



American Grand Strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean
during the Obama and Trump administrations

By

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Αναλαμβάνω όλες τις νομικές και διοικητικές συνέπειες σε περίπτωση που αποδειχθεί ότι η εργασία μου αποτελεί προϊόν λογοκλοπής ή προϊόν τρίτων.

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To my parents who have made me who I am today.

To my friends who have helped me come all this way.

To my fellow students who made this experience unique.

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ABSTRACT

The competing worldviews of former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump were reflected in the strategic choices they made during their presidency. Each president has affected the United States' grand strategy in his own way, however, despite their ideological differences, the two presidents have presented some similarities in managing US role internationally and, in particular, in the Eastern Mediterranean region. This paper is dedicated to a structured comparison of the two Presidents' respective grand strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean through the analysis of selected case studies.

Keywords: US grand strategy, Donald Trump, Barack Obama, Eastern Mediterranean

INTRODUCTION

Since the ancient times, the Eastern Mediterranean has operated as a meeting point for different cultures, facilitating economic and commercial transactions - thanks to its sea lanes - and accelerating the development of the surrounding civilizations.

Throughout time, the region has been a crossroad of nations, languages, religions but also, a field of intense conflict between its coastal states.

Even today, the Eastern Mediterranean is considered an unstable territory due to the changing circumstances in its geopolitical environment.

During the past decade, the region has undergone significant geopolitical changes that have destabilized the situation but also, increased the Eastern Mediterranean's usefulness for several countries. The Arab Uprising that spread throughout the Arab world, the American withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and the rise of the Islamic State, the new hydrocarbons findings off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, Greece's rediscovery of its southeastern neighborhood, the events concerning the Cyprus issue, and Turkey's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) are among those changes. The above issues and their long-ranging effects on the international agenda have captured the attention of major players, such as the US, motivating them to participate in the race for influence over various aspects of the theater of events that is called the Eastern Mediterranean.

In this context, the present paper will attempt to identify American Grand Strategy during the Obama and Trump Administrations and pinpoint similarities and differences through the method of structured, focused comparison. In the writing of the

paper, the author will interpretively use relevant scientific analyses and articles by academics and distinguished analysts, articles in high-profile media and institutional texts of the US National Security Strategy.

CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The first chapter of this paper is dedicated to the methods and analysis tools used in order to examine and draw conclusions from the actors involved in the period under examination.

1.1 Strategic Analysis

States operate in a condition of anarchy where – to achieve their objectives or, simply, maintain their security – they rely on self-help. Simply put, each state calculates and implements the course that it considers to serve its self-interest the most (Waltz, 1977, pp. 111-114). However, individual states use individual approaches. Strategy is a multifaceted concept whose use is complex and has the ability to cause greater harm to the state itself rather than its opponent.

1.1.1. Strategy

The wide use of the term “strategy” has resulted in a loose definition and perception of its meaning by society. In its very basic form, strategy is used to describe the methodology used – by people, corporations, social groups and others. – to achieve a goal. In the realm of strategic thought, strategy has been the subject matter of extensive research and analysis by a number of experts. Carl von Clausewitz in his work “On War” studied and analyzed strategy from a military point of view, defining it as “the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war”. In simple terms, the strategist is in charge of

conceptualizing a goal for the entire operational side of the war that will be accordant with its purpose (Clausewitz, 1976, pp. 90-91). Realizing that Clausewitz's definition limited strategy to the outcome of the battle, Liddell Hart added the government's policy factor and defined strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy". His approach included the effect the movement of forces (Hart, 1991, pp. 319-321). The normative character of the definition offered by both analysts coincides with contemporary American definitions. For example, King defines strategy as "A science, an art, or a plan (subject to revision) governing the raising, arming and the utilization of the military forces of a nation (or coalition) to the end that its interests will be effectively promoted or secured against enemies, actual, potential or merely presumed" (King, 1960, p. 14). Another American definition follows a much more inclusive approach: "The art and science of developing and using political, economic, psychological and military forces as necessary during peace and war, to afford the maximum support for policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favourable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1964). Alternatively, Andre Beaufre succinctly described strategy as "the art of the dialectics of wills that use force to resolve their conflict" (Beaufre, 1963, p. 16). For Konstantinos Koliopoulos strategy is "the coupling of means and purposes in the light of a real or possible conflict. In other words, it consists of the triptych "means-purposes-adversary" (Koliopoulos, 2008, p. 44). For Haralampos Papasotiriou it is the concept of conflict between two or more opposing wills. It refers, that is, to the interaction of opposing sides in successive strikes aimed at bending the will of the opponent (Papasotiriou, 2000a, pp. 14-15).

