

# 2017 Geopolitics: Lost in Transition

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Alvaro Ortiz / Tomasa Rodrigo

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For a further year, geopolitical events have continued to occupy the lead stories on the world's traditional and digital media. We shouldn't be surprised by this, if we accept that global geopolitics is in a state of transition and that the spaces left by certain actors are being rapidly filled by others. It hasn't all been bad news, as the end of the year saw the announcement of the end of Daesh in Iraq and its increasing weakness in Syria.

In terms of the overall global strategy, advances toward a multi-polar world after years of US domination continued apace. The Pax Americana, led by the US after the end of the Cold War, is giving way to a new period characterised by multi-polarity, in which power is shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific and where the world's principal emerging countries such as China are threatening American hegemony. Furthermore, and to use a tennis metaphor, "unforced errors" by certain western leaders, wrapped up in defensive strategies, are resulting in a faster-than-expected advance by China in its progress toward world hegemony.

In the US, Donald Trump's presidency, characterised by the slogan "America First", is abandoning the search for multilateral partnership agreements (commercial, climatic and diplomatic) in order to orientate the country toward bilateral relations, calling into question US supremacy and weakening the soft power that has been built up over decades. It would seem that the shift toward the Pacific announced by President Obama will not occur, that the relationship with Europe is "under review" and that, in the end, the US will remain in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the agreements signed with Iran by the previous administration are under scrutiny, accompanied by an unnecessary fuelling of the tension between Arabs and Israelis with the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

With all this, thanks to the US apparatus in the form of the Pentagon and the Department of State, there was some good news, with the prevention for the moment of the partition of Iraq and the avoidance of the situation in Syria becoming even more virulent. Despite these tactical advances, the regional tension that exists between Iranians and Arabs will need to be handled carefully. While Iran controls a significant corridor from Tehran to the Lebanon, Saudi Arabia continues to be bogged down in Yemen as well as immersed in a major paradigm shift, the outcome of which remains uncertain.

All of this is taking place on Europe's doorstep. It is happening so close to us that the flow of refugees toward central Europe can hardly be contained. Solutions to the refugee crisis have stalled as a result of the removal of the artificial obstacle represented by the traditional autocracies in North Africa, to which we need to add those who are fleeing from Syria, Iraq and Yemen. This represents a challenge for a Europe that is engaged in a strategy whose main objective is to strengthen its institutions with the emergence from the recession and, in the short-term, seek an acceptable divorce agreement with the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, China is slowly but surely continuing its progress toward a position of primacy. The country has its sights set on the seas of South East-Asia to the east and the One Belt One Road initiative towards the

west. Nonetheless, Asia is not without its problems. North Korea has become a real black swan event as far as world geopolitics are concerned. The country's nuclear programme has heightened tension with the US. Although geostrategies show that a unilateral attack would benefit nobody, the probability of error within a highly volatile context has increased significantly.

All of this is taking place within a scenario of global digital transformation that will provoke disruptions to production processes, in the way we consume, in the generation and distribution of information and, as a result, to the capacity for action of non-state actors who are increasingly important on the geopolitical stage.

Once again therefore we face the prospect of a new year of transition, in which, at the very least, we need to remain alert.

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