

## THE NEW WORLD (DIS)ORDER AND THE SEARCH FOR AN ENEMY: THE UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE COLD WAR

### A NOVA (DES)ORDEM MUNDIAL E A BUSCA POR UM INIMIGO: A POLÍTICA EXTERNA DOS ESTADOS UNIDOS APÓS A GUERRA FRIA

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#### **Abstract**

The years of the Cold War were characterized by a clear US strategy: the containment of Soviet power. Once it was over, the United States emerged as the only superpower, with a great military capacity. With the collapse of USSR, though, America was left without a clear enemy and therefore without a clear strategy for its foreign policy. Therefore, if the United States did not want to go back to the isolationism that characterized its first centuries, it needed to find a new rationale for its international engagement. Nevertheless, the world after Cold War had a much wider agenda. New challenges such as the threat of terrorism and the risk of cultural clashes put in danger the stability of the Western order. Besides that, the idea of the democratic peace started to be developed. Without the contradictions of the Cold War, the United States could justify its internationalism by presenting the spread of democracy as its duty as the hegemon in the post-Cold War era. This view of the US role was consolidated during President Clinton's mandate and is yet dominant in the country's foreign policy. This essay will argue that the end of the Cold War left the United States with a great military capacity and means to continue its internationalist foreign policy but also without clear objectives. The route chosen by American foreign policy makers was to keep the global stability and the democratic values worldwide. Therefore, its new enemies became every actor – state or not – that defied this new world order, characterized by democracy, free trade and stability.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy; United States; New World Order; Enemies.

#### **Resumo**

*Os anos da Guerra Fria foram caracterizados por uma estratégia norte-americana clara: a contenção do poder soviético. Uma vez concluída, os Estados Unidos emergiram como a única superpotência, com uma grande capacidade militar. Com o colapso da URSS, no entanto, os Estados Unidos ficaram sem um inimigo claro, e, assim, sem uma estratégia clara em sua política externa. Portanto, se os Estados Unidos não quisessem voltar para o isolacionismo que caracterizou os seus primeiros séculos, o país precisaria encontrar uma nova rationale para seu engajamento internacional. No entanto, o mundo pós-Guerra Fria possuía uma agenda muito mais ampla. Novos desafios, tais como a ameaça do terrorismo e o risco de choques culturais, colocavam em perigo a estabilidade da ordem Ocidental. Além disso, a ideia da paz democrática começou a ser desenvolvida. Sem as contradições da Guerra Fria, os Estados Unidos poderiam justificar o seu internacionalismo, apresentando a disseminação da democracia como o seu dever como potência hegemônica na era pós-Guerra Fria. Esta visão do papel dos Estados Unidos foi consolidada durante o mandato do Presidente Clinton e é ainda dominante na política externa do país. Este ensaio argumentará que o fim da Guerra Fria deixou os Estados Unidos com uma grande capacidade militar e meios para continuar a sua política externa internacionalista, mas também sem objetivos claros. A rota escolhida pelos formuladores de política externa norte-americana foi a de manter a estabilidade global e os valores democráticos mundo a fora. Portanto, seus novos inimigos se tornaram todo ator – estatal ou não – que desafiasse essa nova ordem mundial, caracterizada pela democracia, pelo livre comércio e pela estabilidade.*

**Palavras-Chave:** Política externa; Estados Unidos; Nova Ordem Mundial; Inimigos.

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## Introduction

The years of the Cold War were characterized by a clear US strategy: the containment of Soviet power. Once it was over, the United States emerged as the only superpower, and with a great military capacity. With the collapse of USSR, though, America was left without a clear enemy and therefore without a clear strategy for its foreign policy. Therefore, if the United States did not want to go back to the isolationism that characterized its first centuries, it needed to find a new rationale for its international engagement.

