

## US FOREIGN POLICY: POLITICAL RISKS AND PRIORITIES

### **POLÍTICA EXTERIOR DE ESTADOS UNIDOS: RIESGOS POLÍTICOS Y PRIORIDADES**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Traditionally, the age-old leadership of the United States as a global hegemon is determined by democratic freedoms, safe living, and a highly developed economy. On the one hand, this raises the bar for developed and developing countries and on the other hand, despite the fact that the military power of the United States on land, sea and in the air is practically unattainable, it creates risks for the global American leadership. Based on this, the article focuses on the need to comprehend and study the main priorities of US foreign policy, among which the main ones are the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, the economic crisis caused by it, climate change, democracy issues, building relationships with allies and partners, immigration problems, protection from hacker attacks, theft of intellectual property, and resistance to manipulation of exchange rates.

**Keywords:** US foreign policy, priority of interests, political and economic risks.

#### **RESUMEN**

Tradicionalmente, el antiguo liderazgo de los Estados Unidos como potencia hegemónica global está determinado por las libertades democráticas, una vida segura y una economía altamente desarrollada. Por un lado, esto eleva el listón para los países desarrollados y en vías de desarrollo, y por otro lado, a pesar de que el poderío militar de los Estados Unidos en tierra, mar y aire es prácticamente inalcanzable, crea riesgos para el liderazgo global estadounidense. Con base en esto, el artículo se enfoca en la necesidad de comprender y estudiar las principales prioridades de la política exterior de los Estados Unidos, entre las cuales se encuentran la lucha contra la pandemia del coronavirus, la crisis económica provocada por la misma, el cambio climático, los temas de democracia, la construcción de relaciones con aliados y socios, problemas de inmigración, protección contra ataques de piratas informáticos, robo de propiedad intelectual y resistencia a la manipulación de tipos de cambio.

**Palabras clave:** Política exterior de Estados Unidos, prioridad de intereses, riesgos políticos y económicos.

## INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy refers to the general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behavior of other states, or plans to advance specific geopolitical designs. Leopold von Ranke emphasized the primacy of geography and external threats in shaping foreign policy, but later writers emphasized domestic factors. Diplomacy is the tool of foreign policy, and war, alliances, and international trade may all be manifestations of it (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021).

In the case of US, foreign policy is identical in importance with domestic policy, determined by the interests of the state, which has a monopoly on communication with the outside world. Both external and internal policies play an important role in preserving the security of the American nation and the inviolability of its interests. In the context of building a new world order, the United States strives to play the role of a regulator and coordinator, however, the question of how justified and successful the US foreign policy, based on the concept of global leadership, has become, remains controversial.

The power of the United States is one of the key factors of global stability, and, acting as the initiator of international political, socio-economic and cultural processes, the United States, in the context of globalization, is itself subject to powerful external influences, as well as global cataclysms. That is why, as never before, the study of aspects of the foreign policy of the United States, whose power and driving forces of international political development are involved in building the international order, appear to be significant and relevant in ordering the system of international relations and security. Proceeding from this, the research topic is relevant to determine the main priorities of US foreign policy, the place and role of American foreign policy in the global political process and identify the main problems and risks that the United States faces today in ensuring national and international security.

The unique position of the United States as a superpower has opened up the opportunity for them to exert a broader and more targeted influence on the course and content of international relations. US foreign policy establishment is faced with the task of not only ideologically substantiating its own strategy of international activity in the new conditions, but also adapting it to the model of a new world order, presenting a global strategy for the long term. The complexity of the international situation during the global pandemic, and the contradictory nature of the emerging world order require a comprehensive and more careful

study of the conceptual and theoretical foundations of US foreign policy.

Thus, this article was written with the aim of showing and identifying the main problems, risks and priorities of American foreign policy, and the place and role of American foreign policy in the global political process. During the study, there were used, such research methods as situation analysis, document analysis, historical-comparative method, and systematic approach. Research in this direction and forecast options are capable of making qualitative adjustments to the safe development of the world. The acute foreign policy risks of the United States at the present stage, in addition to the global SARS – CoV – 2 pandemic, are political risks associated with China, Russia, Turkey, the Middle East, as well as the EU. The political climate in the global space will depend on how the United States' relations with these states and their opposing forces will develop.

