level, but also in the diplomatic, military and economic sphere.

To begin with the development of relations between Washington and Moscow in the context of the conflict in Syria, it is essential to understand each other's position regarding the Assad government as well as who have become their allies during the war. The White House and the Kremlin have bet on different conceptions, distancing in their perceptions about Assad, the allies and the direction of the military support.

#### **3.3.1 The contradictions between Washington and Moscow: Bashar al Assad in power**

With regard to Assad's administration, Obama dismissed his government as authoritarian, dictatorial and repressive, considering the top Syrian leader as the stumbling block in the country's transition to democracy. He further stated that Assad's departure from power was the solution to the end of the civil war. In this context, the declarations of the US president, who in a statement issued on August

18, 2011, said: “We have consistently said that President Assad must carry out a democratic transition or resign. He has not done it (the transition). In the interest of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to withdraw” (Expansión CNN, 2011). Following the statement, the European Union, allied to the US actions in Syria, also called for Assad’s resignation, arguing that his promises have lost “all legitimacy” (Expansión CNN, 2011).

On the other hand, the position of Vladimir Putin in representation of Russia has been of absolute support to Assad’s administration, defending the legitimacy of his government. Russia also defends the institutionalism of the Assad government because of the historic alliance between Damascus and Moscow, which made Syria, since the end of the Soviet era, a bulwark to exert influence in the Middle East.

For the Russians, the precedent of the “Libyan mockery” (Ghotme & Ripoll, 2014) represented a fact that would not be repeated in Syria as long as they are involved in the conflict. Likewise, in July of 2012 Putin clarified that the pressure for Assad’s resignation did not represent a solution to the fundamental problem and “that if the Syrian government and President Bashar al Assad are deposed in an unconstitutional manner, the only thing that will happen is that the posts will be exchanged with the present opposition and the endless civil war will continue” (Russia Beyond the Headlines Rbth, 2012).

### **3.3.2 The White House and Kremlin allies**

In relation to the allies of Russia and the United States, there have been important international actors who also seek a share of dominance that allows them to tilt the balance of the situation towards their ambitions. In this way, a political chess has been seen in Syria in which the allies implicitly appear in one of the sides, whether it is the American or the Russian. Nevertheless, in the Syrian conflict the role of the allies has been secondary compared to the one exerted by Washington and Moscow, since they have been mainly focused on supporting the decisions of the main actors of what could be a New Cold War.

On one side, the United States has sought countries that allow it to strengthen its participation in the conflict without resorting to direct military interventionism, as it did in Libya through NATO. Such is the case of the alliances that have been promoted with its historical friend, the European Union, but also with petromonarchies such as Saudi Arabia, which also has an interest in the conflict because it is the “seat” of Sunni Islam and it has been distanced from the Shiite government of Damascus for several years. While on the other hand is Russia, which in the struggle to end the historic hegemony of the United States has been responsible for strengthening ties of a “special friendship” with countries of economic weight such as China or nuclear importance such as Iran.

In the case of the European Union, its participation as an ally of the United States is not only due to economic interests motivated by the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership that has been secretly negotiated, but also to the fact that the two sides, traditionally known as the West, share an “overwhelming power of attraction for immigration” (Roy, 2014). This situation is essential because of the more than 4.000.000 people who seek refuge with their families in places far from the war stage. The European bloc and the United States have mutually supported their initiatives in Syria, sharing actions such as asset’s freeze, exports restriction and the ban on oil imports in that area.

The White House has also found in Saudi Arabia a key element to fight against Assad, as the Saudis have seen in this war the possibility of discrediting Iran, a country that is in favor of the continuity of Assad in power. On the other hand, the religious factor returns to play an essential role since Saudi Arabia is a Sunni monarchy, differing from the Shiite government of Syria. Finally, the other aspect that contributes in the coalition of the Saudis with the Americans is the common objective of eliminating the extremist group Islamic State.

However, Saudi Arabia has not been able to get rid of the accusations that blame it not only for being the main supplier country for rebel groups of opposition but also for sending “multi-million dollar donations to the *jihadist* group (IS)” (BBC News, 2016). It is worth mentioning that “to the US-led coalition, Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates were also incorporated in a line very similar to the



Saudi one” (BBC News, 2016). This is how the categorical Saudi attitude to the events in Syria was praised by the United States. This was announced by John Kirby, State Department spokesman in the Obama administration, assuring that John Kerry, Secretary of State during the second term of the president, thanked the king “for Saudi Arabia’s support for multilateral efforts to find a political transition in Syria” (RT, 2015).

For its part, Russia has also sought to form a solid bloc to ensure the security of its interests in Syria. This is how Iran has appeared within this contest, being this country a fierce rival of Saudi Arabia, a monarchy that as previously mentioned supports the American cause. Iran is the strongest regional ally of the Syrian government at the moment, mainly because of the Shiite religious bond but also because of the geostrategic position of Syria, since by limiting with Lebanon it facilitates contact with Hezbollah.

Iran has collaborated with Assad “through military and economic aid, in that sense, it has provided assistance in intelligence, communications and security advice for crowd control and weapon manipulation, as well as the shipment of ammunition” (Ghotme, Garzón, & Cifuentes, 2015). The Iranian government has been vitally important in shaping Russia’s new axis of power, as it is based on anti-imperialist rhetoric that rejects Washington’s interventionist policies in international affairs.

It should be noted that Iran’s support for the Hezbollah group is a sensitive point for the United States because it is “the only Arab guerrilla capable of defeating the relentless Israeli forces. [...] The Lebanese Shiite militia has committed close to 75% of its total strength on the Syrian front” (Bonet E., 2016). Iran has taken up the issue in Syria as a personal affair because according to a spokesman of Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations special envoy to Syria, the country “invests around 6 billion dollars annually in its support for Assad” (Vargas Posada, 2016).

Another of Putin’s allies for Assad is Xi Jinping, Chinese president, who has maintained the cordial relations that Hu Jintao also had until 2013 when he ended his term. China has joined Russia to defend Syria’s “sovereignty” and together have vetoed any attempt to perpetrate NATO interventionism in that territory. Although

Chinese interests in Syria have a strong economic background because it “has become the largest supplier of products imported from Syria and its investments in the Syrian oil sector are significant” (Ghotme & Ripoll, 2014), it is not the only reason to play an active role in the conflict. The political ambitions of this country are aimed at taking away the leading role to the United States and to achieve this it should promote a conciliatory image in the Middle East.

The logic is this: since Syria is a close ally of Iran, by keeping the Syrian regime intact or, more importantly, preventing pro-Western substitution of it, China is, in fact, ensuring that Iran maintains its regional support and does not fall prey to another Western-led invasion (Wong, 2012).

One of the international actors playing a special role in the conflict in Syria is Turkey, which connects Europe with the Middle East. Being part of NATO, Turkey evidently supports the United States, but its participation in Syria is mainly due to the problems with the Kurds, with whom it has been in conflict since 1984.

The relations between the United States and the YPG (Syrian Kurds) “were forged in 2014 when US bombers attacked positions of the Islamic State, or Daesh, as it prepared to take the city of Kobane”, an important territory that borders with Turkey (Laborie, 2016). For its part, the PYD is allied to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) in Turkey, which appears on the White House “black list”, for being considered as a threatening terrorist organization for the Turks. This is where the paradox of American speech begins. On the one hand the US supports the YPG in Syria but judges the PKK in Turkey (ally of the PYD, which is the party that represents the YPG militia). Meanwhile, Putin has expressed his support for the PYD, whose presence considers fundamental in the negotiations of peace of Geneva that would need the participation of all the involved actors in the Syrian conflict in order to reach a possible solution.

The shooting down of a Turkish plane in Syrian territory in 2012 near Latakia, was the trigger that urged Turkey to ally with the United States. However, this was not the only element that fueled Turkey’s friction with Syria, since everything was made worse with the presence of the Kurds in Jaera, Kobane and Afrin, cities that are

located near to the border that these countries share and that are also under siege by the Islamic State. For this reason, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's claim has been to restrain the advance of the IS towards his territory and to avoid any attempt to propagate radical separatist or extremist ideologies.

Although initially Turkey was an undoubted supporter of the United States, today its approach with Russia could jeopardize Western support for the PKK. Even though Turkey overthrew a Russian plane near to the border with Syria, Putin has given way to a new phase of communication and cordiality with Erdogan. It seems that the statements of the Russian leader, who called this event "a stab in the back" were left behind (BBC News, 2015). While on the other hand, and increasingly confirming the rivalry between the White House and the Kremlin, Barack Obama supported Turkey by arguing that the country "was in its right to defend its airspace" (BBC News, 2015).

Anyway, following an official visit by Erdogan to St. Petersburg, the Russian president stated that this meant a desire to "re-establish dialogue and restore relations between Russia and Turkey" (AlJazeera, 2016). It is then, the indecision of the Turks what makes it difficult to locate them on one side, since apparently they are trying to maintain the internal balance through alliances that do not separate them neither from Washington nor from Moscow.

As it can be evidenced, the partnerships characteristic of what appears as a New Cold War between Russia and the United States are no longer paper alliances. These are regional powers that no longer believe in a unipolar world and, on the contrary, have chosen for an active participation in the interests of their nations. This is how the conflict in Syria represents a transitional stage for Russian-American relations, whose representatives, either directly or indirectly, have been involved in most of the events that have arisen in the course of the problem practically since its first year of development.

### **3.3.3 Diplomatic Crisis**

#### **3.3.3.1 Clashes at the UN**

The differences between the United States and Russia over the situation in Syria moved to the diplomatic sphere, limiting the joint action of the international community to find an early solution to the conflict. Despite the repeated attempts by the United Nations to promote peace in Syria, the projects that have been tabled have been discredited due to the divergence of interests of the powers that have turned the war in Syria into a chess piece that they use at their convenience.

In this context, there were passive UN pronouncements that, overshadowed by the consequences of Resolution 1973 in Libya, has timidly condemned the levels of violence in Syria. At the end of 2011 a first attempt promoted by Germany, the United Kingdom, Portugal and France was made within the UN. This gave Bashar al Assad 30 days to find a way to end violence and start a process of reforms, without considering his removal from power (United Nations, 2011).

This resolution was not approved as Russia and China vetoed it. Explaining his vote, Vitaly Churkin, Russian ambassador to the UN, said: “We consider the threat of an ultimatum and the imposition of sanctions against the Syrian authorities unacceptable. This approach contravenes the principle of a peaceful settlement of the crisis on the basis of a fully Syrian national dialogue” (United Nations, 2011). For her part, Susan Rice, US representative at the UN, said: “The Council should have assumed its responsibilities and imposed strong and selective sanctions” (United Nations, 2011). This was the first sign of the difference of opinion between Washington and Moscow regarding the Assad government.

Subsequently, the Arab League presented a second draft that would also address the situation in Syria, but this once again received the rejection of Russia and China, thus causing the anger of Susan Rice, who expressed her “indignation” against these two countries, which according to her did not allow “to face a growing crisis in Syria and a growing threat to regional peace and security” (United Nations, 2012). In response to these statements, Churkin justified his veto decision by stating: “The draft

resolution that was put to the vote [...] did not adequately reflect the real situation in Syria” (United Nations, 2012), because, according to Russia, the resolution discredited the Assad government and did not mention anything about the situation of the opponents.

A new draft resolution was also tabled, which was vetoed for the third time by Russia and China, whereupon Churkin stated: “We could not accept a document [...] which would open the way to press with sanctions and, subsequently, facilitate external military involvement in Syrian internal affairs” (United Nations, 2012). Immediately, statements were made by Susan Rice, who called the veto a “deplorable” action, in addition to saying that in Syria “the fault lies, rather, fully in the abject regime of Assad and in the Member States that have refused to join the international community and other members of the Council to take firm action against the regime” (United Nations, 2012).

### **3.3.3.2 Failed joint actions**

Despite the obvious differences between the positions of Washington and Moscow, the powers on some occasions attempted to enter into negotiations that would lead to a pact on the conflict in Syria through diplomatic means. As a proof of this is the “Geneva Communiqué”, an agreement signed in 2012 that contemplated Syria’s political transition through dialogue. Later, in 2014, new talks were initiated in the framework of the Geneva II Peace Conference, which was attended by the two sides in conflict, representatives of the government and the opposition.

Geneva II had very clear positions. For its part, the Syrian government, which although accepted to be a participant in the talks, was not willing to relinquish power. On the other hand, the National Coalition of Syria argued that the only solution for peace in the country would be the resignation of Assad. American and Russian efforts to end the conflict in Syria failed on this occasion as the conversation was blocked due to the great divergence of criteria. However, according to Mohammad Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, an expert in Middle East issues, the situation “could have been worse” as “the common denominator of the negotiations in Geneva was very small: positions were far removed” (Wilde, 2014).

Another failed attempt by the United States and Russia was the beginning of the “inter-Syrian talks” in 2016, which would address “the formation of a new government that would include all trends, the drafting of a new Constitution and the organization of presidential and parliamentary elections” (La Jornada, 2016). However, these “slight” approaches were again stalled by the Syrian opposition’s decision to postpone their participation because the escalation of violence in the country had not ceased and that would make this attempt one more of all that have been promoted without achieving results. Nevertheless, the beginning of such talks was enough for Putin to feel that Russia’s goals in Syria were “achieved”.