The emergence of a new world order is frequently related to President Bush's New World Order speech, in September 1990, but some scholars argue that the order that emerged from the end of the Cold War was a continuation of the one established with World War II (IKENBERRY, 1996: 90). This means that the 'new' order was an extension of a strategy already established, with the difference being that now the containment policy was over. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the end of the Cold War posed a challenge to the foreign policymakers in the United States, since it was necessary to find new justifications to its internationalism.

The world after Cold War had a much wider agenda. New challenges such as the threat of terrorism and the risk of cultural clashes put in danger the stability of the Western order. Huntington (1996: 21) explains this shift: "In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic. They are cultural". This assertion evidences that Fukuyama's 'end of history' is more a futuristic fiction than a post-Cold War reality and helps to explain one of the United States foreign policy new rationales, that is, the use of military intervention.

Besides that, the idea of the democratic peace started to be developed. Without the contradictions of the Cold War, the United States could justify its internationalism by presenting the spread of democracy as its duty as the hegemon in the post-Cold War era. This view of the US role was consolidated during President Clinton's mandate and is yet dominant in the country's foreign policy.

All things considered, this essay will argue that the end of the Cold War left the United States with a great military capacity and means to continue its internationalist foreign policy but also

without clear objectives. The route chosen by American foreign policymakers was to keep the global stability and the democratic values worldwide. Therefore, its new enemies became every actor – state or not – that defied this new world order, characterized by democracy, free trade and stability.

The first part of this essay will focus on the challenges of the post-Cold War era and the emergence of two main foreign policy goals – the maintenance of global stability and the spread of democracy – while the second part will analyse America's need for new enemies. To conclude, thus, this paper will seek to demonstrate that besides the need of a new strategy, the end of the Cold War also left the United States in need of new enemies. Finally, it is necessary to clarify that this work is an essay, i.e., it does not have the methodological design of a traditional research article.

### **The new world (dis)order**

The emergence of a new world order after the Soviet collapse is contested by some scholars, who see the events of the early 1990s as a merely continuation and part of an order that had already been established with World War II. Through this perspective, “the end of the Cold War was less the end of a world order than the collapse of the communist world into an expanding Western order” (IKENBERRY, 1996: 91). However, the fact is that the post-Cold War era presented new challenges as well as old ones, but in a new perspective. As Nye (1992:83) asserted in 1992, “the world has changed more rapidly in the past two years than at any time since 1945”. Therefore, it is reasonable after all to talk about a new world order to refer as the period after the Cold War. The term itself was forged by President Bush's speech of September 1990, in the context of the Persian Gulf crisis, in which he declares:

Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective – a new world order – can emerge: a new era -- freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony [...] Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak (BUSH,1990).

Despite of President Bush's rhetoric, this new order came though with a lot of challenges to American foreign policy makers. Against a Ikenberry's “myth of post-Cold War chaos” (IKENBERRY, 1996: 79-91), Carpenter sees the periods a “new world disorder”

(CARPENTER, 1991: 24-38), in which the United States had to redefine its interests by opting to be engaged only in those issues considered vital to its national security.

Indeed, with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the United States as the unique superpower of the world, the containment policy that had prevailed until then needed to be recast. In the words of Schlesinger (1992: 18), “a framework is needed”. Nevertheless, defining a new strategy was not an easy task. The new world was more complex and unstable. During the Cold War, the proliferation of nuclear weapons was slowed by “tight Soviet controls and influence over its client states” (NYE, 1992: 85). Thus with the collapse of USSR this issue became more unstable and challenging for the United States foreign policy to deal with.

Besides, many countries throughout Africa and Asia were still struggling with the colonial era consequences, forging therefore a scenario far from stable and with consequences such as the growth of refugees flow and conflicts between states and its population. In addition to that, the enlargement of the agenda in the post-Cold War period included issues until then neglected such as the ecological preoccupations. Furthermore, it located human rights in a much more central place in this new agenda. In addition, the new context challenged the way Third World conflicts were being managed so far. As Hoffmann wrote back then, “(...) superpowers (...) no longer chasing each other all over the world, may play less of a moderating role in such regional conflicts now that their potential as triggers of a superpower collision has vanished” (HOFFMANN, 1990: 115). Moreover, despite the increase of the transnationalism, nationalism was getting stronger, rising the risk of conflicts (NYE, 1992: 85). The fragmentation of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were examples of this intensification of nationalism (HOBSBAWM, 1992: 163).