## DEVELOPMENT

The economic component of the United States feeds world trade and industry, and the political and cultural appeal, which Joseph Nye called soft power, is so extensive that most international institutions reflect American interests. The most representative among them is the United Nations, where the pro-American Secretariat plays a key role. It is the main source of economic and political analysis for the General Assembly and the Security Council, he manages political field missions that provide information to advisory bodies. Given the full range of roles, the Secretariat has more decision-making authority than its "de – jure" status implies. In its newsletter, the UN reported: *"The United Nations is increasingly becoming a political arena where high-ranking officials participate in political compromises, and "interest groups" lobby for the interests of their country"* (Nye, 2004, p. 191).

Since 2020, US policy has been focused on combating the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and preventing its mutations, which is not only harmful to health and is a threat to life, but also provokes an economic crisis in finance, tourism, energy and other types of business, increases inflation and poverty. Small and medium-sized businesses are failing, tens of millions of low-wage jobs are shutting down, while on-line budget giants such as Facebook, Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Alphabet (Google's parent company) are gaining popularity. These companies work closely with China. In 2019, this was stated by the chairman of the US Joint Staff Committee, General Joseph Dunford:

*“Google has an artificial intelligence center in the PRC. The collaboration between American and Chinese companies is confirmed by a publication by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Millions of dollars are flowing to China, this should be seen as treason to the United States. American on-line giants are stimulating the Chinese economy through the demand for industrial imports just at the moment when China is the main competitor of the United States”*(RBC.ru, 2020).

Containing China is becoming the main task of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the state policy of Washington, while Russia is receding into the background. Improving U.S. relations with major traditional allies such as the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea and other partners will also be top priorities for President Biden, as these relations have deteriorated rather than previous strategic alliances under the Trump administration have collapsed. Second, the new US administration will have a different climate policy (Central Asia Analytical Network, 2021).

In the words of an American publicist Krauthammer Daalder : *“The unprecedentedly dominant United States are in a unique position, since it can determine its own foreign policy”* (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003). However, in recent years, the United States has had a rival in the world orbit in the person of China, which, of course, carries both economic and political risks for the United States.

US foreign policy has been researched and studied from various angles by many foreign and domestic researchers of modern political science, who addressed the basic conceptual foundations of US foreign policy and strategy. Just to mention a few, Friedrichs and Tama (2022) addressed the issue of polarization and its influence on conditioning the population to accept government policies on various issues. Callaghan et al., (2019) addresses issues related to ideology and its influence on American politics. Shipoli (2018) and Prifti (2017) on the other hand focus on relations with the Middle East, and Fabbri (2010) on anti-American sentiment resulting from US foreign policy. Unquestionably, much work has been done on the subject, but given the dynamic and complex nature of politics, it is necessary to address some points. Specifically, it is important to analyze the foreign policy risks of the United States at the present stage and the foreign policy priorities of the administration of the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Joseph Biden, focused on his success in his policy. For this, the presented materials and conclusions of this study can be useful for research in this direction.

## US-China

Today, China competes with the United States not only in such a leading area as high technology, but also in the

field of investment, economy, finance, culture, etc. The division of the technology sector between the US and China disrupts the bilateral flows of technology, talent, and investment. In 2020, China has moved beyond strategic technology sectors such as semiconductors, cloud computing and 5G to a broader economic plane. This trend has affected not only the global technology sector with a turnover of \$ 5 trillion, but also other industries and institutions, which has increased the economic and cultural gap. This is a risk that is becoming permanent, causing a deep geopolitical cooling of global business, as China's onslaught has a stable continuation.

China is increasing its influence in strategically important regions of the world, for example, in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, in certain territories of which it has geopolitical interests. China builds its own enterprises on them and controls promising deposits of natural resources, such as gold, gas, and water (Magda, 2019). In this regard Central Asian countries are in debt to China. This is one of the results of the development of the new Silk Road, from 50% or more of the external debt of these countries has been transferred to the PRC (the debt is constantly growing). China provides financing for the economic miracle of the Central Asian republics, in which the number of the Chinese diaspora is increasing.

