

# UNDER THE SIGN OF MARS OR MERCURY- WHAT WILL BE THE GEOPOLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEXT AMERICAN ELECTIONS?

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In 1828, Andrew Jackson, commander of the Tennessee militias, fighter of Indians and victor over the last British army present in the United States at the end of the War of 1812, was a candidate for the presidential election. The inventor of the *spoils system*, which enabled him to get rid of the White House technocrats - once elected - did not hesitate to use the military to put an end to a strike or to oppose the creation of a central bank, led by private interests. In some ways, his personality can be compared to that of the current Republican candidate Donald Trump. Does this mean that a possible Trump victory would spawn a real turning point in terms of foreign policy? This is not impossible. In effect, behind the electoral statements of both candidates exist two substantially different diplomatic lines: the first, that of Donald Trump, favours the commercial interests of the United States, while the second, that of Hillary Clinton, pretends to perpetuate America's position through new wars.

## TRUMP, A COMMERCIAL VISION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

From a political point of view, Donald Trump is as an independent person: Initially a Democrat, he supported the Republicans of Ronald Reagan in the early 1980's. A decade later, it financed the Clinton campaign with \$100,000. In 2008, he gave \$ 4,000 to Senator Hillary Clinton for her Democrat presidential primary campaign. D. Trump's mother was a devout Presbyterian, although Trump himself has strayed far from his mother's piety. He has, nevertheless, been very influenced by the preacher, N. Peale, who highlights the importance of personal initiative to overcome all obstacles. Despite the narrative of the American mainstream media that Trump has little chance to win, there is substantial evidence indicating the contrary to be the case. He has beaten his rival on social networks. His eccentricity and mistakes do not seem to bother the electorate. He has won the support of the American middle class, frustrated by Washington's policy. The middle-class fears unemployment and

impoverishment due to blue-collar job relocations to China or Mexico. Donald Trump has appeal via typical conservative ideals, but also appeals to certain strata of American society in a manner that Republicans have not since Ronald Reagan. During the first debate between Clinton and Trump, 80 million viewers watched the exchange. The press and commentators praised the rhetorical victory of H. Clinton. However, after the first debate Clinton polls showed a clear victory in favour of Trump – the public's perceptions were not primarily concerned with rhetorical style or with debating points, but with their deep dissatisfaction with status quo Washington policy, and they see Trump representing change and Hillary representing the status quo. With regard to media coverage of Trump, which is almost uniformly hostile, his threat to reshuffle all of the cards in Washington threatens the position of the very powerful media, resulting in their attempt to stop his candidacy at all costs.

Donald Trump rarely expresses a detailed outline of precisely what his foreign policy agenda would be. He outlines general positions but doesn't explain how he would reach his objectives. Beyond his unpredictable, populist, and sometimes provocative style, his knowledge of international relations seems to be limited. Not a natural geopolitical thinker, he has a very commercial vision of international relations. Yet superimposing his statements allows us to anticipate - in case of a possible Trump victory - a geopolitical repositioning of the United States: a reconciliation could occur with Russia, but refereed by Israel - who has felt hostility from the Obama Administration and has been reassured by Trump - and which would obtain in return a shift of the American position on Iran. This inflection would be welcomed by Saudi Arabia - terrified by the rise of the Iranian power - and to which the United States could provide financial aid to support its transition into a post-oil economy. This downturn is even more likely that Russia and Turkey have just covertly agreed on a division of influence in the Middle-East: Russia leaves Turkey making war with the Kurds, but Turkey gives Russia a free hand to liquidate the opposition to Bashar al-Assad. Donald Trump's statements regarding NATO should be interpreted as both a positive signal with respect to Russia – which is frightened by what it sees as the continued extension of NATO - but also as a blackmail to increase the financial participation of European states to the common military defense. The geopolitical inflection that could be undertaken by Donald Trump would naturally be harmful for Iran, the Kurds, and finally the European states located next to Russia (particularly for Poland and the Baltic states). In this new context, India, bound historically to Russia and geopolitically to the United States, could play a role of arbitrator between these two powers in Ukraine.

As for China, even though it is designated as an enemy to mobilize the electoral masses, it does not appear to be seen by Trump as a real geopolitical opponent. In any case, he appears to see China as less an enemy than Islamic terrorism. For its part, Mexico raises two key issues to D. Trump: "*We lose against Mexico both in terms of trade as that of borders*" D. Trump wants to seal the 1,600 km US-Mexico border and improve the wall with Mexico - on the model of Israel's security fence - to stop illegal immigration of the flood of people from Central and South America, as well as from northern and eastern Africa, the Middle East, and even China, that have taken advantage of the Obama Administration's virtually open-border policy. The model for Trump is the border built by the US in the city of Yuma, Arizona, which includes 3 walls with cameras, radios, radar and lighting system that covers over 200 km.