1.1.2. Grand Strategy

Grand Strategy is considered to be “the highest level of national statecraft that establishes how states, or other political units, prioritize and mobilize which military, diplomatic, political, economic, and other sources of power to ensure what they perceive as their interests”. Each theoretical perspective offers a different approach into the focus of those perceived interests, which may refer to the minimal goal of ensuring survival, the pursuit of certain domestic interests or the establishment of a specific regional or global order (Hooft, 2017). According to Liddell Hart (2000), grand strategy’s role is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or an alliance, towards the political goals of the war - the goals set by national policy. This process includes the calculation of the state’s economic resources as well as its manpower in order to sustain its army (ground, naval or air forces).

Papasotiriou (2000a, p. 14-15) has underlined the tendency of traditional strategic analysis to focus on the military element of international politics, namely the conflict of rival armed forces in wars, and on the analysis of the factors that determine the course and outcome of war operations. On the level of grand strategy, analysis includes in military strategy the non-military factors that influence a war, remaining close to the traditional strategic studies.

Aspects of Grand Strategy during wartime

Athanasios Platias speaks about the levels of the Grand Strategy, saying that Grand Strategy on the horizontal level, interacts with the one of another state, while, if we perceive it vertically, its individual levels interact with each other, sort of hierarchically, if we consider Grand Strategy concept encompasses military, operational strategy, tactics as well as the entire technological development and knowledge of weapons defense systems and facilities. He also points out that a successful Grand Strategy combination should cover four dimensions: identifying the international environment, setting policy objectives based on available means, setting an effective combination of means to achieve hierarchical goals and the careful shaping of the image both inside and outside the state (Platias, 2010, pp. 83-86). At the level of the Grand Strategy, the interactions of the lower military levels produce results within a broader framework of international politics in interaction with the non-military relations of states: the formal diplomatic meetings, the propaganda, the secret missions, the perceptions formed by the actors based on the information they receive and all economic transactions (Luttwak, 2001, p. 209).

Nonetheless, the aspects of Grand Strategy differ among analysts. Beaufre (1963) names political, economic, diplomatic, and military strategy while Liddell Hart (2003) says that Grand Strategy manages the economic power, the manpower, the ethical sources of power, the fighting power and exerts economic, diplomatic, commercial and psychological pressure on the opponent, essentially introducing the psychological aspect as a separate concept. Papasotiriou (1996, p. 17-24) describes Grand Strategy in wartime as a term that includes all means used by the opposing sides to advance their military

objectives and it includes five main aspects: military strategy, the economic aspect, domestic policy, international legitimation and diplomacy.

Military Strategy

Shedding light to the term through an example of a country's approach on military strategy we will proceed to see how the US Doctrine for Joint Operations describes the term. According to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, "the Armed Forces of the United States—the military instrument of national power—in coordination with diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments advance and defend US values and interests, achieve objectives consistent with national grand strategy, and conclude operations on terms favorable to the US" (US Joint Chiefs Of Staff, 2017). H.P.S Klair (2000) maintains that "military strategy is designed to attain, through the use of military assets, military and security objectives. It is predicated on physical violence or the threat of violence, whereas national strategy is not concerned with the efficient application of force but with the exploitation of potential force". Simply put, military strategy provides the means to fulfill policy. Also, he underlines that clarified policy will provide a clear set of military objectives, facilitating an efficient strategy.

In brief, the above definitions institute that military strategy aims at using or threatening the use of organized force on land, sea, and air to advance the political objectives of war. Organized use of force has three main operational purposes through which the adversary seeks to accept the political purpose of war, to destroy its armed forces, to defend its territory, and to destroy enemy's will, meaning to make the enemy government and its allies ask for peace and/or the population to submit. For Clausewitz,

the most important part of this triptych is the first as, often, it is a basic condition of the second and third goal (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 177).

At this point, it is appropriate to mention that armed violence is not an end in itself but a necessity that exists to achieve the political objective of bending the will of one side to accept the goals of the other in the conflict. Of course, the political objectives of the wars are constantly changing and are influenced by the course of the war. But the direction of military operations remains the same - for the adversary to accept a political outcome (Papasotiriou , 2000a, pp.17-18). This interaction between the results achieved in the battlefield and the political goals set, underlines the differentiation between strategy and tactics. Tactics concern the use of the armed forces during battle while strategy the exploitation of battles to achieve the objectives of the war. The former is required to contribute in achieving the aforementioned objectives in battle while the latter has to adjust to the needs and capabilities of the former, otherwise the entire effort might fail (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 177).