Throughout the Syrian conflict, there have been several announcements about a ceasefire. However, one of the most important ones took place in February of 2016 when the simultaneous cooperation of Assad, Putin and Obama was achieved for the first time. According to John Kerry, the plan depended on “both the regime and the opposition fulfilling their obligations” (BBC News, 2016), whereupon Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that he had spoken with the Syrian government and that they were “willing to comply” (BBC News, 2016). The agreement sought a cessation of hostilities but due to the presence of Al Nusra and the Islamic State in Syrian territory, the conflict could not be stopped.

### **3.3.3.3 The White House and the Kremlin facing the liberation of Aleppo**

Another event that deserved different opinions by Washington and Moscow was the liberation of Aleppo, a city with a strategic location in the south of the border with Turkey, that owns a crossing of commercial routes of great importance. During the first year of the war, Aleppo was not yet besieged, but in 2012 the rebels took control of the eastern side and the Assad regime forces remained in command of the western zone. Following the efforts of the regime, in collaboration with Russia, the liberation of Aleppo was achieved on December 14, 2016 after Churkin’s statements in which he confirmed that the Syrian government had regained control over the remaining neighborhoods. This represented a symbolic victory for Assad after almost six years of war.

Following the announcement of the liberation of Aleppo, Samantha Power, the United States representative at the UN, verbally confronted her counterparts from Syria, Russia and Iran, making controversial statements that fueled tension in the Security Council. Power expressed: “Three Member States of the United Nations contributing to a noose around civilians. It should shame you. [...] Are you truly incapable of shame?” (Bertrand, 2016) Power's accusations provoked a sarcastic response from Churkin, who said, “Samantha Power gave her speech as if she was Mother Teresa herself. Please, remember which country you represent” (RT, 2016).

What for Russia meant a victory, for the United States was a failure, or at least that was expressed by Alaedin Boruyerdi, chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, who said: “The victory in Aleppo was a very important event. In fact, the US and its regional and European allies suffered a new defeat in the area” (Hispan TV, 2016).

Aleppo became the central topic of the Security Council until the end of 2016. For this reason, on December 19, UN Resolution 2328 was unanimously adopted, in which “the UN was requested to carry out, in a neutral manner, the monitoring and direct observation of the evacuation operation in Aleppo” (United Nations, 2016). This resolution gave way to the participation of observers to ensure that the evacuation process took place under parameters of stillness and order.

On the same day took place the murder of Andrey Karlov, Russian ambassador to Turkey, who was shot while visiting a gallery in Ankara. The attacker was Mevlut Mert Altintas, a Turkish policeman who committed the crime while shouting “Allahu akbar (Allah is the greatest). Do not forget Aleppo! Do not forget Syria! Do not forget Aleppo! Do not forget Syria!” The Kremlin took this act as a sample of terrorism and even received the support of John Kerry, who said that the United States condemned the act and that they were willing to collaborate with Ankara and Moscow during the respective investigations to clarify the facts (CNN, 2016).

### **3.3.4 Economic and political crisis**

#### **3.3.4.1 Sanctions**

Russian-American relations were not only affected by diplomatic clashes but also by the economic and political repercussions of the sanctions that the United States and its allies imposed to Syria, situation not well received by Russia. The first package of sanctions came from the European Union, which ordered the freezing of the assets of Syrian officials and also vetoed the supply of arms to the country in conflict, later including Assad on the sanctioned list. Subsequently, measures in the economic field were intensified by prohibiting the imports of oil from Syria.

For its part, the United States also punished Assad's government in order to pressure him to give up to the euphoric protests demanding his removal from power. The sanctions included, as was the case with the European Union, the freezing of the assets of the Commercial Bank of Syria and its subsidiaries in Lebanon, banning investment in Syria and imports of crude oil (ABC International, 2012). Putin, who was then serving as Russian Prime Minister, called for "caution" from the West when issuing these sanctions (La Información, 2011).

Syria, in the light of international reactions, also received a "punishment" from its Middle East neighbors when it was suspended as a member of the Arab League. This situation was the target of criticism by Sergey Lavrov, who considered as "premeditated the decision to suspend Syria" (La Información, 2011). Of course, Lavrov did not miss the opportunity to make accusations that compromised the stability of relations between Washington and Moscow by stating that it was the Western countries that "fueled fire" in the government's confrontation with opponents in order to "overthrow the regime of Damascus" (La Información, 2011).

#### **3.3.4.2 The fading of old commitments**

The disagreements between the United States and Russia caused the fading of old commitments acquired by the two powers. This is demonstrated by the suspension of the Plutonium Agreement, in force since 2000. This contemplated the elimination of



34 tons of plutonium through reactors. It should be mentioned that plutonium is indispensable for the production of nuclear weapons, whose presence would have serious implications for mankind if used.

The decision was taken by the Kremlin when a decree stipulated that the United States “created a threat to strategic stability as a result of hostile actions towards Russia”. The measure was described by the Russian chancellor as “forced” since the United States and its allies “openly announced the implementation of the containment policy against Russia” (RT, 2016). Whereupon, the White House expressed that the decision to suspend the agreement was “disappointing”.

### **3.3.5 Military Crisis**

#### **3.3.5.1 The debate over the use of chemical weapons**

One of the facts that deepened the friction between Washington and Moscow was the opinion of Barack Obama regarding a possible chemical threat by Syria in 2012. His speech was motivated by the exposition of Jihan al Maqdisi, Syrian spokesman, who through an official statement said: “No chemical or biological weapon will be used during the current crisis in Syria whatever its evolution” except “in case of external aggression against the country” (Cembrero, Carbajosa, & Alandete, 2012). These were the words that put an end to the “stillness” that Washington had shown even though Maqdisi himself claimed that these weapons were guarded by the Armed Forces.

But, what assurance could represent that the chemical weapons were under the power of an entity in the service of Assad? Surely that was the question that led Obama to warn Assad of the “tragic mistake” that the use of those weapons would mean. Earlier, Obama’s spokesman had stated that if Syria were to use them, it would be crossing the “red line”, unleashing an imminent military response from the United States (Monge, 2012).

Obama’s warning on the subject was concrete: “We have made it very clear to the Assad regime and other actors in the region. For us it would be a limit if we see

movement or use of chemical weapons. That would change my calculations” (Monge, 2012). Obama’s harsh reactions to Syria worsened his connection with Moscow, since the Kremlin being Assad’s main protector would be obliged to participate in an eventual military attack by the West, a fact that would have fatal consequences in the course of Diplomacy.

Despite warnings by the White House about the consequences of the use of chemical weapons in mid-2013 among the “usual” bombing of Syrian cities, the Assad government launched an offensive on the suburbs of Guta in Damascus, during which, according to the opposition, chemical weapons were used, killing 1429 people as expressed by John Kerry (BBC News, 2013). According to Peter Bouckaert, Director of Human Rights Watch’s Emergencies Division, “the evidence persuasively suggested that Syrian government troops launched chemical-laden projectiles in the suburbs of Damascus” (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Following this, Assad expressed that everything was a “dirty propaganda war” that sought to discredit him even more.

For Russia, the reports that accused the government of authorizing this event “looked like a previously planned provocation” in complicity with biased media that virtually spread the news at the exact time that the attacks were perpetrated. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexandr Lukashevich said: “It is striking that the regional media, immediately, as if they had received a signal, began an attack of aggressive information, blaming the government completely” (RT, 2013).

This situation generated the reaction of the UN, which immediately ordered Angela Kane, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to investigate the alleged chemical attack in Guta. Meanwhile, from the United States came the statement from the Republican Senator John McCain, who predicted a “speedy” punishment against Syria and also announced his support for a military operation as a sign of US credibility after President Barack Obama declared the previous year that the use of such weapons would be to cross the “red line” with the White House.

Obama stated that “he will always prefer multilateral action where possible, but his obligation as a leader was to ensure that regimes using prohibited weapons were

responsible of their acts”, making it clear that the United States could intervene if the Congress approve the president’s request to start an operation against the forces of Assad. Moscow did not wait for its reaction to Obama’s statements and “recommended” the White House “not to repeat the Iraqi adventure in Syria” (RT, 2013). However, John Kerry stated: “There are increasing reasons to justify a military attack on Syria” (BBC News, 2013).

President Obama ensured that he was “ready to give the order” if the Congress gave the authorization, whereupon Putin argued that it seemed “absurd” that the United States accused Assad of attacking the population with the use of these weapons, in addition he pressed Washington to show the “evidence” that backed its position (BBC News, 2013). Russia also expressed its rejection to a possible US intervention in Syria, as this would mean a “direct violation of international law” and “would undermine the prospects for a political solution to the conflict” (BBC News, 2013).

Despite the heat of the situation, a meeting between John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov took place, where Kerry agreed that the United States would renounce to military intervention but emphasized: “Only after the threat of direct US military action we have reached a point at which we are having substantial technical talks in Geneva” (20 Minutos, 2013). Prior to this meeting, John Kerry had already “left the script” that was part of the strong American speech, by saying that “the Syrian regime could avoid the attack if it announced that it was committed to destroy its chemical weapons in front of the international community” (Suárez, 2013). Kerry’s pronouncement was seen as a possible solution to the verbal escalation that had been occurring since the incident in Guta and was thus adopted by Resolution 2118, which forced Assad to deliver his chemical arsenal.

The efforts of Russia and the United States were unified for the achievement of these goals. This time it did not happen as on previous occasions, where the veto of Russia and its faithful ally, China, prevented the approval of projects. It was vital for Russia that the resolution did not adjudicate the acts committed in Guta to the Assad regime and that it excluded Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which allows the use of military force to ensure compliance with resolutions.

For his part, Lavrov stated: “We believe that the experts of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations will act in a professional and impartial manner in Syria, fully respecting the sovereignty of that country” (United Nations, 2013), while John Kerry expressed: “I would like to thank Foreign Minister Lavrov for his personal efforts and cooperation before Geneva and all this week so that we could find a similar position” (United Nations, 2013).

This fact calmed the uncertainty of the international community with regard to future chemical attacks on civil society and also restored Russia’s prestige as a key element in reaching the agreement. The United States thus recognized that the presence of Russia was increasingly necessary if a treaty was to be sealed. Although the resolution had “free” Assad from official allegations, Samantha Power’s Twitter statements continued to blame the Damascus government for the damage done: “The agreement reached with Russia over the resolution legally forces Syria to hand over chemical weapons that the regime used against its people” (Suárez, 2013).

### **3.3.5.2 Insurgent groups: the alibi for interventionism by Russia and the United States**

#### **3.3.5.2.1 Al Nusra, the Homs Massacre and the vision of Putin and Obama**

With the arrival of 2012, the situation in Syria would be aggravated in greater proportion due to the appearance of the front Al Nusra. This Al Qaeda affiliate, according to Lorenzo Martín, an expert in international security, could even represent a greater danger than the Islamic State. Martín argues that the militants of Al Nusra “follow the policy of winning hearts and minds and, in this case, the environment in which they move is more favorable” (Bonet E., 2016).

Al Nusra took control in Homs, Hama, Idlib and much of the Syrian Golan Heights. In addition, it is possible that this front has strong links with the Free Syrian Army, which in the opinion of Nizar Abdelkader, a retired Lebanese general, “makes the Al Nusra Front a long-term danger”, because it would be an organization “intrinsically intertwined with the Syrian opposition” (Bonet E., 2016).

After the rebels seized control of Homs, Syria's third-largest city, the Syrian army undertook a military campaign to regain power in the city and to expel Al Nusra from nearby areas as well. Then began the bombings in the city, event known as the Homs Massacre, which caused the displeasure of Barack Obama, who demanded once again the resignation of President Assad. On the contrary, Russia expressed that the US could not condemn only one of the parts in conflict (González, 2012). Following this, Assad said that the photos and videos circulating in the media were not real and that he had not ordered the bombing. According to the Syrian president, it was all a collusion to put pressure on the UN since it was close to holding a meeting to address the country's problems.

#### **3.3.5.2.2 The Islamic State: A common enemy that generates individual reactions**

In the past, the contest for power was limited to the participation of States as such, but today the reality is different. The emergence of armed non-state actors "determines the dynamics and scope of the new wars" (Prado Pérez, 2015). Thus, the Islamic State was born as a branch of Al Qaeda. At first it was called the "Islamic State of Iraq" but then it came to Syria, where it designated Raqqa as its de-facto capital and was renamed "Islamic State of Iraq and Levant". "Levant" was the old name of Syrian territories, where it was announced the installation of a caliphate in June of 2014.

Its presence in Syria deserved the consternation of Putin and Obama, who would no longer be the only ones leading the contest but would have to share the public talk with this new actor. IS started with the intention of absorbing the front Al Nusra, but expanded its horizons perpetrating terrorist acts in Europe and trying to reach Africa in order to ensure the implementation of a law that governs the entire Muslim world. Fighting the IS has become, perhaps, the only common ground between Russia and the United States since the beginning of the "New Cold War". Nevertheless, the few "joint" attempts have not had success in their purpose because although the defeat of the IS would be of great importance for both Washington and Moscow, their rivalry and their ambition for global hegemony have represented an obstacle.