From 2013 to 2020 Chinese campaigns were represented in the Caucasus, in particular in the South Caucasus countries. China uses “soft power” as a geopolitical instrument. The growth of China's cooperation with the South Caucasus in recent years has turned Beijing into an increasingly influential force in the region. The key component of these relations is the economic interests of all the parties involved. China has signed several official documents with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan on their participation in the “One Belt, One Road” (BRI) initiative. Among them is the free trade agreement between China and Georgia from 2017 - the first in the post-Soviet space. Starting from a very low level ten years ago, China is now one of the ten largest export partners of Georgia, accounting for more than 5 % of Georgia's exports in 2018. However, in relations with Georgia, as well as with Azerbaijan, Chinese control has serious limitations. So, in 2013, the parties belonging to the National Front of Georgia staged a small protest against the planned creation of a free economic zone in Tbilisi, owned by the Chinese Hualing Industry and Trade Group. The protesters demanded that the agreement signed in 2012 between Hualing and the previous Georgian government be made public and that the new government impose restrictions on the number of Chinese workers entering Georgia.

40% of China's trade with the South Caucasus region falls on Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan itself is the key player here, not China. For example, the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway project, which is considered one of the main components of Beijing's global transport communication in the region.

China's presence in Armenia is significantly different from its relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia. Since 2012, China has provided at least \$ 37 million in economic assistance to Armenia and presented it with hundreds of public buses and ambulances. Thus, as of April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Armenia's external debt of \$ 103.13218 billion has increased in the amount of \$ 340 million (Freedom House, 2021). It is noticeably also that two years ago, Armenia extradited 78 Taiwanese citizens suspected of fraud to China.

The PRC, as is known, exerts pressure on states in which it has a significant presence. At the same time, there are human rights violations and shadow agreements in the business practices of some Chinese state-owned companies operating in Armenia, as in SinoHydro, which undertook the construction of three sections of the North-South highway in Armenia. Meanwhile, a Chinese consulting firm that published a feasibility study of a railway connection with Iran is at the center of its own disagreements. Since the budget of the North-South highway already significantly exceeds the budget, it remains unclear how Yerevan intends to pay. A study conducted by the Center for Global Development warns that Armenia may be in danger of falling into China's debt trap. According to the International Monetary Fund, Armenia's debt to China is high and vulnerable for Armenia, despite acceptable levels of public debt.

Now China is leading in many industries, even in the space sector, and no sanctions will stop China's development. Many experts believe that China carries global expansionist risks (Elliott, 2019), which is very worrying for the United States. The division, tension between the US and China confronts them over national security and influence. In this struggle, both countries continue to use economic instruments-sanctions, export controls and boycotts, which are increasingly political in nature. So, in the second half of April 2020, the contradictions between the United States and China led to the actual disruption of a remote meeting of the G20 members. Since this format is considered the most representative and at the same time the least binding in terms of decisions, it seemed until recently the most promising in the conditions of the "crumbling" world order and the growth of national egoism. However, the first round of the most important interstate confrontation of the new era has already cast doubt on the very possibility of discussions between the

leaders of the twenty most economically and militarily-politically important states (Diplomat, 2021).

The principles of America's strategic rivalry with China are reflected in the bill presented by senators, Republican D. Risch and Democrat R. Menendez in April 2021. Respectively, this 280 – page document was supported by both Republicans and Democrats. A well-known politician, Democrat M. Bloomberg quoted D. Risch: *"This legislative initiative is an important step in order to provide the United States with the necessary position for rivalry with China in the coming decades."*

This document deals with the sale of weapons on a regular basis to Taiwan. Some experts believe that "the US Congress is playing with fire, the bill is a provocation and a violation of the principle of "one China, and that China will not compromise". According to international experts, the draft law on strategic competition calls for close cooperation with Taiwan, while the United States uses the Chinese province as a pawn in its game. The Taiwan issue, related to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China, is the most important and sensitive moment in US-Chinese relations. China has repeatedly stressed its readiness to make active efforts to achieve peaceful unification of the country. China does not intend to retreat on this issue. The Taiwan issue is an internal matter of China, external interference is unacceptable here (RG.ru, 2021).

### US-Russia

Russia confronts the United States in its military arsenal and in the defense of democratic values. In the first direction, the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms (START-3) is relevant, which the parties agreed to extend on January 26 without additional conditions for another five years, until February 5<sup>th</sup> 2026 during a telephone conversation between Russian President V. Putin with the new US President Joseph Biden (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021).

The second direction is a different attitude towards democratic values. The US authorities believe that human rights are being trampled on in the Russian Federation, while for America, democratic freedoms are a priority for development. Based on its Constitution, the United States is integrating democratic values into the world community but does not see a response from the Russian Federation. The United States opposes the annexation of Crimea, persecution, and murder, which are not acceptable in modern civilized societies. According to Freedom House (), the Kremlin manipulates elections and suppresses dissent. Rampant corruption contributes to the shifting of ties between bureaucrats and organized criminal groups.