As mentioned by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (2017), there are no fixed limits or boundaries between the levels of strategy, but they help commanders visualize a logical arrangement of operations, allocate resources, and assign tasks to appropriate commands. Employment of units and resources depends on the nature of the task, mission, or objective. For example, intelligence and communications satellites, which in the past were considered mainly strategic assets, have proven to be significant resources for tactical operations.

The economic aspect

This aspect refers to the ability of the state to materially support the conduct of military operations. The economy of war includes the financing of the army, the purchase or manufacture of equipment, and the general oversight of the armed forces - such as housing and food. At the same time, it undermines the ability of the opposing side to provide financial support to the armed forces. After all, as mentioned earlier, destroying the enemy's economy is one of the main objectives of military strategy (Παπασωτηρίου, 2000a, p. 20). A typical example of the economic dimension of Grand Strategy in play is the Marshall Plan, where – in 1947 – the US expressed its commitment to fund economic recovery in Europe in order to stabilize the continent and to prevent the rise of pro-Soviet communist parties, which brought West European democracies closer to the American democratic and liberal values while reducing the economic strength of the opponent thus, preserving a balance of power in the Cold war era (Miller B. , 2020, p. 76). It should be noted that the economic aspect plays a significant role also in foreign policy as the above dependence between states is as great as the asymmetric economic dependence between them (Papastiriu, 2000b, p. 21)

Domestic Policy

The domestic policy aspect represents the process of an "internal" counterbalance approach during which the state upgrades its defense capabilities by intensifying the exploitation of domestic power factors. This process serves the purpose of organizing its offensive or defensive policy (Kouskouvelis, 2004, p. 213). Another dimension of domestic policy lies in internal legitimation, meaning the public justification of policy.

Legitimation is integral in the definition of national interest and threat identification but also, to the formulation policy options available and the mobilization of the people. For example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt – a skilled orator and masterful politician – attempted through an extensive public relations campaign to mobilize the Americans against the Nazi threat. It has been argued that he was not successful as early as he would have preferred but when the US entered the war, it was Roosevelt's portrait of the enemy as the Nazi regime, that held sway (Goddard & Krebs, 2015, pp. 21-30). As described by Platias (2010, p.113), internal legitimation is a sine qua non for the success of grand strategy.

International legitimation

International legitimation stands at a different point of Grand Strategy from diplomacy as the former may be achieved by deploying an ideological campaign to justify a state's actions in order to gain international acceptance. In short, it concerns the extent to which the undertaken goals and actions are in line with the prevailing international values and the spirit of the time. An internationally legitimized Grand Strategy can positively influence the attitude of third states towards the actions of a state, even excluding potential enemies (Papasotiriou, 2000b, p. 21).

Diplomacy

Diplomacy refers to the commitments made by states in their relations and has two forms: the short-term and the long-term. The first includes support for the current political scene, while the second includes long-term action, such as formulating agreements or alliances. In essence, diplomacy is based on the process of achieving the state interest beyond the values that govern the international system (Papasotiriou, 2000b, p. 25). In war, diplomacy revolves around the belligerents' attempt to secure the support of third states - directly or indirectly - in the hope of achieving external counterbalancing of the adversary through a coalition or by assuring they maintain a discriminatory attitude against him. At the same time, diplomacy is responsible for setting the coalition's political objectives in the war and the means that will be deployed by each state. In addition, diplomacy will be in charge of securing a favorable treaty for the winner after the end of the conflict, achieving the bending of the will of the opponent and the acceptance of the political goals of the winner (Papasotiriou, 2000a, p. 21).

CHAPTER 2:

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

2.1 The international system

2.1.1. The situation of states

The existence of power relations between states in the international system leads to the distinction between strong and weak states. In this regard, the position of the states and their relations with each other are determined on the basis of these power relations, confirming the phrase of Thucydides: “The law has equal value when there is equal power to impose it, and when this does not happen, the strong do what their strength allows them to, and the weak accept what their weakness imposes on them” (Thoukididis, 1989, p. 89). In the transitional stage, where the current international system operates today, power is of increasing importance, whether it is military or economic. Weak states do not set the agenda as they lack power and formulate their strategy in a way that ensures their survival. At the same time, the absence of government in international politics pushes states to strive for more power at the expense of others (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 341). In this direction, one would say that strategy revolves around the ways a state uses its power against another state. However, Papasotiriou (2000a) added two more elements to international politics, in addition to the conflicting element. As the first he described the element of cooperation, which includes the networks of collaborations for