This new geopolitical situation has yet to be qualified. First, the easiest way for the United States to survive in a rapidly deteriorating environment is to maintain controlled wars that benefit their industry. Will Donald Trump resist the pressure of the industrial lobbies? Let

us not forget that he has quoted General George Patton and Douglas MacArthur as political intelligence models. Second, the geopolitical repositioning of the United States would face institutional obstacles. A rapprochement with Russia would immediately meet the hostility of both the Republican and the Democrat parties. Even if Donald Trump decided to use an executive order or some other type of executive action in order to push an agreement with Moscow through, the domestic political backlash in the United States could severely cripple a Trump Administration politically – mistrust and hostility toward Russia is deeply embedded within the American population. On the other hand, if handled deftly in terms of domestic political messaging, the geopolitical inflection desired by Donald Trump could bring together a large number of States, and public opinions - now focused on the question of identity - against a common enemy: Islamic terrorism. We must not think that the election of Mr. Trump would mean a simple return to the isolationism of the interwar period: the United States would continue to take a leadership role in the world in the world, but in a more pragmatic and probably more effective way. The main objective of the interventions would be to safeguard the interests of the United States more strictly defined than in the past. They would be less numerous but more violent and effective.

## **CLINTON : RECOVERING POWER BY LAUNCHING NEW WARS ?**

Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate, embodies the existing system. She is supported by the establishment which is both a strength and a weakness. She received the official and financial support of large companies, banks, investment funds, newspapers from the East Coast, actors and directors of Hollywood, intellectual circles and finally from within the Obama Administration where she was Secretary of State (although a virtual blood feud between the Clintons and the Obamas that had begun due to the extremely bitter competition between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama during the 2008 Democrat presidential primary race led President Obama in early and mid 2015 to seek to encourage a candidacy by his Vice President, Joe Biden, whom Obama preferred to H Clinton). However, Hillary raises the suspicion of the people. Even those pledging to support her do not like her, nor do they trust her. Lifelong Democrats around the United States, accustomed to supporting the Democrat candidate no matter who it was, have this year, for the first time, openly stated that if the Republican candidate were somebody like Mitt Romney, most of Mrs. Clinton's current base of support would abandon her for Romney – that is how little esteemed she is among many Democrats. Mrs. Clinton is perceived to have lied about her emails and mishandling of classified information, to have extensively covered it up, is accused of conflict of interest between her political office and professional obligations, and widely perceived to be completely corrupt. Moreover, there are widespread concerns that she and her campaign are hiding the reality of her health, and that she could be unable to assume her presidential duties. For these reasons, Hillary Clinton has not convinced the young voters who preferred B. Sanders to her. In 2008, young voters put Barack Obama in the White House. In 2016, not only are they not supporting Mrs. Clinton as strongly, but a slim majority of young voters are supporting Donald Trump. Hillary Clinton embodies a return to a more interventionist foreign policy. However, her past negotiations with Russia show that she is also able to make concessions to her opponents. Hillary Clinton - like Margaret Thatcher or George W. Bush - have been marked by the Methodist current, out of which sprung the religious *Second Great Awakening* of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that has so shaped American culture and politics ever since. Her entourage includes many hawks. We can cite, for example, Victoria Nuland, ardent defender of direct intervention in international affairs, among her advisors. Another prominent

supporter is Kurt M. Campbell, former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Also included in her circle is former American General Wesley Clark, who is positioned on an identical line.

According to the Center for Public Integrity, an organization that examines the campaign accounts of candidates, Hillary Clinton is the candidate who received the most important funding from the top fifty business partners of the Pentagon. If Democrats win, the increase in the defense budget would be the largest. It would reach 8.4% per year between 2016 and 2019, according to the analysts of Bank of America-Merrill Lynch. They believe that it would not be higher than 2.8% per year over the same period in case of Republican victory. Another source of funding is the Clinton Foundation, a charity she founded with her husband. One of the companies contributing the most to this foundation is the aerospace giant Boeing. However, the military wing of Boeing was lately somewhat troubled. It lost indeed two capital contracts, the Endowment fighter-bomber of the USAF, entrusted to Lockheed Martin, and more recently that of the strategic bomber that will replace the B-52 from Boeing. The company therefore requires an increase in military spending in order to sell the materials it produces, such as the F 18.

To conclude, it would be simplistic to oppose a isolationist Trump to an interventionist Clinton. Indeed, on certain issues, their positions are reversed. This is particularly the case with Iran. If Trump considers Iran as a major global supporter of terrorism, the Democratic candidate, who has participated to previous negotiations as Secretary of State is convinced of the reverse and would likely continue the line of President Obama in that regard. In reality, the main question is: facing their own decline, will the United States be tempted - at the instigation of armaments lobbies – to intensify on-going wars in order to revive their economy or, conversely, to reduce the number of their enemies allowing a comeback of their foreign policy?