In face of danger that the IS means to the peace and stability of the United States, in September of 2014 Barack Obama began the bombing against its fortresses. Obama's warmongering resistance could no longer be maintained and he was forced to act in Syria, not by attacking regime forces but by seeking the elimination of the IS in this territory. Although Obama was initially reluctant to engage in any type of military intervention in the conflict, in 2014 the Washington Post and ABC News polls supported actions against the IS with the 71% approval of public opinion (Faus, 2014).

The United States took the lead in the fight against the Islamic State, leading a coalition of more than forty countries that shared its cause. This coalition was formed by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Iraq, Turkey, Canada, among others. In the case of Iraq, the country gave all the necessary authorizations so that the United States could make use of its airspace without limitations, while taking advantage of humanitarian aid that would benefit its displaced people. Of course, the White House did not miss the opportunity to provoke the Kremlin by asserting that these operations were the "hallmark of American leadership" (El Mundo, 2014).

It is worth noting that Obama was strong in stating that "he was not going to cooperate with Syrian President Bashar al Assad in the fight against the IS" (RT, 2014) and instead "he had asked Congress again for permission to train and equip the Syrian rebels" (RT, 2014), as a decree would have been signed in 2012, authorizing the CIA to provide support to the Syrian insurgents. According to Russian media, this decree would "provide wide aid to the armed opposition in Syria to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al Assad" (RT, 2014). Of course, this fact contributed to the mistrust between the White House and the Kremlin, which had already been affected after the US State Department allocated 25 million dollars to the opposition under the slogan of "non-lethal aid" and 64 million dollars more as "humanitarian aid" (RT, 2014).

The Russian refusal to intervene in Syria soon became evident in the face of Obama's decision. According to Russia, the actions of the West in Syria were "illegitimate" and "the Syrian bombings by the United States and its partners

required not only a formal unilateral notification of Damascus, but Syria's approval or the decision of the Security Council of the UN" (RT, 2014). However, Russia also intervened militarily in Syria when, in 2015, after the IS seized control of the city of Palmira, Bashar al Assad sought its help in combating the terrorist group. For this reason, on September 30, 2015, the Russian Senate gave approval to the country's Air Force to enter Syrian territory and begin the same day operations in collaboration with the Assad government troops.

According to Sergey Lavrov, "the main objectives of the Russian bombing in Syria were arsenals of arms, fuel deposits and other facilities with military material of the Islamic State" (RT, 2015). The actions of the Kremlin generated the concern of the Syrian National Coalition that described these actions as "Russian military aggression" (BBC News, 2015) and also asserted that Russia's aid was not to fight against the Islamic State but to "support the regime of Assad in his war against civilians" (BBC News, 2015).

As Russia continued its anti-terrorist campaign in response to Assad's appeal for help, the United States began to doubt about the true purpose of the bombings, whereupon Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter expressed: "It does not seem that the bombings took place against areas where there is IS activity" (BBC News, 2015). Carter insisted that Russia's actions were "counterproductive" and that what it had done was "indirectly against a coalition of 60 countries involved in the war launched against the IS" (BBC News, 2015).

The rivalry between the United States and Russia in the Syrian conflict in the context of the "New Cold War" has been notorious, because despite the few attempts to contribute to the end of the war, the tension between these two powers did not diminish, at least until the culmination of Barack Obama's presidential term. In the last days of 2016, Russia relegated the United States to the background, by gaining prominence after a ceasefire agreement that was announced between the Syrian government and the rebels, promoted by Putin and Erdogan, which placed Russia again as the country with the most influential leader in the world.

## CHAPTER 4: THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT IN THE “NEW COLD WAR”

After almost three years since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, another event would aggravate the relations between Russia and the United States, because their respective interests would again be affected when at the end of 2013 a dispute inside Ukraine gave the powers a new territory of confrontation in the framework of the “New Cold War”.

As it happened in Syria, what began as an internal conflict would soon have the intervention of Moscow on the one hand and on the other the participation of Washington, along with its traditional ally, the European Union. The multiple protests in Kiev (the Ukrainian capital), the violent clashes between the civilian population and the police, the resignation of President Viktor Yanukovich, the separation of the Crimean peninsula, the pro-Russian uprisings in Eastern Ukraine, as well as the struggle between the United States and Russia to keep the country within their sphere of influence, caused deep political, social and economic instability in Ukraine, of which its population has not yet been able to recover.

However, these events cannot be seen as part of a new conflict, since they are the result of the convergence of internal factors that historically have divided the Ukrainian people, as well as of external aspects that have had interference in the country, especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, of which Ukraine was a member. Given this, such circumstances become essential to understand the roots of the problem and its geopolitical implication for Russia and the United States.

Furthermore, the role played by external actors becomes a fundamental element to define the future of countries where internal fissures and the clash of geopolitical interests determine the course and outcome of the so-called *proxy wars* or subsidiary wars, that is, those where the rivals use territories outside their own as battlefields, as demonstrated in the analysis of the Syrian case and as will also be done in the Ukrainian case.



## **4.1 Factors of the Ukrainian conflict**

After the fall of the USSR, the old socialist republics that had formed it took their own course regarding the political organization of the State and the way of conducting their foreign policy. Although Ukraine had been one of the first republics to proclaim independence, its close ties with Russia did not allow it to completely abandon its dependence on the Eurasian giant and fully adapt to the Western way of life. In this way, Ukraine faced the dilemma of becoming a pro-Russian or a pro-Western State.

This disjunction has its origins in political, historical-cultural and economic factors inside Ukraine, as well as in external factors such as the interests of the West (the United States and the European Union) and Russia, which put pressure on Ukrainian governments due to the geostrategic position of the country. These elements deserve to be considered since they provide the background for the Ukrainian crisis that was detonated in November of 2013.

### **4.1.1 Internal factors**

#### **4.1.1.1 Political factors**

On August 24, 1991, the Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament) approved the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine, which would later be submitted to a referendum on December 1, where 90.32% of voters favored it. Those regions that expressed broad support for the declaration came mainly from the west, while those with little enthusiasm for independence belonged to the eastern part of the country.

For example, in the western *oblasts* (provinces) of Ternopil and Lviv, 98.67% and 97.46% of electors voted in favor of independence. On the other hand, in the east of Ukraine the acceptance was smaller, since in the Kharkiv oblast the 75.83% approved the declaration, whereas in Donetsk the 76.85% did. But perhaps the most significant case that deserves to be analyzed for its later relevance in 2014 is the one of Crimea, a peninsula located to the southeast, where only 54.19% supported independence. Similarly, in Sevastopol, an important city in Crimea and of great

geostrategic value for Russia, only 57.07% of the electors favored independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It is important to mention that in Crimea the number of voters was only 67.5%, compared to the 97.1% that Ternopil had (Lapychak, 1991) (see Appendix 3).

But the election outcome in Crimea was not surprising to the Ukrainians or to the international community, since months ago, with Ukraine's foreseeable intention to proclaim its independence, the region declared its determination to rejoin Russia, which it had formerly been part of until it was ceded by Khrushchev to Ukraine in 1954. Thus, on January 20, 1991, a referendum was held in Crimea, where 93.26% of the electors voted for the restitution of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the Soviet Russia. However, the result was not recognized by Ukraine (Sputnik, 2011).

Crimea's attempts to separate from Ukraine did not cease, as in 1992 Crimea proclaimed its independence and later approved a Constitution, events that were rejected by the government. That same month, the Russian Parliament declared as null the decision to cede Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, which was also not recognized by Ukraine. In 1994, Crimea declared its independence again and even got to appoint its own president. However, in 1995 the Ukrainian Parliament abolished the 1992 Constitution, while Crimea adopted a new Constitution that same year, stipulating its autonomy but within the Ukrainian borders. This was accepted by the Rada, which recognized the Autonomous Republic of Crimea as part of Ukraine, being the only administration with that condition in the country.

In this way, the internal political division of Ukraine was evident before the independence of the new State and during its first years, which would damage the stability of the country, since *a posteriori* it would be an important source for the erosion of new disputes. However, this division has its roots in historical-cultural factors, including the ethnic and linguistic, as well as the common history of Ukraine with Russia.

#### **4.1.1.2 Historical-cultural factors**

The historical heritage between Ukrainians and Russians comes from the 9th century, when the tribes of the territories now known as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus formed the Kievan Rus, cradle of Slavic culture, whose capital would be the present city of Kiev. In 1654, after the invasion of Poland and Lithuania into Ukraine, Russia and Ukraine signed the Treaty of Pereyaslav, an alliance under which the Russians would grant protection to their Ukrainian brothers. This led to the war between Russia and Poland, in which Kiev would be given to Russia thanks to its victory.

In the eighteenth century, territories of southern and eastern Ukraine that had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire were annexed to the Russian Empire, which explains the broad presence of the Russian ethnic group in the eastern part of Ukraine. On the other hand, the western region was under the control of the Austrian Empire, reason why the oblasts of the west side are populated mainly by Ukrainians. Later on, these territories would be unified along with Russian territories that were granted to Ukraine in the course of the creation of the USSR, where the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic would also be born, being this the second more important of the Union after Russia.

This is how Ukraine, also known as “little Russia”, throughout its history has maintained close ties with the Russians. It was even said in Czarist times: “Petersburg is the head of Russia, Moscow is the heart, and Kiev the soul, thus identifying the ancient capital of the Rus as an intangible foundation of national identity” (Ruiz González F. J., 2014).

These historical factors also had an impact on the ethnic distribution of the country. According to the last census conducted in 2001, in Ukraine lived 77.8% of Ukrainians, while the Russian ethnicity represented 17.3% of the population. In the western oblasts the presence of Russians was very small. In Lviv, for example, it reached 6%, in Ivano-Frankivsk 1.8% and in Ternopil 1.2%. In contrast, on the eastern side statistics show a different picture. Luhansk was inhabited by 39% of Russians, while Donetsk by a 38.2%.

In Crimea, the Russian population reached 58.3%, while the Ukrainian population reached 24.3%. In this region the data of the city of Sevastopol stood out, because in that one inhabited 71.7% of Russians. But within Crimea there is another ethnic minority of great importance that represents 12% of its population: the Tatars. During the Stalinist era these were banished to Siberia because of their cooperation with the Nazis in World War II. However, once the USSR dissolved, some returned to Crimea, showing from the outset a rejection to the “Russification” of the area, which aggravated inter-ethnic problems.

Another factor that contributes to the Ukrainian fragmentation and that has been very controversial is the language. The 67.5% of the population recognizes the Ukrainian language as their first language, while 29.6% recognizes the Russian language, the latter predominating in the eastern zone. In Sevastopol, for example, 77% of the population states that Russian is their first language, in Donetsk 75% does, in Luhansk 69% and in Kharkiv 44% (see Appendix 4).

This is how a Ukraine without a unique national identity, the main threat to its internal stability, becomes a fertile ground for Ukrainian nationalism of the west side and pro-Russian groups of the east to emerge. This weakness has been politically exploited by external actors on more than one occasion since the fall of the USSR, either to favor Western or Russian interests.

#### **4.1.1.3 Economic factors**

The debacle of the Soviet Union cannot be understood only as a political phenomenon, since it touched other aspects of the life of its inhabitants, among which the economic one stands out. The uncertainty and the serious economic situation in the last Soviet years were the main motivation for the independence claims of the republics that sought the disappearance of the Union, including Ukraine.

However, in the years after independence, the recession continued and the Ukrainians could not significantly improve their economy. This situation has led the country to constantly seek for foreign loans, whether from international financial

organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or from other countries that have contributed to the Ukrainian “bailout”.

Inside, once again the Ukrainian population is divided by the economic and productive field. The western area is primarily agricultural, while the Ukrainian industrial sector is located in the eastern side. For example, Donetsk and Luhansk are home to the chemical, steel and coal industries, and the arms industry is located in Kharkiv and Crimea. Although agriculture has been in the forefront of Ukraine’s exportable supply in recent years, iron and steel have traditionally been the main export products, which is why the eastern oblasts are of great importance to the Ukrainian economy.

According to WTO data, until 2012, a year before the Ukrainian conflict broke out, Ukraine’s main trade partner was Russia (25.7% of exports and 32.4% of imports), followed by the European Union (24.9% of exports and 31% of imports). The economic interdependence between Russians and Ukrainians can be especially evident in energy matters, as Ukrainians’ main supplier of gas is Russia: more than 80% by 2012 (World Trade Organization, 2016).

The commercial connection with the former Soviet republics could not be abandoned after the dissolution of the USSR. Before the resignation of Gorbachev, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created, which from the beginning was aimed at cooperation in economic, security and defense matters, among others. Although the organization has made significant progress in trade and economic matters, Ukraine has maintained a less inclusive orientation in the CIS and has preferred to sign bilateral free trade agreements with the majority of its members. Nevertheless, with the intention of strengthening its ties with the European Union, negotiations began in 2007 for the signing of an Association and Free Trade Agreement, a partnership that would unleash deep divisions in 2013, as the Ukrainian government’s refusal to sign the agreement would motivate the riots that started the current conflict in Ukraine.

## **4.1.2 External factors**

### **4.1.2.1 The geopolitical value of Ukraine and the interests of the powers**

For its position in the world map, Ukraine is considered the door between Russia and the West. To the north it borders with Belarus and part of Russia; to the west with Poland, Slovakia and Hungary; to the southwest are located Romania and Moldova; to the south it borders with the Black Sea; while to the east lays Russia. This location places it as a target for the interests of Russia and the United States along with the EU. But what is really at stake for the powers?