the benefit of all participants. These partnerships, implemented through agreements or institutions, promote - in essence - international order. Cooperation is important as maintenance of the balance of power does not require parity or equality because alliance agreements can correct these disparities in power among states (Bull, 2012, p. 117). The second element mentioned is dedicated to the value systems with universal claims, that is, to universal moral rules that rise above the particularities of each state. In its mild form, this element resembles a cooperation based on common values and the voluntary cooperation of the dominant forces, while in its extreme form, it creates a kind of revolutionization of international politics resulting in intense conflicts and a threat to the existence of the dominant powers (Papasotiriou, 2000a, p. 14).

2.1.2. Great Powers

As described by Mearsheimer (2001), states operate under a self-help system and act according to their own self-interest in order to survive. Under these circumstances, it is rapidly understood that the optimal way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system, reducing the possibility of another state threatening their existence. Specifically, the ideal situation is to be the hegemon of the system. Great powers are in a constant state of competition with each other for comparative advantage, functioning under a zero-sum mentality when dealing with each other. Maximizing relative power is the ultimate goal and it is an ongoing process.

However, dominating the entire system as a status quo power is an impossible task which is why the concept is often applied on a regional level, creating the term

“regional hegemon”. Through their dominance over the Western hemisphere, the United States offer an ideal example of a regional hegemon as no other state in the area has the power to challenge them (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 40-41).

Regional hegemons not only strive to dominate their own area but, also, wish to prevent other great powers from achieving hegemony in other parts of the world. In cases where the local Great Powers are not able to contain the threat, the “distant hegemon” moves in and balances against it. In essence, regional hegemons operate as “offshore balancers” across the globe – however – they prefer to be “balancers of last resort” (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 125-126). In this situation, the dominant power’s offshore allies play a significant role in aiding in the control of rising challengers by offering bases to the former and enabling it to project its power and maintain the balance abroad. Allies can also adopt measures that undermine the core objectives of other regional powers that are on the rise. For example, Taiwan – by declaring independence from China – can force the US to enter into a confrontation with China by imperiling the stability of the region (Christensen, 2001, pp. 5-40).

Regional hegemons share another characteristic that has been described by Stephen D. Krasner: the ability to promote, intervene and operate under an ideology. While realism represents a theory of limitations, where states are continuously subjected to the pressures of the system, the ones that enjoy a hegemonic position in the balance of power are able to follow an ideological policy. An avid example of this case is, again, the US, after 1945. This ability perishes when the hegemon’s power is in decline and thus, he is obligated to adopt a more realistic approach (Papasotiriou, 2018, p. 174).

2.2 American Grand Strategy

Like any other state, but mostly as a regional hegemon, the United States are in need of a constantly evolving grand strategy. Maintaining the role of an offshore balancer needs a complex approach to the objectives of the state but also to the constraints imposed by the international system to avoid mistakes that could harm the country's perceived role in the world.

2.2.1. US National Interests

As mentioned earlier, defining the political objectives or vital national interests of a state plays an important role in shaping its grand strategy. In this era, the national interests of the US have been identified by Robert Art as the following: First, security and the prevention of any attack on American soil. Second, maintaining the peace in the Eurasian region and balancing the security competitions that threaten it. Third, ensuring access and circulation of energy resources, such as oil. Four, the preservation of an open international economic order. Five, the preservation and spread of democracy with respect for human rights and six, the protection of the planet from the catastrophic effects of climate change (Art, 2003, p. 7). The above national interests are a product of an era characterized by important consistencies but also, radical discontinuities. US presidents of the post-Cold War era have tried to formulate a grand strategy at a time where – after decades of tension – the US lacks a clearly defined primary adversary (Martel, 2015, p. 301).

2.2.2. Security and counter-hegemonism

Mearsheimer (2001, p.40-42) mentions that having attained the role of a regional hegemon, the United States attempt to maintain their position by acting as an offshore balancer in Europe and East Asia. At a first stage, the US let other great powers in the area to handle the other rising hegemon but, if the regional powers are not successful, the US resorts to a “counter-hegemonic” approach, intervening militarily to maintain the balance. However, US military presence supersedes counterhegemonic purposes as American military power remains positioned around Europe and East Asia even after the balance of power has been restored. One bedrock explanation is that the US maintains its military presence in order to offer reassurance to its Eurasian allies and preventing them from “sinking” into multipolar power politics and “going their own way”, jeopardizing American economic interests. Thus, America’s interest in safeguarding regional peace is linked crucially to the country’s market (Layne, 2007, pp. 27-28). In short, American alliances and security commitments “underpin the political stability on which the prosperity of civilized nations is built” (Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 2001, p. 15).