In July, a referendum was held on extending the presidential term of office until 2036 (but this applies only to President Vladimir Putin). Unauthorized protest actions are either ignored or lead to mass arrests. NGOs are considered as “foreign agents”. NGO staff are subject to fines and arrests (Freedom House, 2021). Measures were taken against a number of oppositionists. In August 2020, an anti-corruption activist, A. Navalny, was poisoned by FSB officers. Five laboratories certified by the OPCW3 have identified a 4<sup>th</sup> generation toxic agent (OPCW, 2020). A. Navalny was sentenced to 3.5 years in a strict regime colony for failing to report to the police in a coma (DW News, 2021). Violations of the democratic foundations were also revealed in the technology of the electoral system, in the voting processes, gender division, the party system, in the courts, media accountability, freedom of religion, etc.

### Turkey-US relations

Joseph Biden's foreign policy strategy could have been resonant if it were not for the foreign policy risk with Turkey. Turkey is a key regional player and a long-standing ally of the United States. The role of Turkey as a regional power has increased with the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP leadership aspired to become not only a regional power, but also a global player. Thus, Turkey has assumed various roles: a regional leader, a historical role of “big brother”, a defender of Muslim minorities, a mediator in disputed issues between other countries. By increasing its regional influence and interacting with developing powers, Turkey is regaining its status as a rising power. In other words, Turkey's economic and military security largely depends on its Western allies. Four of the five and eight of the ten largest export markets of Turkey are members of NATO (Trading Economics, 2021).

The United States is interested in a stable and democratic Turkey, which is able to help resist Russia, cope with the refugee crisis and work with Washington in the Middle East. However, since 2003, relations between the United States and Turkey have begun to regress. The reason was Turkey's refusal to use the Incirlik air base for the US invasion of Iraq. This incident has intensified since July 2016, when there was an attempted coup in Turkey. In the process of expanding international relations, Turkey has moved to seek partnerships with other countries, including Russia.

In 2018, Recep Erdogan bought a missile defense system from Russia and the crisis in relations between the United States and Turkey deepened even further. Whether Turkey will maintain its nominal membership in NATO with the American establishment of the Secretariat of this

organization is a question, the same as whether Joseph Biden will use additional levers of pressure on Turkey with the help of sanctions (Dembinski & Fehl, 2021). “*This is the lowest point in US-Turkish relations*” said Haykan Erdemir, a former member of the Turkish parliament who now works at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank in Washington. As vice president of the United States, he brought relations to a low point after the coup attempt against Erdogan in 2016, in which the Turkish leader has long blamed the United States of America.

But how Biden overcomes the diplomatic minefield of US–Turkish relations as commander-in-chief will be a serious test for his comprehensive foreign policy program, showing whether he can simultaneously restore relations with a long-time NATO ally and contain Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian views. Turkey's tough approach to foreign policy creates a potential crisis of expectation for the Biden administration. Erdogan is stuck in the clutches of Russian President Vladimir Putin after Turkey bought the S-400 air defense system for \$ 2.5 billion, and he does not agree with US foreign policy in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa. Turkey is still under US sanctions against buyers of Russian defense equipment, although former US officials and experts have said that the fines were not intended to damage the Turkish economy.

### US interests in the Middle East

The increased attention of the United States to China and the decision to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan, encourage the administration of Joseph Biden to turn the US foreign policy course towards the problems of the Asia-Pacific region. But this requires at least relative stability in the Middle East. Maintaining sufficient interaction to balance Russian and Chinese influence focuses most of Biden's agenda on Middle East policy. At the same time, the administration of the new US president is focusing on the following key tasks: 1) a reset of relations with Saudi Arabia, 2) an end to Hamas ' terrorist attacks on Israel, 3) an end to the war in Yemen, and 4) getting Iran's nuclear deal back on track.

U.S.-Saudi relations have long been complicated because, although Washington is no longer dependent on Saudi oil, it still relies heavily on Riyadh to facilitate counterterrorism operations and counterbalance against Iran. Despite the cessation of sales of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia, Biden confirmed that the United States will continue to provide defensive support to Saudi Arabia to counter drones and missile attacks supported by Iran (Norman, 2021).