With the exception of Moldova, all countries bordering Ukrainian territory to the west and southwest belong to the European Union and to NATO, while Belarus and Moldova become, together with Ukraine itself, a shield to protect Russia's borders from the expansion of these two Western organizations. Without Ukraine within its sphere of influence, Russia would only be protected on the western side by Belarus, since Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, other countries with which Russia limits to the west (the last two surround the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad), are members of the EU and NATO, with the exception of Finland that belongs only to the European Union (see Appendix 5).

However, Belarus gives Russia more security than Ukraine, since after the fall of the USSR these two countries opted for several integration mechanisms, especially in economic matters, which despite occasional discrepancies are now consolidated. On the contrary, in Ukraine the Russian government is not completely sure of having one more member in its allied board, since the Ukrainians still have not been able to define a totally solid partnership neither with the Russian bloc nor with the Western bloc.

This is due to the fact that in the field of foreign relations, Ukraine has not had a single state policy, but these have been conditioned to the ideological inclinations of the governments in turn. Thus, during the pro-Western presidential periods, approaches to the EU, the United States and NATO have been at the heart of political action. On the other hand, when pro-Russian presidents have led the country, the

distancing from the Western bloc and the preference for closer ties with Russia have been key elements.

The United States' intention to exert its influence over Ukraine, through its incorporation into NATO, represents for Russia a threat to its security very similar to that of the 1962 Missile Crisis. In the framework of the NATO Summit in Bucharest held in April of 2008, Bush expressed his enthusiasm for granting a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine as a first step towards their possible entry, a situation that bothered Russia given their geographical location. Both Georgia and Ukraine border Russian territory, reason why their membership in NATO would favor the military presence of the West on Russian borders, putting Moscow on alert.

But the attempt to grant the MAP to the two former Soviet republics was blocked by some of the NATO countries themselves, such as Germany, France and Spain as they saw in it a threat to Russia-West relations. Anyways, with Ukraine in NATO, the West would further expand its activities in Eastern Europe, mobilizing more weapons, a situation that would guarantee a faster response to a possible attack from Moscow.

Also in military matters, the geostrategic position of Crimea kept the area under the Russian radar from the beginnings of Ukraine as an independent State. The city of Sevastopol was key to the navy of the USSR, so during the early post-Soviet years Russia secured its use thanks to a lease agreement with the Ukrainian government, which was signed in 1997 for a period of twenty years.

The Russian Navy is formed by the Northern Fleet, the Pacific Fleet, the Baltic Fleet, the Caspian Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet, the latter located in Sevastopol. The loss of this naval base, although it would not impede the direct access of Russia to the Black Sea, it would generate inconveniences because the Russian government would have to establish the Black Sea Fleet in another place with exit to that sea. In addition, the control of Sevastopol is essential to access the Mediterranean, where Russia possesses the Tartus naval base in Syria (see appendix 6).

The interests of the powers in Ukraine are also evident in the economic field. In 2014, a treaty was signed for the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (later joined by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan), which came into force in 2015. Ukraine was invited to join the bloc, but discrepancies with Moscow have not allowed its integration. For Putin, the incorporation of Ukraine into the EAEU, the eastern equivalent to the European Union, would be of crucial importance because in addition to improving the economy of the bloc, it would reduce the influence of the European Union and the United States in the area, thus providing the ideal scenario for Russia to consolidate its political leadership in Eurasia.

On the contrary, the incorporation of Ukraine to the European Union could increase the economic income of its members, given the vast agricultural offer of the country. Ukraine is the largest producer of wheat and barley in Eastern Europe, the second largest producer of potatoes in Europe (behind Russia) and it ranks fifth in terms of sugar beet production. In addition, it is the second exporter of steel to the EU, after Russia, so its membership in the bloc would decrease European dependence on Russian steel imports (Azcárate Luxán & Sánchez Sánchez, 2013).

In the energy field, Ukraine is the access door of Russian gas to Europe. About 80% of Russian gas exports go to Europe and approximately one-third of the gas imported by Europeans is Russian, with Ukraine being the channel through which more than 50% of Russian gas goes to Europe (see Appendix 7). The shortage of Russian gas would damage the economy of the European Union, while for Russia to lose control over Ukraine would mean losing control of the gas pipelines that transport most of the gas that goes to Europe. In addition, for Ukraine to move away from Moscow would encourage Russia to seek to reduce the dependence on the pipelines that cross its territory, causing great losses in the Ukrainian economy.

The analyzed elements reflect the importance for both Russia and the United States of exerting their influence over Ukraine. Russia is perhaps more interested in keeping Ukraine as an ally, since its political, economic, military, and even social interests are much broader than those of the Americans. On the other hand, for the United States its inclination to strengthen ties with the Ukrainians, through the EU and



NATO, is related to the impediment of “Russia’s rebirth” as a power of equal or greater importance than the USSR, since the course taken by Moscow since Putin’s arrival to power has been interpreted by many as the “Soviet revenge”.

It is also essential to emphasize the importance of the alliance between the United States with the European Union and NATO, which has been described by Putin as a provocation, when in 2007 during the Munich Security Conference, he expressed:

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? [...] I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: “the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee”. Where are these guarantees? (Kremlin, 2017)

In this way, Ukraine is forced to choose between three options. The first would be to become a military mattress, keeping a balance between its neighbors in the commercial and economic field; the second would be to establish a strong military partnership and economic integration with Russia and the Eurasian Union; while the third and last would contemplate its integration into NATO and the beginning of a process of economic and preferential trade agreements with the EU, with the aim of becoming a member of it (Ballesteros Martín, 2014).

#### **4.2 New conflict or old unresolved issue?**

Weakness in Russian-US relations had already been brewing since the first decade of the 21st century, but the turning point was the outbreak of conflicts in Syria in 2011 and then in Ukraine in 2013. However, before the war broke out in Syria, the control of this country had not been a matter of dispute between Washington and Moscow. Whereas in Ukraine, since before 2013 a future confrontation between the two powers was already foreseeing, since it is an old unresolved issue.

#### **4.2.1 The Orange Revolution**

The so-called “color revolutions” allude to those protests that have taken place inside several countries (many of which were members of the Soviet Union or were under their sphere of influence), with the aim of making changes in their political course, with the apparent support of the West. Thus, in 2000 the Bulldozer Revolution was carried out in Serbia, in 2003 the Rose Revolution in Georgia, in 2004 the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and in 2005 the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. However, due to the importance of Ukraine for Russia, the Orange Revolution was the one that aroused greater concern, thus fostering the distancing between Russia and the United States.

In the final years of the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, who ruled Ukraine from 1994 to 2005, Viktor Yanukovich was appointed as Prime Minister and came forward with Kuchma’s support for the 2004 election as the presidential candidate of the Party of Regions, considered as a party of pro-Russian ideology. Representing the pro-Western sector, Viktor Yushchenko won the first round with a slight advantage over Yanukovich, who in the second round defeated Yushchenko thanks to an alleged electoral fraud.

This triggered protests that began in Kiev on November 22, 2004, a day after the announcement of the results, and that would spread throughout the rest of the country, especially in the western side. For the color used in the protests, this episode is known as the Orange Revolution. After the disagreement with the elections, the result of the second round was annulled and a third round was called for December, where the result was favorable for Yushchenko, who prevailed over Yanukovich and finally took the charge of president of Ukraine in January of 2005, ending the social protests. Immediately, Yulia Tymoshenko, one of the leaders of the Orange Revolution, was appointed as Ukrainian Prime Minister.

However, the new political course of Ukraine would generate a division of opinions among the population. In the east, the citizens had been in favor of Yanukovich, who was born in Donetsk and was even governor of the oblast, for which they described the new leaders and their parties as “Nazi-fascists”. On the other hand, supporters of

Yushchenko accused Yanukovych, his supporters and Kuchma's government team of having attacked his life as during the presidential campaign Yushchenko was poisoned and as a result his face was disfigured. This attack came to be adjudged, by Yushchenko's followers, even to the Russian government, since Putin had expressed sympathy for candidate Yanukovych and maintained a good relationship with Kuchma.

In fact, after denouncing the electoral fraud, Yushchenko proposed to repeat the second round, while Kuchma called for the realization of new elections (where it was planned to present a new candidate as a replacement for Yanukovych, whose reputation was tarnished by the fraud) as the more viable solution, which was endorsed by Putin. "That will not give anything. People can vote for the third time, for the fourth time, twenty-five times, until one of the parties obtains the necessary results", said the Russian president regarding Yushchenko's request (Bonet P., 2004). Anyway, the Kremlin could not frown upon the election of a pro-Russian president.

Russia was not the only power that took a stand in the Ukrainian events, as the European Union had expressed to the Kuchma government its concern about the violation of democratic procedures in the elections and the failure to comply with international electoral rules, threatening even with a turnaround in its relations with Ukraine in the event of an electoral fraud.

The US government, for its part, was accused of funding Yushchenko's party and the Orange Revolution protesters, which is why many nicknamed the new Ukrainian president as "*Bushchenko*" for the alliance he allegedly had with Bush. The money would have been channeled through state organizations such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and NGOs such as Freedom House, Carnegie Foundation, Renaissance Foundation, and International Centre for Policy Studies in Ukraine, among others (Wilson, 2006, p. 184).

In addition, it is estimated that the Ukrainian-American community helped raise funds to support the Orange Revolution, especially in Chicago, the original home of Yushchenko's wife. This generated criticism from US politicians such as former

Congressman Ron Paul, who expressed: “Several US government agencies [...] sent US taxpayer dollars into Ukraine in an attempt to influence the outcome” (Wilson, 2006, p. 184).

While for Yushchenko’s supporters, his victory meant the establishment of a true democracy in Ukraine, for Putin represented a hard attack. The United States had added one more ally to stop what was perceived as “imperialist intentions” of Russia, as the actions of the new Ukrainian government would be aimed at an approach with the West. However, Washington could not attack Russia without the help of the European Union, so the subsequent approach between Yushchenko’s Ukraine and the EU was an advantage for the United States. In relation to this, Charles Krauthammer, author of “The Unipolar Moment”, stated the purposes behind the complicity between the United States and Europe:

This is about Russia first, democracy only second. This Ukrainian episode is a brief, almost nostalgic throwback to the Cold War. Russia is trying to hang on to the last remnants of its empire. The West wants to finish the job begun with the fall of the Berlin Wall and continue Europe’s march to the east (Krauthammer, 2004).

#### **4.2.2 Geopolitics after the Orange Revolution**

During his campaign, Yushchenko expressed his intention to strengthen ties with the European Union and with NATO. Only a month after having been invested as head of State he traveled to Brussels, favoring a first approach to the EU. This generated continuity in bilateral relations maintained since the Kuchma administration, as there was a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in force since 1998. With the expansion of the EU in 2004, the European Neighborhood Policy was reformulated, which sought to strengthen cooperation with Ukraine. Later, with Yushchenko in command, negotiations began for the signing of an Association Agreement that included the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, considered as the previous step for Ukraine’s entry into the EU.

Also, the incorporation of the country into NATO had been announced as one of the main points on the agenda of the new government. In 2006, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic expressed their support for Ukraine's accession to the Alliance. Similarly, Yushchenko expressed his interest in obtaining a MAP, which was seconded by the United States but that would be truncated, as already mentioned, by some countries of NATO itself. In any case, Ukraine had not yet met all the requirements for the accession, such as: internal stability, as well as "political and military reforms and guarantees for civil liberties, which would take a decade" (Erlanger & Lee Myers, 2008).

Despite this, in 2006 the United States and Ukraine jointly conducted the *Sea Breeze* military exercises, a situation that was not well received by some sectors of Ukraine, especially in the southeastern area. Similarly, in 2008 NATO conducted exercises in the Black Sea, generating the rejection of people from Crimea and Odessa to the presence of the organization's troops. In addition, 2007 surveys revealed that in Ukraine approximately 54% were against a possible NATO membership. Yanukovich took advantage of this to handle a speech with which he could "refer to «cooperation» with NATO instead of «integration» in it" (Perepelytsia , 2007).

Although NATO membership could not be consolidated during Yushchenko's presidency, the Kremlin remained on alert to the geopolitical maneuvers that were taking place, all this while relations with the West and Ukraine deteriorated. For example, during the war in Georgia, the Ukrainian government tried to reduce the Russia's influence by decreeing that the Russians would have to ask for prior permission in order to enter or leave the naval base in Sevastopol, a situation that bothered Putin. In addition, Europe began new projects encouraged by the United States for the construction of gas pipelines, such as *Nabucco*, which was aimed to diminish the Russian dependence by transporting gas from the Caspian Sea through Turkey. The situation would hit bottom when in 2006 and 2009, Russia cut off the gas supply to Ukraine and therefore to Europe, in what was called the "gas war".