2.2.3. Political and economic expansion

After the Second World War, the United States held enough power to allow their international aspirations to expand. In this spirit, the US wished to expand its political and territorial control, creating an ecosystem that would serve its political, economic and ideological interests (Gilpin, 1981, p. 24). It has been noted that the goal the US grand

strategy has been to create an international order comprised by states that “are open and subscribe” to the American liberal values but also, are open to US economic penetration (Smith T. , 1994, p. 327). In other words, US grand strategy is – in part – based on the assumption that political and economic liberalism are not able to survive domestically if they do not survive abroad. This missionary - almost - US goal has been echoed by Hans Morgenthau in his description of the US mission abroad, stating that the goal of American policy is not just to achieve conditions of freedom and equality among Americans but also the adoption of the model from all of humanity (Morgenthau, 1960, p. 99). The concept of a destiny - the role of the US as a beacon of freedom and their destiny to lead the world, as well, as the divine invocation to do so - have starred in the speeches of numerous American presidents, creating a narrative that provides a strong internal legitimacy. For Americans, their activity stems from a structurally guaranteed international power and a responsibility to fulfill the role assigned to them by a higher power (Mountjoy, 2009, p. 11). Based on the above, building the international system on US-set priorities turns the spread of democracy into the spearhead of American grand strategy.

2.2.4. Energy Security

As far as energy is concerned, oil is considered the most incremental energy source globally, with its demand growing over time. The United States have been and remain one of the most important players in global energy with an enormous appetite for oil that accounts for 20,3% of the world share (worldometers.info, 2021). At the same

time, the country's and behavior is felt worldwide, from the conflicts in the Persian Gulf to everyday oil purchases.

Oil security has various definitions, however, it can be satisfyingly described through three aspects. First, the achievement of reasonable oil prices, which depend on various economic, political and security factors. Second, making sure that supplies are not easily disrupted severely from global events or deliberate political manipulations in power games and third, minimizing the negative effects of oil use, such as pollution, terrorism and war within or among nations (Yetiv, 2015, pp. 2-4).

During the past decade, the United States went through what has been named “the American boom”, where oil and natural gas production rose to unprecedented levels thanks to new discoveries of “tight oil” and shale gas with the use of enhances technologies named hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling (U.S. Energy Administration Information, 2014). This development has raised hopes within the US leadership that the country will be able to achieve energy independence in the following years. In fact, the boom has contributed significantly to the decrease of foreign oil imports but, so far, it does not guarantee long-term freedom from price spikes and shocks for consumers. Various political, security and economic factors in the world can still prevent a stable energy secure American future from emerging.

Concurrently, in the years following 9/11, and having positioned US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US mindset – both in the public mind and in the government – developed a strong connection between oil and US national security (Sissine, 2007). Indicatively, the need to maintain secure access and supply of oil was also reflected in the US National Security Strategy in February 2015, which, in particular, set as key goal, in

the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East, the safeguard of the free and unimpeded movement of energy (The White House, 2015). Nonetheless, the importance of energy sources for the United States should not be confused with analyses stating that the wars in the Middle East, and in particular Iraq and Afghanistan, were waged solely for the purpose of controlling oil reserves, ignoring national interests, economic factors and the interdependence of states (Kouskouvelis, 2004, p. 381).

2.2.5. Climate crisis

Although the United States had been ignoring the issue of climate change for decades, in recent years, and especially during President Obama's tenure, the country has taken an active role in the issue. In 2014, the US Environmental Protection Agency released the Clean Power plan, which aimed to reduce carbon emissions by 30% in electricity generation (Climate Change and President Obama's Action Plan, 2014). At the same time, the United States sought to lead the international community in initiatives to tackle climate change while encouraging and pressuring other countries to tackle their emissions – such as China, Russia –, culminating in the Paris Agreement (United Nations, n.d.). As described by Hulme (2019), this sort of developments “signify [...] a growing alignment of global resources tending toward an ultimate end—a grand strategic objective—of the global low-carbon transition.”.

CHAPTER 3:

THE GEOSTRATEGIC VALUE OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The Eastern Mediterranean is an area where with an important imprint in the history of many different cultures from antiquity to the present day. As a geographical bridge between three continents, it has always been a point of meeting, communication and conflict of peoples, ideas and interests (Filis, 2012, p. 8).