Biden's team hopes that the preservation of relatively close relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia will prevent the King of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, from seeking to strengthen the defense partnership with Russia and China.

The knot of the most painful Middle East conflict is tightened by problems between Palestinians and Israelis, as the eleven-day war between Hamas and Israel has once again demonstrated. The Saudi reset may become more difficult as the US ramps up diplomatic efforts on the Iran nuclear deal. Biden campaigned to join the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was brokered during his tenure as vice president in the Obama administration but was replaced by Trump's "maximum pressure" policy based on sanctions. However, despite the fact that sanctions have undermined Iran's economy, its nuclear potential has continued to develop, and its network of militias throughout the Middle East has expanded.

Biden's first encounter with Iran was also his first military action as president – an air strike against Iranian-backed militias on the Syrian-Iraqi border in response to ongoing attacks by Iranian militias on US and coalition forces in Iraq, including rocket fire and the killing of a civilian contractor. But this incident highlights the difficulty of balancing diplomatic initiatives and defense imperatives in real time.

The Biden administration has been moving more slowly towards a nuclear agreement than some expected, and indirect negotiations are just beginning now in Vienna. The US claims that Iran has rejected previous invitations to direct talks, with both sides wanting the other to speak first. Iran wants the US to lift sanctions – more than 1500 of them imposed under Trump as a precursor to direct negotiations, while the US wants Iran to first reduce uranium enrichment levels to the levels agreed in the 2015 deal. The lifting of US sanctions is complicated by the fact that many of them imposed by the Trump administration, for example, related to the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), were labeled terrorism rather than nuclear weapons.

The Vienna talks, based on EU shuttle diplomacy between their American and Iranian counterparts, were the starting point for breaking the stalemate and taking practical steps in the second round. The nuclear deal remains politically contentious in Washington and puts the US at odds with allies such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Israel. The ongoing tensions show that it is difficult for Biden to achieve a deal while maintaining coordination and cooperation with Israel.

Intelligence and military coordination between the United States and allies in the Middle East remain crucial in deterring the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and other militant groups. The Middle East is still key to US geostrategic interests, because if Biden wants to succeed in his broader foreign policy agenda focused on China and Russia, it is in his interests to maintain leverage over the Middle East.

### US-European countries

Since the founding of NATO in 1949, transatlantic relations have been undermined by numerous crises, for example, the scandal around the European Defense Community in the early 50s (at that time the United States supported this idea), de Gaulle's departure from the united armed forces, Nixon's move to end the convertibility of the dollar into gold in 1971, or the clash over sanctions against the USSR after the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981. At the very beginning of his presidency, Joe Biden expressed his commitment to the North Atlantic Alliance and to strengthening US-European relations. However, the historian Jussi M. Hanhimäki in his recent book "Pax Transatlantica: America and Europe in the Post-Cold War Era" argues that disputes and clashes are inevitable even between the closest allies (Hanhimäki, 2021, p. 3).

The structural ties linking Europe and the United States continue to create wealth and ensure the security of the parties involved, and thus all the upheavals in transatlantic relations are followed by a "return to the usual norm" ("return to business as usual"). The United States and Europe are preparing for tense relations with Russia, because it is unlikely that Russia's foreign policy course will change during the long term of Vladimir Putin's presidency.

The leaders of America and the EU countries refer to the common values on which their cooperation is based. This is more than political rhetoric. The United States played a crucial role in the transition to democracy. The transition to democracy in most countries of the world is a unique success in the global space and an important contribution to collective security. The active support of the United States for the expansion of democratic opportunities is vital, given the illiberal trends in Hungary and Poland (Bergmane, 2021).

### CONCLUSIONS

Foreign policy risks of the United States at the present stage were analyzed. The study showed that the United States is still in a unique position: its establishment in NATO allows it to determine its own foreign policy. However, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic carry a certain risk. The Covid-19 pandemic damages health, is a threat to life, provokes an economic crisis, contributes to the

stratification of society into rich and poor, which of course, affects the domestic policy of the United States, which is intertwined with foreign policy. Main risks for US foreign policy come from interaction with countries such as China, Russia, Turkey, Middle Eastern countries, and the countries of the European Union. The global foreign policy environment, peace or war largely depends on the interaction of the United States with these countries. The 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Joseph Biden, is focused on success in his broad foreign policy agenda, and some solid progress has already been reflected in his policy.

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