This much more diffuse world was the scenario in which the United States had to redefine its foreign policy. With so many challenges worldwide – in comparison with the former almost unique one from the Cold War times – it was difficult to define what really mattered for the national security, that is, what the real interest was. Therefore, “a plethora of foreign policy objectives [had] been put forward, as if all could be successfully and simultaneously pursued” (SCHLESINGER, 1992: 17). Nevertheless, two preoccupations seem to have prevailed back then: global stability – which actually includes almost all of the issues above-mentioned; and the spread of democracy (CARPENTER, 1991: 24). Indeed, it appears that the latter started to

be used as the solution to all that cauldron of problems. It was in this context that the idea of the ‘democratic peace’ started to be developed:

The end of ideological hostility matters doubly because it represents a surrender to the force of Western values of economic and especially political freedom. To the degree that countries once ruled by autocratic systems become democratic, a striking fact about the world comes to bear on any discussion of the future of international relations: in the modern international system, democracies have almost never fought each other (RUSSETT, 1993: 4).

Therefore, the idea that the world should have as many democracies as possible in order to maintain peace and stability – and consequently to reinforce the security of the United States – seemed very attractive to American foreign policymakers in that confusing post-Cold War context. This idea was reinforced by the victory of the United States in the Cold War, which led to the general belief that the democratic principles were universal. Thus, the “export” of democracy became one – if not the main – guide to US post-Cold War foreign policy.

As for the maintenance of global stability, Carpenter argues that for the Bush administration this goal “[had] become the post-Cold War equivalent of the search for the Holy Grail” (1991: 25). With Bush’s rhetoric of a new peaceful world order, this objective was thus central in his foreign policy strategy. As Gaddis wrote back then,

[t]he choices in the post-Cold War world are likely to center [...] where the triumph of one over the other could upset the international stability upon which rest the security interests of the United States, its allies and other like-minded states; and where action is therefore needed to restore equilibrium (1991: 114).

Indeed, both this and the spread of democracy worldwide goals served as new rationales to which American leaders cling to justify its post-Cold War internationalism. “The American preoccupation with promoting democracy abroad fits into a larger liberal view about the sources of a stable, legitimate, secure and prosperous international order” (IKENBERRY, 1999: 58).

Therefore, the end of the Cold War left the United States without a clear objective in a much more diffuse and diverse world. Hence, it was necessary to redefine a strategy to American foreign policy, especially one able to justify the continuity of US internationalism. Besides a new strategy though, as will be analysed in the next section, the United States needed a new enemy.

## The need of a new enemy

The fact that the end of the Cold War left the United States without a clear threat means that the country did not have a clear and well-defined enemy anymore. Nevertheless, US military capacity after the Soviet collapse was considerable and with so many profits coming from the war industry, it was hard to find a turning point to American internationalism. Therefore, the vacuum left by the Soviet Union represented not only a need for a new strategy but also for a new enemy. After all, without a clear and defined threat, the United States had lost “the magnetic north calibrating its foreign policy” (SCHLESINGER, 1992: 17).

This was the general perception back then. As Krauthammer wrote at the *Time Magazine* in 1992: “just days after the demise of their enemy of the last half-century, Americans seem desperate to conjure a new one” (KRAUTHAMMER APUD MURRAY and MEYERS, 1999: 556). However, since the world presented many more diversified challenges in this period than before, also more plural were US enemy candidates. Thus, linking the new rationales established after the Cold War, discussed in the first part of this essay, with the necessity to address the military capacity of the country to a new foreign enemy in order to maintain the internationalist policy, we can argue that the nation`s new enemies became every actor in the international system do defy global stability and democratic values.