3.1 Regional actors and systems

In order to analyze the geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean on a level that reflects the issues faced regionally, one should dedicate some time into analyzing the Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) that meet in the area, namely: the Middle East, the Balkans and the European Union. Each of these complexes is governed by its own dynamics and its own security issues.

The Middle East, meaning the area from Morocco to Afghanistan, may be divided into three subcomplexes: the Persian Gulf - Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Yemen- , the Levant which includes the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean basin - Egypt, Lebanon, Syria , Israel, Jordan - and that of the Maghreb - Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco. In this area, Turkey has gained the role of the “insulator”, interacting with forces of other security systems without the ability to unify them (Buzan, 2003, pp. 41-44). For the purposes of the present paper, the area of interest is the Levant. The Balkans consist of the countries positioned in the Balkan peninsula and

the European Union, of its member-states. The last two sub-complexes tend to unite as many states have EU membership - Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia – while the rest are in the process of admission (Buzan, 2003, pp. 188-189).

3.2 Regional dynamics in the past decade

During the past decade, the Eastern Mediterranean security environment has been affected by a series of interconnected dynamics, such as energy discoveries, geopolitical frictions, new security imperatives and increased interest from external powers.

First, the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean has had a continuing effect on security and geopolitics in the region as the surrounding states adjust their calculations and approach (Adamides & Christou, 2015, pp. 189-206). As natural gas gains prominence in the region, these energy finding are expected to continue creating insecurities and affecting inter-state relations. Second, given the previous developments, energy has now become an addition to existing rivalries between traditional geopolitical rivals in the Eastern Mediterranean region – such as Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Israel and Egypt. Indicatively, relations between Israel and Turkey – which had been stable from 1996 to 2009 – worsened significantly after 2010. Similar disruptions have occurred also in the Egypt-Turkey relations after the 2013 coup in Egypt. Not to mention the chronical conflicts between Turkey, Cyprus and Greece. Third, the rising importance of the Eastern Mediterranean has not been overlooked by external players – such as Russia and the US and others (Tziarras, 2019, pp. 6-7). Stemming from

the energy discoveries, the European Union has expressed its interest in the Eastern Mediterranean region (EC, 2014). China's interest and presence in the region has also been felt through the Belt and Road Initiative (Lin, 2015, pp. 63-78). The "race" among the aforementioned powers has resulted in a series of geopolitical bargainings that have affected their national foreign policies in the region and the systems of energy, security and commercial cooperation (Tziarras, 2019, p. 7). Lastly, the Arab Uprisings and the devastation inflicted by the rise of the Islamic State have caused significant economic, social, security and humanitarian issues in many Arab states, such as Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Libya and Syria. Many of the people affected by the conflict have fled their countries and become refugees. The refugee crisis has been, and still is, a major concern for Europe and the EU with Southern European countries – like Greece and Italy – becoming recipients of large refugee numbers. At the same time, the Middle East has been associating with a rapid rise of Islamist terrorist attacks that have occurred in Europe and North America, among other locations (Bali, 2013, pp. 526-527.). Under these circumstances, these issues have become intertwined with national security and central to the efforts for cooperation among countries. For example, in the Eastern Mediterranean, trilateral partnerships, such as the one formed by Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Israel, also serve security concerns, given the proximity of these states to the source of instability – the Middle East.

3.3 US incentives in the Eastern Mediterranean

Nicolas Spykman (2004, p. 107) has described the Eastern Mediterranean as a part of the Rimland - the strip of coastal land that encircles Eurasia - through which one can master the Heartland, meaning the central Asian zone, and through the Heartland, the entire world. Zbigniew Brzezinski (1998, pp. 215-216) has classified the Eastern Mediterranean as the western end of the region called the "Eurasian Balkans" which includes the states of Central Asia - as the core - and the Middle East - as the zone of instability. For the US, Brzezinski (1998, p. 256) states that its interest lies in: “ensuring that no force will be able to control this geopolitical space and that the world community will have unhindered financial and economic access to this area. Geopolitical pluralism will become a permanent reality only when a network of pipelines and transport routes directly connects the region with the main centers of world economic activity via the Mediterranean and the Arabian Sea, as well as by land.”.

Given the above, American foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region is focused on a set of clear-set goals: controlling sea and air lanes, enhancing regional stability, having a leading position in the exploitation and trade of oil and other mineral resources, and ensuring economic penetration and profitable trade (Stampoulis, 2015, p. 4).