But in view of Ukraine's evident actions to favor Western interests, Putin decided to secure Russia's economic revenues by building new gas pipelines that would allow it to carry gas through the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, avoiding its passage through

Ukrainian territory. In this context, Russia began the construction of the *North Stream*, a channel that would transport gas through the Baltic directly towards Germany, and that at the moment is already in operation. Later on, the *South Stream* project was announced, a gas pipeline in which gas would travel from the Black Sea, through Bulgaria and the Balkans to Austria and Italy (see Appendix 8). The latter was canceled in December of 2014, after the government of Bulgaria announced that it would not authorize the project (Azcarate Luxán & Sánchez Sánchez, 2013, p. 253).

Meanwhile, political instability could not be overcome in Ukraine due to fissures within the Yushchenko government, which caused him to obtain only 5% of the votes in the presidential elections of 2010. For his part, Yanukovich submitted his candidacy again and this time he won with 48.95% of the votes over Yulia Tymoshenko, who obtained 45.47%. Once again the division of Ukraine became evident, as in the eastern regions the vote was mostly for Yanukovich, while in the west Tymoshenko was more accepted than his opponent. This was the beginning of another stage of change in Ukrainian politics.

### **4.3 The internal conflict in Ukraine (2013)**

After assuming power, Yanukovich expressed his intention to achieve a balance in Ukraine's foreign policy, which is why he took decisive steps towards an approach with both Russia and the West. In this way, he promised the Ukrainians to sign the Association Agreement that the country was already negotiating with the European Union. On the other hand, shortly after assuming the presidency, he signed with Russia the renewal of the lease agreement of Sevastopol, which was due in 2017, in exchange for a 30% reduction in the price of Russian gas. Thanks to this extension, the Black Sea Fleet could occupy the naval base until 2042. Following the same line, a law was approved in the Rada by which Ukraine acquired the status of neutral country, reason why its possible entry into NATO was suspended.

In addition, since his campaign Yanukovich had promised changes in favor of the Russian-speakers, reason why in 2012 he promoted a law that granted the Russian language the status of regional language in the places where it was spoken at least by

10% of the population. However, this caused protests by nationalist groups, which began in Kiev and spread especially to the western oblasts.

But within the country, the political rivalries inherited from the Orange Revolution seemed not to be erased. In 2011, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for alleged prevaricate and abuse of power during negotiations with Russia to end the gas war. This situation was badly received by the European Union, since Tymoshenko claimed that it was a political revenge, reason why the Yanukovich administration began to feel pressure from Brussels to release Tymoshenko, being this one of the main demands of the EU to sign the Association Agreement. In addition, the EU demanded that Ukraine adopted certain financial and electoral reforms aimed at strengthening democracy and improving the economy.

The signing of the agreement was scheduled for the end of November of 2013, during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. However, a few days earlier, contrary to Yanukovich's own promise, the signing was suspended, unleashing the discontent of those who longed to join the bloc. This would be the trigger for Ukraine to start a period of deep crisis that would lead the country to a civil war.

After the announcement of the government, on November 21, 2013, protests began in Kiev, which attracted the crowd thanks to the use of social networks. In the Independence Square, better known as *Maidan*, thousands of protesters gathered immediately requesting the signing of the agreement, but as the protests continued, they also called for Yanukovich's resignation. The protests, which had initially been promoted by students, soon had the presence of nationalist, pro-European and far-right political groups, accused of being "neo-Nazis" by the ruling party and the pro-Russians. Because the largest concentration of people was given in Maidan and for the objective of the protests to reach the "European dream", these received the name of *Euromaidan*.

The streets of Kiev were transformed into a battlefield protected by barricades that were built by protesters themselves. The escalation of violence was accentuated on February 20, 2014 in the so-called "Black Thursday", where about 90 protesters died.

This last event generated more pressure for the government, reason why the next day Yanukovych agreed with the opposition to call for anticipated elections, to carry out constitutional reforms and to make the forces of both sides leave Maidan.

However, the agreement was not enough for the most radical groups of nationalism, who stated that the riots would not stop until the president's resignation. The Rada dismissed Yanukovych on February 22, before which he claimed to have suffered a coup. An arrest warrant was issued against him, but the president would have fled the country the same day of his dismissal. Immediately, Yulia Tymoshenko was released from her house arrest and it was announced that there would be new presidential elections in May of the same year. The provisional presidency was taken over by Alexander Turchynov, President of Parliament, while Arseniy Yatsenyuk, one of the political leaders of Euromaidan, was appointed Prime Minister.

With the introduction of the new regime, the vast majority of ministerial positions (eighteen of twenty) were handed over to citizens from central and western Ukraine, leaving the eastern area with almost none representation in the cabinet. This, coupled with the fact that the new government announced its intention to repeal the law that granted the Russian language the status of regional language, raised fears within the pro-Russian sectors and was perceived as a threat to carry out a possible "derussification". Furthermore, the declarations of Yanukovych ignoring the new dome and declaring it as illegitimate echoed in southeastern Ukraine, where new protests began as a sign of rejection to the new regime.

It had only been three days since Yanukovych was deposed when the first uprisings against the results of Euromaidan took place in Crimea. As a consequence, the Prime Minister of Crimea was replaced by a new head of government with a separatist ideology, who announced that a referendum would be held for the secession of Crimea and its reincorporation to Russia. In the midst of total rejection of Ukraine, on March 11, 2014, Crimea declared its independence, which had to be legitimized through a referendum in which the people decided the future of the disputed peninsula.



Sevastopol had a special status as a municipality within Ukraine, remaining outside the administration of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, although geographically the city was located on the peninsula. For this reason, Sevastopol unilaterally declared its independence from Ukraine and its status as subject of the Russian Federation. However, the city also joined the Crimean declaration of March 11, where it was stipulated that it was resolved to declare independence...

... With regard to the Charter of the United Nations and a whole range of other international documents and taking into consideration the confirmation of the status of Kosovo by the United Nations International Court of Justice on July, 22, 2010, which says that unilateral declaration of independence by a part of the country does not violate any international norms (Sputnik, 2014).

The referendum in Crimea was held on March 16 with the participation of more than 80% of people qualified to vote, where 96.7% voted for the independence of Crimea and its reunification with Russia. In Sevastopol, 89.5% participated and 95.5% favored separating from Ukraine. Subsequently, on March 18, the signing of the agreement by which Crimea and Sevastopol adhered to Russia was carried out, with Sevastopol becoming a federal city.

But inside Crimea, the Tatars rejected the decision of the Parliament and called to boycott the referendum, worried about their future in a Russia to which they held resentment since the Stalinist era. Although some Tatars participated in the referendum, their leaders described it as illegal, reason why they have repeatedly defended Crimea's membership to Ukraine.

The pro-Russian moods also increased in other oblasts of southeastern Ukraine, especially in Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk and Odessa. During the first days of April, pro-Russian groups staged violent riots, having as a response from the Ukrainian government the sending of state troops for what was denominated as an "anti-terrorist operation". However, protests in the Donbass region, formed by Donetsk and Luhansk, continued until reaching a wave of violence unprecedented in the independent Ukraine, transforming the conflict into a civil war, which until today has

not found its end. The two oblasts were proclaimed as “People’s Republics” and held a referendum to legitimize their independence despite Kiev’s rejection.

In the midst of internal chaos, on May 25, 2014, Ukraine elected its new president, businessman Petro Poroshenko, who won in the first round with 54% of the votes. Although Poroshenko came to power with the intention of restoring peace and stability to the country, it has been more than three years since the Ukrainian conflict broke out and the civil war is not over. According to the latest report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which does not take into account the balance of dead and wounded of the Euromaidan protests, from April of 2014 to December 1, 2016 the death toll of the conflict amounted to 9758, of which more than 2000 were civilians. In addition, the clash has left more than 1 million displaced, while the number of missing people is unknown (United Nations, 2016).

This is how Ukraine continues to be plunged into one of the greatest conflicts of the 21st century, which we cannot understand without analyzing the role of external actors, specifically Russia and the United States (in coalition with the European Union and NATO), since their interference has transformed an apparent internal conflict into an instrument to demonstrate the dominance that these powers exert on the world board.

#### **4.4 The Ukrainian conflict in the “New Cold War”**

The Orange Revolution turned on the alarms in the Kremlin, which feared that, drawn by the West, Yushchenko’s government would move away from Putin’s radar. It was believed that the United States’ intentions were to isolate Moscow from the former members of the USSR and stop its rebirth as a decisive player in the international arena, as a result of Western “Russophobia”. Anyway, in 1997, the well-known author Zbigniew Brzezinski, a scholar of US foreign policy, had already outlined the geostrategic route that the United States had to take in Ukraine in order to ensure that Russia became “less European and more Asiatic with each passing year” (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 99).

Somewhere between 2005 and 2010, Ukraine, especially if in the meantime the country has made significant progress in its domestic reforms and has succeeded in becoming more evidently identified as a Central European country, should become ready for serious negotiations with both the EU and NATO (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 91).

#### **4.4.1 Political and economic crisis**

When Yanukovych took the presidency of Ukraine, Putin had to make sure that the Ukrainian approach to the West did not materialize. Shortly before it was decided to suspend the signing of the Ukraine-EU agreement, the Kremlin took restrictive trade measures that pressured the Ukrainian economy. In the metallurgical sector, import duty-free quotas for steel pipes were suspended, Ukrainian exporters were assigned “risky” status, imports of Ukrainian food products such as meat products were restricted and licenses to wagon manufactures were canceled. Also, Russia began to demand the payment of the debt that Ukraine had for gas imports (Bonet P., 2013).

This led the West to think that the intimidation of Russia had been the cause for the change of course in Ukrainian foreign policy. In fact, when the Ukrainian government announced the suspension of the signing of the agreement, it was alleged that the decision had been taken due to the intention to strengthen ties with the former Soviet countries, especially with Russia. In addition, it was stated that in Ukrainian interests was developing cooperative three-way relations between Ukraine, Russia and the EU. Furthermore, the EU would not have given Ukraine enough guarantees to cover the economic loss of distancing itself from the Russian market, or to improve the Ukrainian economy that worsened day by day. Anyway, this approach with the EU would have been damaging for Russia because:

If Ukraine removed its trade barriers with the EU, Russia would be forced to protect its economy from massive entry of European products into its market, as Putin reminded Yanukovych a few days before his decision. Ukraine’s industrial production would lose its main market, which would not be offset by an increase in agricultural exports to the EU, due to the protectionism of the Common Agricultural Policy (Ruiz, González F. J, 2014).

The West and the Ukrainian pro-European leaders found the confirmation to their assumptions when the Ukrainian Prime Minister at that time, Mikola Azarov, acknowledged that “Russia had suggested delaying signing the treaty to conduct negotiations between Kiev, Moscow and the EU” (BBC News, 2013). However, he said: “We absolutely do not want to be a battlefield between the EU and Russia. We want to have good relations with both the EU and Russia” (BBC News, 2013). Despite this, Putin asked the European Union “to avoid making abrupt statements” and accused the bloc of threatening Ukraine to sign the agreement and of fomenting the protests, which he called acts of “pressure and blackmail” (Bonet P., 2013).

But if Russia had intervened, the United States also had its share of interference in Ukraine’s internal affairs. A day before the protests broke out in Maidan, Ukrainian Congressman Oleg Zarov reported to the Rada that the United States was planning through Geoffrey Pyatt, its ambassador to Ukraine, a project called *Techcamp*, with the aim of organizing protests to destabilize the government and create a civil war in that territory. Moreover, in a conference at the US-Ukraine Foundation (American NGO dedicated to strengthening US-Ukraine relations), Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, expressed her support for the Maidan protests and stated that since 1991 more than 5 billion dollars had been invested to guarantee “a safe, prosperous and democratic Ukraine” (US Department of State, 2013).

The leak of a telephone conversation between Victoria Nuland and Ambassador Pyatt after a meeting with the leaders of Euromaidan later revealed the US position on the Ukrainian conflict. “I think Yats (Arseniy Yatsenyuk) is the guy who’s got the economic experience, the governing experience”, Nuland told Pyatt when discussing who could lead a new government in Ukraine (BBC News, 2014). In fact, when Turchynov and Yatsenyuk assumed power, Western leaders immediately gave them their support. Putin, on the other hand, stated that Russia would ignore the new leaders, emphasizing their lack of legitimacy because, according to the Kremlin, they had seized power as a result of a coup.

In addition, Nuland referred in hard terms to the EU, demonstrating her discontent with the bloc for its failure to bring Ukraine to its sphere of influence. Later, the

official apologized to the European Union at the same time that the US government accused Russia of having leaked the audio. All this convinced the Kremlin that the United States had orchestrated the Euromaidan protests.

For their part, Republican Senator John McCain and Democratic Senator Chris Murphy visited Ukraine on behalf of the US Congress. During their stay they held meetings with the leaders of Euromaidan as well as with the government to address the situation in the country. Subsequently, they went to Maidan and made public their support to the protests. “People of Ukraine, this is your moment. The free world is with you, America is with you, I am with you”, McCain said.

Nevertheless, the presence of US politicians in Kiev did not prevent Yanukovych from traveling days later to Moscow, attracted by an offer from Putin. As happened during the Cold War through the Molotov Plan, Russia’s “good intentions” towards its European neighbor were soon revealed. For this reason, an agreement was signed in December of 2013, in which Russia granted Ukraine a credit of 15 billion dollars at an annual interest rate of 5%, in addition to a 30% reduction in the gas price. According to Ukrainian authorities, that was going to help the country to save 3 billion dollars the following year.