A good example of this construction of enemies happened in the context of the Gulf War: “Portraying Saddam Hussein as a modern-day Adolf Hitler, Bush asserted that a vigorous, uncompromising response to Iraq`s invasion of Kuwait was essential to deter other potential aggressors” (CARPENTER, 1991: 25). Thus, shaping Saddam as an outrageous enemy of international stability helped the Bush administration to justify the Gulf war. The need to have an enemy can be generally explained in political terms as the necessity that leaders have to “create enemies to mobilize the nation around common aims or to profit from the arms industry” (FREELAND; EDELMAN; WOLFE; WOLFE; CHOMSKY APUD MURRAY and MEYERS, 1999: 556). This is suitable to explain the particular case of the world after Cold War, since the United States had increased its military capabilities to a considerable level and it was thus difficult – if not impossible – to go back to an isolationist foreign policy without damaging the arms industry and consequently the whole economy, considering how dependent the latter is to the former. In addition to that, Americans seemed really confuse at the end of the Cold War about the future of the United States, as demonstrated by an article at

The New York Times in March 1990, wrote by William E. Schmidt. Most of the people interviewed for this article were reluctant to say that the US had won the war, despite the general sense that the Soviet Union had lost it. They feared that even though the nation was a superpower in military terms, what mattered now that the Soviets were no longer a danger was the economy: “[w]e're just not a superpower anymore[...]. Economically, we are not as strong as Japan or West Germany right now” (SCHMIDT, 1990). Through various interviews, the article shows how the people was paying more attention to problems within the country – especially the ones related to economics – now that the military threat was gone. Besides that, there seemed to be a general belief that with the collapse of Soviet Union, American power would diminish: “the decline of the Soviet Union is also the decline of the United States in terms of its relative importance in the world” (SCHMIDT, 1990). Hence, this confusion among the American people is also one component of the need felt by US leaders to find a new enemy for the nation.

All things considered, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States needed to rethink not only the strategy behind its foreign policy but also to consider finding a new enemy in order to justify its continuing internationalism. In the context of the new world order, there were as many potential opponents as there were challenges. Therefore, any actor to defy President Bush's harmonic and peaceful new era – marked by democracy and stability – would be a candidate for American hostility.

## Conclusion

The foreign policy embraced by the United States during the years of the Cold War was characterized by the containment of the Soviet power. The rationale behind this strategy was the necessity to maintain national security against a specific enemy – the USSR. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of this enemy, the United States had to rethink the role it was going to play in the world. Having acquired a significant military capacity over those years, America opted to continue with its internationalism. Therefore, it was necessary to find a new strategy to justify its choice and, beyond that, it was necessary to find a new enemy to replace the former one.

The first part of this essay has sought to analyse the new order emerged from the end of the Cold War. Far from President Bush's rhetoric, though, the new era was a rather disordered



one. As Nye attested: “rather than the end of history, the post-Cold War world [was] witnessing a return of history in the diversity of sources of international conflict” (NYE, 1992: 84). In this context, the world was facing many more challenges than before, since the new international agenda included issues that had been neglected until then. Despite the variety of issues suitable as US new rationales, two objectives seem to have been prioritised by American foreign policy makers: the maintenance of global stability and the spread of democracy.

The second part of this work has argued that by the end of the Cold War the United States needed not only a new foreign policy strategy but also new enemies. This necessity seems to be justified both by the need to unite the nation against a common threat and by the economic interest in maintaining the profit from the arms industry. Nevertheless, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, US leaders were also influenced by the confusion of American people after the Soviet collapse. In addition to that, a new enemy was necessary if the country wanted to continue its internationalism. All things considered, in the context of President Bush's new world order, characterised by stability and democracy, every actor to disturb or defy this order would be a candidate to be an opponent of the United States.

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