CHAPTER 4:
BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:
GRAND STRATEGY FROM BUSH SR TO BUSH JR

In the twilight of the 20th century, the United States had managed to establish themselves as a military, political and economic superpower and the “leader of the free world”. However, as the post-Cold war era unfolded, the country’s grand strategy began to face daunting challenges as it was no longer aimed at containing the USSR but expected to address a myriad of new challenges.

4.1. After the Cold War and before 9/11

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, American grand strategy sought to guarantee US security by maintaining its leading role in the West hemisphere. The ultimate goal was to lead a world order based on American power – political, economic and military – as well as American values. In addition, the Americans wished to extend their control over the international system by preventing the rise of other great powers (Layne, 1997, p. 88). As mentioned by Sloan (2003, p. 305), the above explains why, after the end of the Cold War, the US remained active in NATO and its alliance with Japan. It has been argued that US policy in the first years after the Cold War was lacking direction and, at certain times, was incoherent. Others, however, have underlined that George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton managed to preserve the US’s pre-eminent role in the international order during those years.

In brief, during the first decade after the Cold War, the US gradually implemented a series of convergence strategies such as: convergence to market economies and participation in international economic institutions, humanitarian interventions aimed at stabilizing conflict-prone countries, regime change (democratization) of selected states peacefully or through the use of force and, identification of shared transnational threats with other great powers – such as, nuclear proliferation, terrorism. (Wright, 2017, pp. 6-7).

4.1.1. The Bush Senior years

In general, the Bush presidency has been hailed by many as having deftly handled the rapid changes in the international system from 1989 to 1991. Among scholars who share this view is Hendrix Kissinger, who said that the President Bush Sr. handled American rule with moderation and prudence (Kissinger, 2014, p. 149).

At the heart of the Bush strategy was the strengthening and achievement of collective security resulting from multinational cooperation. At the same time, priority was given to building new alliances that would form a coalition of democracies that would exert pressure - political, economic, and diplomatic - on authoritarian regimes to meet the challenges and resort to military intervention only as a last resort (The White House, 1991). The idea behind this approach was that economic interdependence and shared liberal values among states would minimize the risk of conflicts and, consequently, would mean that these liberalized states would not pose a threat to the US.

Nevertheless, the “new world order” that the Bush administration represented during the Gulf crisis (1990-1991) focused on sovereignty, non-interference in other

states' domestic affairs and sanctity of borders. The aforementioned concept can be located, also, in the administration's reluctance to intervene in the civil conflict in Yugoslavia as well as, in its unwillingness to impose decisive sanctions on China after the former's violent suppression of the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen. At that time, the US behaved in a reserved and effective way in managing the transformation of the international system (Zelikow & Rice, 1995). This approach changed towards the last years of Bush's term, he began to endorse the idea of humanitarian intervention – as it later manifested in the US intervention in Somalia, for example – but, he made sure to underline that the US “should not seek to be the world's policeman... it must not go running off on reckless, expensive crusades” (Brands, 2016, p. 332).

4.1.2. The Clinton years

In contrast with the Bush administration, Bill Clinton focused mainly on domestic affairs and the economy, leaving foreign affairs in the background. Putting domestic affairs at the front was based on the idea that the post-Cold War global situation would release beneficial resources for the US economy (Brown S. , 1994, p. 552). However, as mentioned by James Boys, one of the Clinton administration's main challenges was “in defining exactly where US interests lay in the absence of a single, formidable foe and his efforts to reconfigure the economy or the armed forces remained impeded by an inability to do so” (Boys, 2015, p. 54). During that time, the Clinton administration adopted the doctrine of “enlargement”, which was described by the president's national security advisor, W. Anthony Lake as following: “the successor to a doctrine of containment must

be a strategy of enlargement—enlargement of the world’s community of market democracies” (Brown S. , 1994, pp. 569-571). Concerning the implementation of this strategy, Lake emphasized the need to “strengthen the community of major market democracies...which constitutes the core from which enlargement is proceeding”, “help foster and consolidate new democracies and market economies, where possible in states of special significance and opportunity”, “counter the aggression—and support the liberalization— of states hostile to democracy and markets” and to pursue our humanitarian agenda not only by providing aid, but also by working to help democracy and market economics take root in regions of greatest humanitarian concern” (Lake, 1993). In short, the dominant trend was to guarantee US hegemonic position in international power sharing (The White House, 1996).

The president continued to emphasize opening access to trade and preventing human rights violations regarding various areas – from Bosnia to Haiti, China, and Kosovo. His administration’s main tools were political and economic incentives that would encourage democratic reforms. Although, when those seemed to fail, the US would hesitantly consider the use of force. Even so, Clinton avoided committing U.S. troops on foreign territory (Suri, 2009, p. 624).