During a press conference, Putin stated that the decision to grant the credit was based on existing ties of brotherhood with Ukraine, a country that, because of its difficult economic situation, months before was looking for obtaining the money through the IMF, entity with which it did not reach any agreement since its conditions and requirements did not convince the Ukrainian government. By the end of 2013, Russia had already delivered 3 billion dollars, agreeing that the delivery of the remaining 12 billion dollars would be made in 2014.

Although after the signing of this agreement the main Russian media handed Putin victory in the battle for Ukraine with the United States and the European Union, the increase of violence in Kiev in mid-January of 2014 raised concern in Moscow. With Yanukovych’s foreseeable removal, the Kremlin decided to delay the delivery of the loan offered to Ukraine until a new government was established. The EU used this

event by offering its help so that Ukraine could negotiate favorable conditions with the IMF in order to obtain the financing it needed.

In addition, the EU announced that it was working with the United States to develop a plan for the “bailout” of the Ukrainian economy. Indeed, in March, John Kerry visited Kiev and offered a 1 billion dollars loan to help the new government, while the European Union reported that it would provide 11 billion euros over two years, with the condition that Ukraine made certain reforms and approach to the IMF. It was announced that 610 million euros would be delivered first and as soon as possible.

#### **4.4.1.1 The gas war**

In March of 2014, Moscow suffered a strong political and economic blow, as the Ukrainian provisional government signed in Brussels the political provisions of the controversial Association Agreement with the EU. Although the signing of the economic points were delayed for after the elections of May of the same year, this first step sealed the alliance with the European bloc. Subsequently, perhaps in response to the now consolidated approach of the “little Russia” with the West, Putin decided to use the traditional resource that has helped to intimidate Ukraine and Europe on more than one occasion: gas. In that context, Russia withdrew the reduction in the price it had offered to Ukraine in late 2013, reason why gas price increased by 40%.

The gas war returned when the Russian state-owned company Gazprom cut off gas supplies to Ukrainian territory, sparking the European Union concern, which feared that the amount of gas stored by Ukraine would not be enough to supply the high consumption during winter. Ironically, the signing of the economic section of the Ukraine-EU agreement was expected for the next few days, raising suspicions that Russia would try to obstruct it again, as Prime Minister Yatsenyuk had previously warned that Russian claims had “nothing to do with gas”, but that it was about a “general plan to destroy Ukraine” (Fernández, 2014).

Anyway, Petro Poroshenko, recently elected as president of Ukraine, signed the agreement as planned. It should be noted that on the same day, Moldova and Georgia also signed their own Association Agreements with the European Union, causing another blow for Putin, who saw how three of the former USSR members were simultaneously distancing themselves from his sphere of influence.

Although the gas war lasted until the end of 2014, the economic crisis in Ukraine was reduced by the announcement of a resumption of gas supply by Russia, after reaching an agreement with the European Union and the Ukrainian government. The “good intentions” of the EU had helped to promote reconciliation between Moscow and Kiev, which was described by Günther Oettinger, European Commissioner for Energy, as the “first sign of an intelligent neighborhood” (Fariza, 2014).

#### **4.4.1.2 Sanctions**

The first international reactions after the violence in the Euromaidan protests came from the European Union, which announced that it would sanction the officials of the Ukrainian government that were responsible of it, joining in the intentions of the United States that had already threatened to impose sanctions against twenty Ukrainian officials.

Subsequently, after the authorization of the Russian Senate for military intervention in Ukraine, the sanctions to the Kremlin came. In this sense, the other G8 members (the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada) announced that they would not attend the summit scheduled for June of 2014 in the city of Sochi in Russia. Later, Russia was suspended from the bloc. In addition, Obama suspended economic and military cooperation with Russia and announced that in case of continuing its intervention in Crimea, the Russian Federation would be sanctioned. The European Union, for its part, declared the suspension of negotiations on cooperation and visas with the Kremlin.

It is also worth mentioning that after the annexation of Crimea, the European Union, Canada and the United States immediately issued a long list of Russian and Ukrainian officials and politicians to whom visas were restricted and assets in those

countries were frozen. As a response, the Russian government prohibited the entry of 9 Americans to its territory and applied sanctions against 13 Canadians.

Another event that resulted in sanctions for Russia was the shooting down of a Malaysia Airlines aircraft in Donetsk, which was attributed by the West to pro-Russian separatists in alleged complicity with Russia. The Western bloc punished Russia's financial, energy (oil companies) and military sectors (a total of 111 people and 49 companies). On the other hand, Russia ordered an embargo on food products from the United States, the European Union, Canada, Australia and Norway, while Western sanctions spread even further in the Russian banking sector, preventing some entities from obtaining international financing (Ruiz González F. J., 2014). But in the sanctions package against Russia, the EU did not contemplate gas since punishing Putin in "solidarity" with Ukraine through this resource would have been harmful for the European bloc.

Although the sanctions over the Ukrainian conflict have affected both Russia and the West in economic terms, in June of 2016, Putin decided to extend the food embargo until December 31, 2017, while at the end of December the European Union announced that the sanctions imposed to Moscow would extend until July 31, 2017. Russia asserted that the extension of its sanctions was made in response to Western announcements, while the Western side stated that the Russian government has not collaborated with solutions for the Ukrainian crisis, reason why it has been inevitable not to prolong the "punishment" towards the Kremlin.

#### **4.4.2 Obama and Putin on Crimea's situation**

The turning point that aggravated the tension between Obama and Putin was the annexation of Crimea to Russia. The Ukrainian provisional government, concerned about its territorial integrity, called on the UN Security Council to address the situation in Crimea, warning of possible Russian interference. However, effective United Nations action on developments in the area was a failed attempt. In this context, the United States introduced a draft resolution condemning the referendum in Crimea as illegal and exhorting other countries and international organizations not



to recognize its outcome, but this was vetoed by Russia, while China abstained in the voting.

US Ambassador Samantha Power regretted the result of the vote and stated: “Under the Charter of the United Nations, the Russian Federation has the power to veto a Security Council draft resolution. But it does not have the power to veto the truth” (United Nations, 2014). On the other hand, her Russian counterpart, Vitaly Churkin, said that Russia would support the decision of Crimea in the referendum and criticized the American action in promoting the draft resolution:

The Permanent Representative of the United States blamed Russia for illegally pursuing its ambitions. [...] The world would be very interested to know if Washington, D.C., would in fact tell the truth about its role in the development of the crisis in Ukraine. Finally, Ms. Power spoke of dreams and aspirations. But why has she negated the right of the people of Crimea to express their will tomorrow during the referendum? (United Nations, 2014)

The Kremlin defended the self-determination of the people of Crimea when manifesting their desire to belong to Russia, while Obama and his allies did not recognize Crimea as a member of the Russian Federation. Putin, angered by the position of the West, compared the Crimean case with Kosovo’s independence in 2008, which was openly supported by the United States:

The Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent, a precedent our western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country’s central authorities. [...] For some reason, things that Kosovo Albanians (and we have full respect for them) were permitted to do, Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea are not allowed. Again, one wonders why (Kremlin, 2014).

Although Putin repeatedly rejected Western accusations that blamed him for premeditating the annexation of Crimea, in 2015 he would confirm the assertions

regarding his intervention in the Ukrainian conflict. This would happen because of Putin's statements in a Russian documentary, in which he revealed that the plan for Crimea's return had been set in the very night of Yanukovich's dismissal. "We are forced to begin the work to bring Crimea back into Russia", the Russian leader had told his colleagues (BBC News, 2016).

#### **4.4.3 Military crisis**

In late February of 2014, the Canadian newspaper *The Globe & Mail* reported that Russian soldiers had been found on the road linking Sevastopol with Simferopol, the Crimean capital. The newspaper's reporters recognized the troops for their armament and for the armored vehicles in which they were being transported (Pérez J. M., 2014). Then, in Simferopol a group of armed rebels appeared, who were called "little green men" because they wore military uniforms without identification. These took over the Parliament building, in which exteriors there had been confrontations between pro-Western and pro-Russian groups. Despite not wearing badges that could have related them to the Russian Armed Forces and in spite of the fact that the Kremlin denied having displaced its military contingent in the area, it was presumed that they were Russian soldiers.

However, on March 1, President Vladimir Putin sent a request to the Senate asking for permission to deploy Russian troops in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, after the new Prime Minister of Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, and Yanukovich himself asked Moscow for help in order to safeguard the lives of the Crimean people. The request reads:

In connection with the extraordinary situation that has developed in Ukraine and the threat to citizens of the Russian Federation, our compatriots, the personnel of the military contingent of the Russian Federation Armed Forces deployed on the territory of Ukraine (Autonomous Republic of Crimea) in accordance with international agreement; pursuant to Article 102.1 (d) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, I hereby appeal to the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation to use the Armed Forces of the Russian

Federation on the territory of Ukraine until the social and political situation in that country is normalized (El País, 2014).

The Russian decision to intervene militarily bothered the new Ukrainian government. In the first place, Ukraine did not recognize the legitimacy of the new Prime Minister of Crimea, who was not elected democratically but by a parliament that, according to the government, was pressured by pro-Russian groups that were outside the building, violating in this way the Ukrainian laws. Paradoxically, the provisional government led by Turchynov and Yatsenyuk had come to power through the same way, by decision of the Ukrainian Parliament. As for the Russian military deployment, Turchynov had previously announced that any maneuver outside the base of Sevastopol, the only place in Crimea where Russia had free action, would be taken as “military aggression”.

The position of the Ukrainian government was supported by President Barack Obama, who after Putin obtained authorization to deploy troops in Ukraine, declared that “Russia had no right” to act in that way. But days before Obama had already warned about the repercussions of Russian action during a conference in the White House, in which he expressed that the Russian intervention...

... Would represent a profound interference in matters that must be determined by the Ukrainian people. It would be a clear violation of Russian’s commitment to respect the independence and sovereignty and borders of Ukraine, and of International Laws. [...] There will be costs for any military intervention in Ukraine (The New York Times, 2014).

Although the United States maintained the position that Russia had attacked the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Washington decided not to deploy its troops in that territory. In 2016, *The Atlantic* published “*The Obama Doctrine*”, where the American president talked about his decision not to intervene militarily in Ukraine:

We have to be very clear about what our core interests are and what we are willing to go to war for. And at the end of the day, there’s always going to be some ambiguity. [...] People respond based on what their imperatives are, and if

it's really important to somebody, and it's not that important to us, they know that, and we know that, he said. [...] The idea that talking tough or engaging in some military action that is tangential to that particular area is somehow going to influence the decision making of Russia or China is contrary to all the evidence we have seen over the last 50 years (Goldberg, 2016).

Anyway, the United States sent combat vehicles to Ukraine and deployed 300 US soldiers to carry out military exercises with Ukrainian troops. In addition, Congress approved a budget for 2016 that would allow spending 300 million dollars for activities to support the Ukrainian government, including the provision of lethal weapons. However, President Obama did not agree with the shipment of these, so they continued providing “non-lethal” equipment. Despite this, US support for Ukraine has not been well received by the Kremlin, as Russia has repeatedly stated that supplying weapons to Ukrainian troops will only worsen the conflict in Donbass.

#### **4.4.3.1 NATO and the United States vs. Russia**

As during the Cold War, military maneuvers of the two sides have been a tool to highlight their armament power. Thus, in the context of the Ukrainian conflict, in March of 2014 the test of an intercontinental ballistic missile of latest technology was launched from Russian territory. In response to this, the United States conducted joint military exercises with Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. NATO also strengthened its aerial surveillance in Poland, Romania and the Baltic countries, given their proximity to Russia and Ukrainian territory, but ruled out military support for Ukraine, as the country does not belong to the organization.

The mistrust between Washington and Moscow grew when in August of 2014 the Ukrainian government announced that Russian troops had entered without its authorization, which was corroborated by NATO when the organization broadcasted satellite photographs showing alleged Russian vehicles on Ukrainian territory. NATO accusations came after cooperation between the Alliance and the Russian government through the NATO-Russia Council was suspended months before, being reinstated in April of 2016. Of course, the Kremlin rejected the NATO complaint and stated that the only Russian troops that were on Ukrainian territory had been those of

the Black Sea Fleet, when Crimea still belonged to Ukraine. According to Putin, Russia would not have sent new troops to Crimea, but it would have deployed soldiers from its naval base in Sevastopol, which did not exceed the number of troops allowed by the lease agreement.

It should be noted that after taking office, Poroshenko announced that Ukraine would no longer be a non-aligned country, facilitating joint operations with NATO, thus bringing Ukraine closer to the West. This was a stumbling block for the Kremlin's military plans, although many analysts agree that Ukraine has little chance of joining NATO, at least in the short term.

#### **4.4.4 Diplomatic crisis**

The wave of violence in Donetsk and Lugansk urged international actors to smooth out differences and work together in a peaceful solution to the conflict, despite the fact that their initiatives were not successful. In April of 2014, representatives from Ukraine, the United States, Russia and the European Union met in Geneva to establish concrete steps in order to restore security to the Ukrainian population. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) would be in charge of monitoring compliance with the points agreed (Europa Press, 2014). Nevertheless, the desires for stability in the country were truncated, since the agreement was not respected in Donbass.

Following this failure, a second attempt to stop the civil war in eastern Ukraine came in September of the same year with the Minsk I Agreements, which were promoted by Putin with mediation from the OSCE and that had the commitment of the representatives of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic as well as of the Ukrainian government. The pact established 12 points, including a bilateral ceasefire, hostage release, elections for local councils in Donbass in December and decentralization of government. However, the truce soon began to weaken since elections were held in Luhansk and Donetsk in November, a situation that bothered the Ukrainian government as these had been scheduled for December. The United States, Ukraine and the European Union announced that they

would not accept the results, while Russia notified its intention to recognize the new leaders.

With the ineffectiveness of Minsk I, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande took the initiative to join new efforts in order to resolve the Ukrainian conflict. Thus, the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine met in Minsk in February of 2015, achieving the approval of the Minsk II Agreements. The ceasefire in Ukraine from February 15, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the introduction of reforms to grant a special status to Luhansk and Donetsk, the exchange of prisoners and other points were agreed. The hopes in Minsk II were based on the fact that, unlike with Minsk I, the pro-Russian groups had expressed their satisfaction with the agreement, as this time their requests would have been taken into account. Through the “Contact Group on Ukraine” (Russia, the OSCE and Ukraine) the leaders of Luhansk and Donetsk accepted the agreement.

This was welcomed by the international community, including President Obama, who had not participated in the negotiations of neither Minsk I nor Minsk II, losing prominence in the search for a viable solution to the conflict and leaving Russia as one of the decisive actors in it. However, the agreement momentarily frustrated the intention of many US politicians to arm the Ukrainian government, as they had already expressed their commitment to contribute with the National Guard of Ukraine and the State Border Service of Ukraine through training and equipment. In response, the Head of the Russian Parliamentary Committee for Security and Anti-Corruption, Irina Yarovaya, had declared that arming these institutions would be considered “a direct financial complicity of the US in the genocide of civilians in south-east of Ukraine, as well as war crimes” (RT, 2014).

Less than a month after signing Minsk II, Russia accused the United States of wanting to “rewrite” the Minsk Agreements for its convenience, in order to delay their implementation. Vitaly Churkin denounced that the intervention of the United States would bring serious consequences for Ukraine, because “everyone knows that where American soldiers arrive, they only bring in misfortunes” (RT, 2015). Days later, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom announced that they would supply the Ukrainian government with “non-lethal” military equipment.

During 2016, the situation in Ukraine was described as a “frozen conflict”, since although in Donbass the war continued, the number of attacks declined, as did the number of human losses. In addition, the scant attention given to this conflict in that year is due to the escalation of violence in Syria, where the picture is much more complex than in Ukraine.

Evidently, hostilities between Washington and Moscow over the Ukrainian conflict have not been overcome, although not all politicians agree with the rivalry. For example, former US Congressman Ron Paul, known for his criticism towards American interventionism, spoke about US action in relation to Ukraine:

What should we do about Ukraine and Russia? We should stop egging Ukraine on, we should stop subsidizing the government in Kiev, we should stop NATO exercises on the Russian border, we should end sanctions, we should return to Diplomacy, we should send the policy of “regime change” to the dustbin of History (Paul, 2016).

Also, the famous American politician Henry Kissinger had already established in March of 2014 a possible way to solve the Ukrainian conflict, when in an article he published:

If Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side’s outpost against the other; it should function as a bridge between them. The West must understand that, to Russia, Ukraine can never be just a foreign country. To treat Ukraine as part of an East-West confrontation would scuttle any prospect to bring Russia and Europe into a cooperative international system (Ruiz González F. J., 2014).

## CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the relations between Russia and the United States in the period between 2012 and 2016, through the study of the conflicts of Syria and Ukraine and the intervention of the two powers in the same, this investigation suggests that the world has apparently entered a new period in History: “The New Cold War”, starred as it was in the past by Washington and Moscow.

Although the new US President Donald Trump has expressed the intention of an approach with Russia, paradoxically it is during this government that some events have taken place, showing the persistent tension between both powers, starting from the report of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the US, where Russia is held accountable for an alleged intervention that would have influenced US elections in favor of Trump through the hacking of Democratic Party accounts (The New York Times, 2017), to accusations that assert that during the electoral contest, Trump campaign advisers would have met with Russian officials, all this with the purpose of altering the establishment of American policy and thus imposing over its historical rival (RT, 2017).

This confrontation, despite keeping similarities with what happened from 1947 to 1991, has its own characteristics as a result of the new realities that the protagonists of the conflict face. In this way, the multipolarity of the world, the resurgence of proxy wars, the formation of new strategic alliances, the presence of new leaders of the powers, the appearance of interests other than the ideological ones and the pressure exerted through the means of communication, are some of the factors that have contributed in the reactivation of a rivalry seemingly rested by a marked American hegemony after the fall of the Soviet Union.

With the defeat of communism, the United States became the supreme actor of most decisions in international affairs, so there was the idea of a unipolar world under the domination of the White House. However, a multipolar order gradually emerged with the appearances of forces such as China especially in the economic sphere, Iran in nuclear matters, while in the political and diplomatic field Russia reappeared with the aim of regaining its leading position, characteristic of the Soviet era. Despite



multipolarity, in the case studies chosen for this research, it has been shown that the two main actors have been the United States and Russia, without this meaning that the role of their allies is not important in the international arena.

In addition, the “New Cold War” has found other battlefields where proxy wars can be fought, such is the case of Syria and Ukraine that, as Jesús Pérez Triana, an international security and defense analyst, expressed in an interview granted for the completion of this work, are not the consequence of the existence of a “New Cold War” but are only part of it because of the multiple economic and geopolitical interests in those areas.

In this sense, both Russia and the United States have been in need of forming new coalitions that help in their intervention strategies in these conflicts. In this way, tacit alliances have been formed, having on the one hand the surprising association between Russia, China and Iran to face the traditional cohesion of the West, made up of the United States and the European Union, using the military reach of NATO.

However, throughout the analysis it has been shown that it has been Barack Obama, during his administration, and Vladimir Putin, until today, who have determined the course of an apparent New Cold War. Thus Putin has made it clear that his policies are aimed at the rebirth of Russia, so his actions have come to be described by many as intentions of a “Soviet revenge” pending since the dissolution of the USSR. Obama, meanwhile, tried to maintain the US *status quo* despite his anti-war rhetoric that even led him to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, without foreseeing his subsequent interventionism in Libya, a country that was destroyed because of the interventionist operations of the United States and NATO.

Likewise, it has been observed that the Russian-American dispute is no longer based only on ideological differences. Thus, for example in Ukraine, through the annexation of Crimea, Putin manifested his territorial interest in the area with the aim of expanding Russian borders. But that has not been Putin's only motivation to interfere in the Ukrainian crisis since his action comes from the need to stop further Western advancement of NATO to territories close to his own, as he has been mentioning since 2007. On the other hand, for Putin the American pretensions in

Ukrainian territory lie in the need to intimidate Russia and to restrain its protagonism in the international arena, since the ties that unite Ukraine with the United States are almost null compared with those that unite it with Russia.

Furthermore, Syria has also been another scenario where it can be verified that Russian and American motivations are not related to ideologies but to economic power games. For both Washington and Moscow, Syria represents a strategic trade route that could increase its influence in the Middle East, so maintaining control over this area is essential for the country to be victorious over what could be a New Cold War.

Another aspect that can be concluded from this study is the preponderant role of the mass media, which is mostly biased towards one of the two sides. Thus, in the West, it is more frequent to hear about the “good intentions” of the White House, ignoring the perspectives seen from the other side of the world regarding the “New Cold War”, which generates that the common citizen takes a position based on a single version of the facts. In addition, this has been an obstacle in the conduct of this research, because in the search for truthful and objective news it has been found information that favors or discredits one side or another without achieving a balance in the issuance of criteria.

From the elaboration of this work it can also be inferred that the role of the United Nations has deficiencies, since it has been unable to fulfill its mission of peace and prevention of friction between the great powers, generating insecurity in the international community as the United States and Russia use foreign territories to indirectly confront. In addition, the UN has lost credibility because of its weak statements against interventions by the White House and the Kremlin, which have interpreted at its convenience the resolutions issued in the Security Council, as well as the Charter of the United Nations.

Also, the fissures inside the UN, caused by the tension between Washington and Moscow, have not allowed the organization to face one of the greatest threats to global stability, terrorism, which despite being the slogan for which the two powers have militarily intervened in other territories, has not been eradicated from the world,

but rather, the insurgent groups have spread, taking advantage of the conditions propitiated by an apparent New Cold War.

Although Trump has shown sympathy for Putin, there are contradictions motivated by the current Russian interventionism in internal affairs of American politics, as the scandals about the alleged hacking and the contact of the Trump circle with Russian officials weaken the idea that the "New Cold War" could find its end in the short term. It will take time to see the course of relations between Russia and the United States, knowing that at some point the powers will have to make decisions that oppose their interests, defining a winner in this power struggle. While this happens, it can be said that in the period analyzed in this study, Vladimir Putin's actions achieved greater visibility than those of former President Obama, which is why until 2016, many gave the Russian president the leadership in the course of Russian-American relations.

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## **Interview**

Pérez, J. M. (2016, December 21). La Nueva Guerra Fría. (M. G. Carrión, & M. B. Guerrero, Interviewers).

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Map of Syria's geopolitical value



**Source:** Zamora, Augusto. Política y geopolítica: para rebeldes, irreverentes y escépticos.

## Appendix 2

### Map of Tartus' location



**Source:** Morales González, Alberto ¿Qué intereses tiene Rusia en Siria?

[http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2013/DIEEEO48-2013\\_InteresesRusos\\_enSiria\\_MoralesGlez.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2013/DIEEEO48-2013_InteresesRusos_enSiria_MoralesGlez.pdf)

### Appendix 3

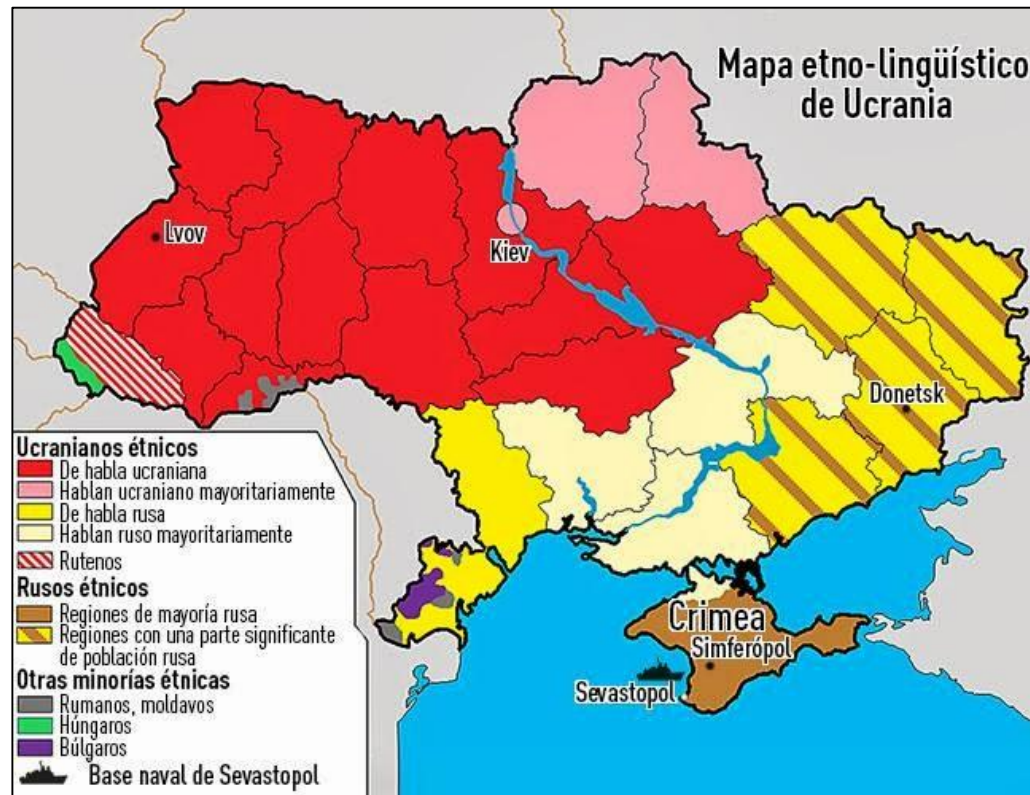
#### Results in favor of the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine in 1991



Source: The Ukrainian Weekly. Independence: Over 90% vote yes in referendum; Kravchuk elected president of Ukraine.  
[http://ukrweekly.com/archive/pdf3/1991/The\\_Ukrainian\\_Weekly\\_1991-49.pdf](http://ukrweekly.com/archive/pdf3/1991/The_Ukrainian_Weekly_1991-49.pdf)

#### Appendix 4

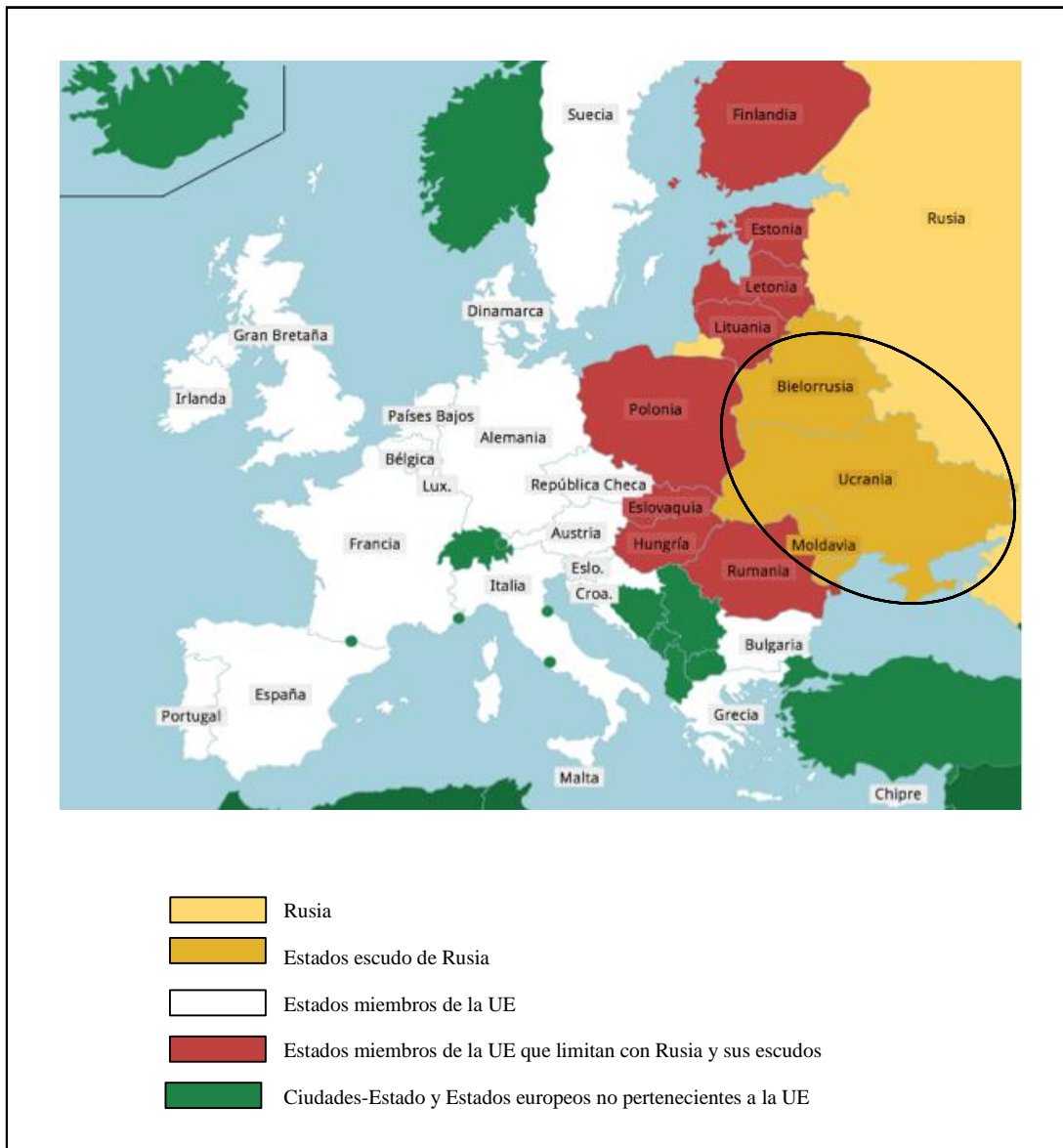
#### Ethno-Linguistic Map of Ukraine (Before the annexation of Crimea to Russia)



Source: RT. ¿Cómo está dividida Ucrania? <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/view/121127-ucrania-lineas-desintegracion>

## Appendix 5

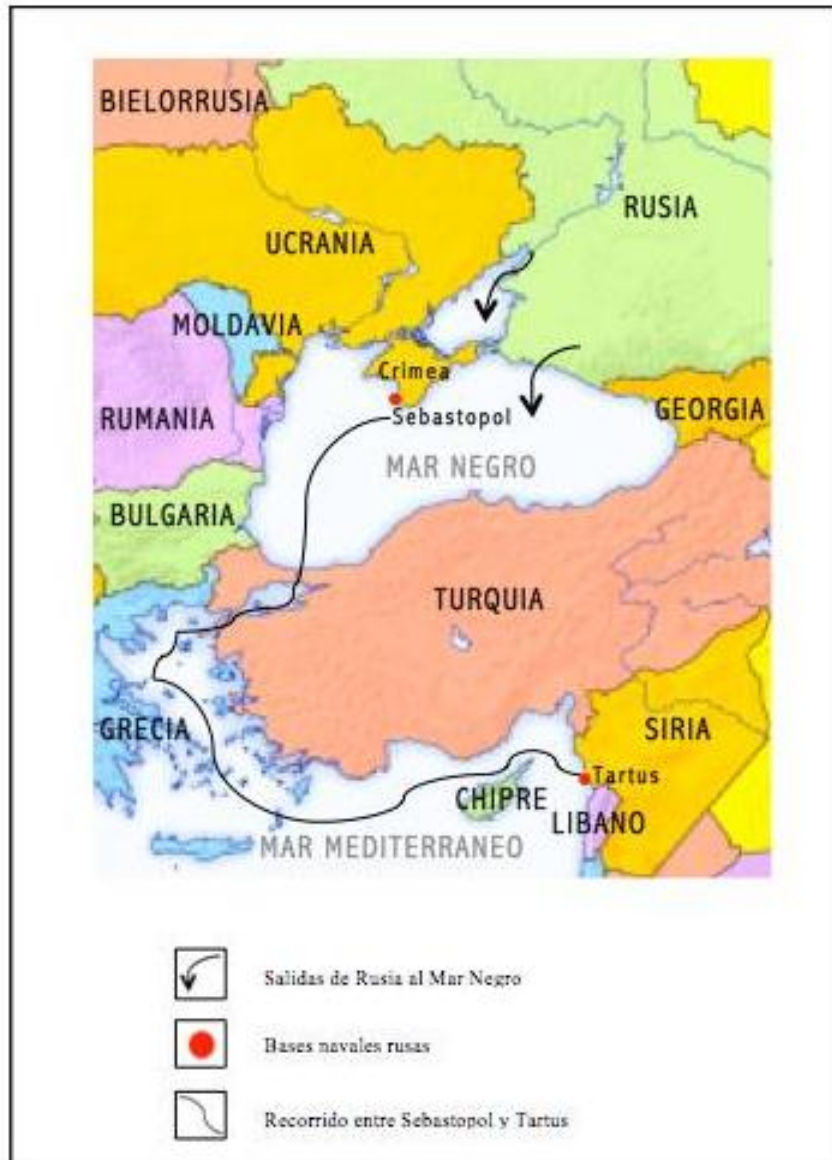
### Map of Russia's geopolitical position (Before the annexation of Crimea to Russia)



**Source and elaboration:** Guerrero, María Belén & Carrión, María Gabriela

## Appendix 6

Map of Sevastopol's geostrategic location (Before the annexation of Crimea to Russia)

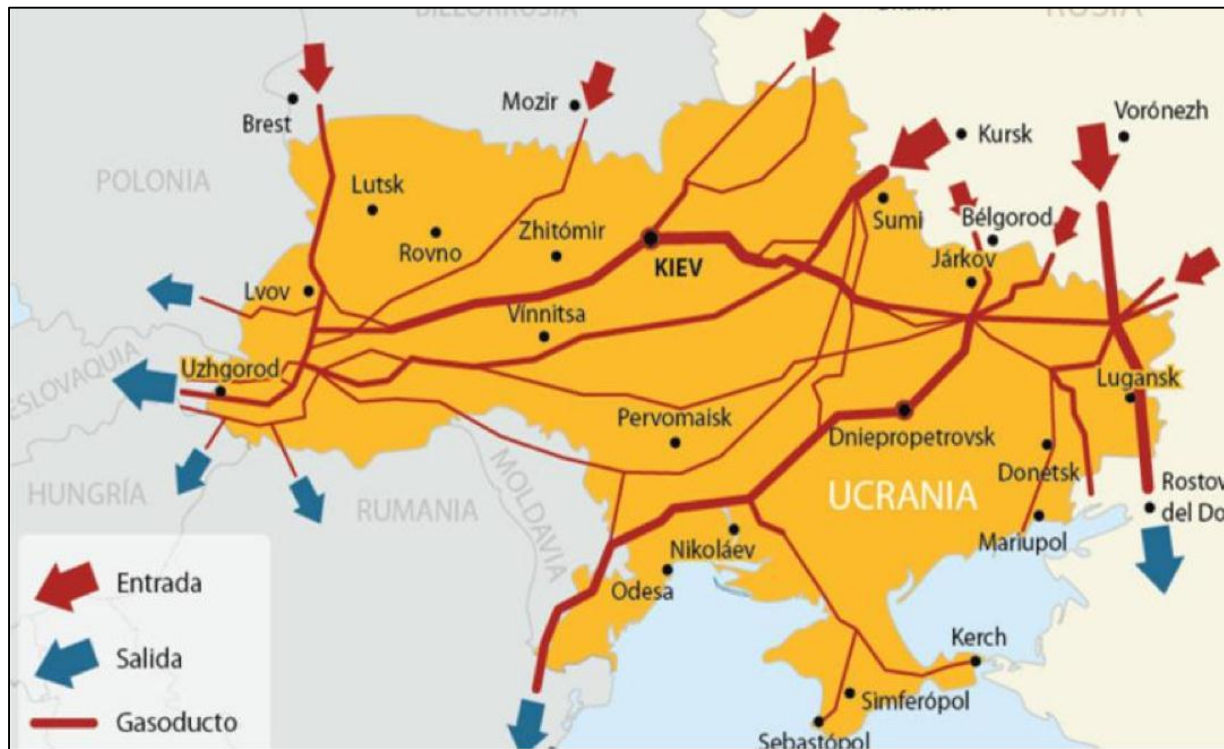


Source and elaboration: Guerrero, María Belén & Carrión, María Gabriela



## Appendix 7

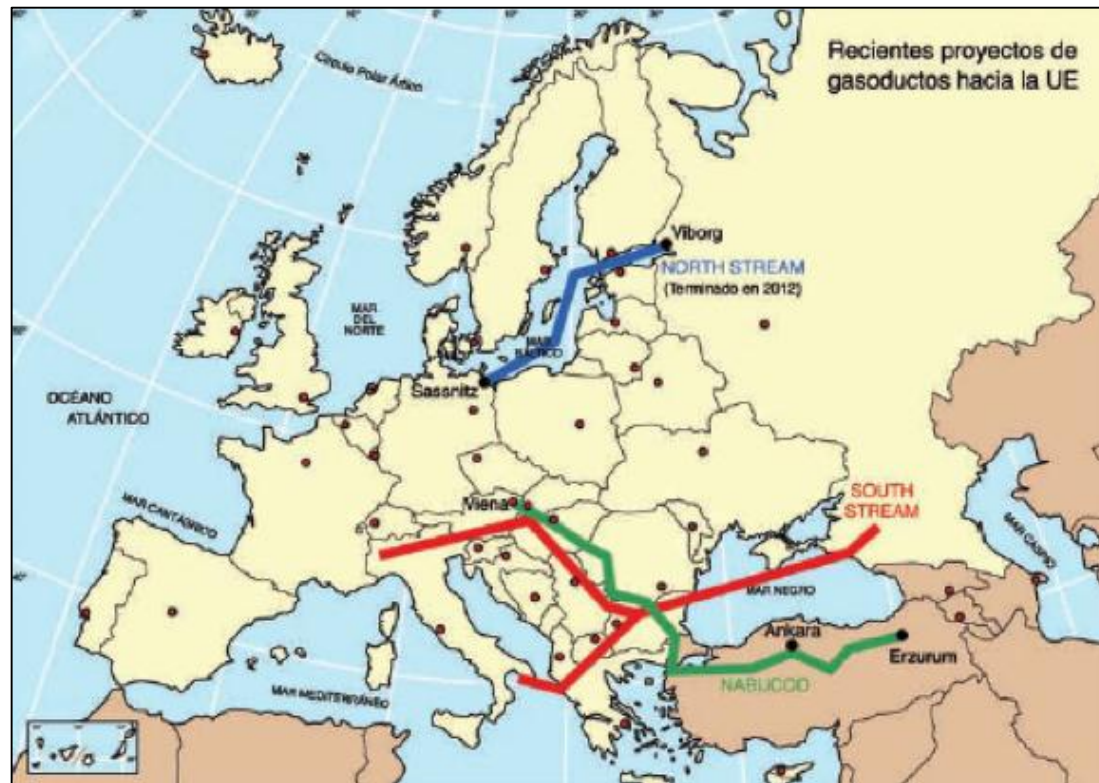
Map of Russian pipelines in Ukraine (Before the annexation of Crimea to Russia)



**Source:** Oñativia, Óscar. Ucrania: la bisagra entre Occidente y Oriente. <http://docplayer.es/2914116-Ucrania-la-bisagra-entre-occidente-y-oriente.html>

## Appendix 8

### Map of Russian energy projects for Europe



Source: Azcárate Luxán, María Victoria & Sánchez Sánchez, José. Geografía de Europa.