4.2 George W. Bush and the Post 9/11 Reality

George W. Bush's administration witnessed the deadliest attack on American soil in US history. At first, the 43rd president of the United States began his term focusing on domestic issues, giving every indication that, like his father, he was a conventional 'realist' in foreign affairs, who was firmly committed to a grand strategy of selective engagement" (Owens, 2009, p. 24). Following the events of 9/11, the administration quickly turned its focus to foreign policy and international terrorism. From that point on, US grand strategy shifted to restraining sources of disorder (Martel, 2015, p. 315).

From a president who tried to consciously position himself as a different Republican who combined "conservatism with compassion," after the terrorist attack, George Bush Jr. was pushed to declare the US "will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them", laying the foundations of the policy he would pursue in Afghanistan and Iraq (Παπασωτηρίου, 2012, p. 403; The New York Times, 2002). Bush's post-9/11 grand strategy is comprehensively articulated in the National Security Strategy document of September 2002, where the administration clarified the structure and intentions of US policies and initiatives. In effect, the 43rd president's grand strategy sought to protect the US against extremist groups while supporting other states in their efforts to fight terrorism. The principle that gained a central role in Bush's grand strategy was the "doctrine of preemption", which drifted away from the containment years of the Cold War and dictated that "the United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security". The document's forceful language declared also that the US would be using every tool in their arsenal in this struggle – from military power to homeland

defenses, law enforcement and intelligence (The White House, 2002). In a few words, the NSS 2002 outlined a grand strategy which aimed at making the US and the world more secure. This grand strategy was based on two concepts: First, the idea that the US “was fighting a war against terrorists of global reach”, which called for stronger alliances, and second, the need to act preemptively against terrorism, in order to prevent them from harming the state and its people (Martel, 2015, p. 321). By the end of his first term, President Bush had managed to respond to the 9/11 attacks, change the NSS and move to the offensive against terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. His next term was based on the policies developed during his first one, which remained intact for a number of years.

4.3 American Grand Strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean

The region of the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East has always attracted the interest of every great power. After the end of World War II, Britain's inability to maintain its leading role in the region created a security hole that was filled by the United States (Evriviadis, 2013). The interests of the Americans in the region are summarized by Brzezinski (1998) where he states that their goal was “...to ensure that no force will be able to control this geopolitical space and that the world community will have unimpeded financial and economic access to this region”.

During President Bush's presidency and in the face of Saddam Hussein's invasion, the United States managed to take the lead in world affairs and to serve their interests in the wider region, which meant maintaining the status quo. According to President Bush

himself, the goal of the intervention was to create an independent Iraq that would work to balance Syria and Iran - that is, countries - former USSR allies to the United States (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999). As for Bill Clinton, during his presidency, the goal was to reduce tensions in Greek-Turkish issues by strengthening the rapprochement of the two sides. This process was considered vital to the region's stability and therefore to US interests there. At the same time, special attention was paid to the possibility of a democratic and secular Turkey joining the EU (The White House, 2000).

On the other hand, in the Eastern Mediterranean subsystem, the Bush Junior administration has given full support to Israel's unilateral actions - although it has not been directly involved. Having ended the war in Iraq by using "hard power" and creating a climate of discontent in the Muslim world, he could only pursue a strategy of balancing the region. This includes the Aqaba agreement, which introduced international diplomacy on the roadmap for the creation of two states, a Palestinian state and a Jewish state (UN News, 2002).

CHAPTER 5:

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY: PRESIDENT OBAMA

President Obama (2009-2016) took office at a time where the United States were implicated in two wars – one in Afghanistan (2001) and one in Iraq (2003). Concurrently, his administration had to face the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s. Regardless of the severity of various foreign policy issues – such as Iran’s nuclear program, geopolitical competition with China and Russia or the European debt crisis – the most pressing problems were considered to be domestic (recession, high unemployment, weak recovery). Given that, Obama’s main priority in grand strategy was “to rebuild the domestic foundations of American power” (Martel, 2015, p. 325).

5.1. The Obama Doctrine

Barack Obama put an emphasis on international retrenchment and accommodation, gaining the ability to focus on liberal policy legacies at home. Following a similar approach with previous presidents, Obama pursued a “hybrid” approach on grand strategy, using regime change in some cases and containment in others. The point of differentiation in his strategic combination was that, during his term, the US proceeded with gestures of international goodwill, which promoted the American example, on one hand, and on the retrenchment of US military commitments overseas, on the other (Dueck, 2015, p. 14).

The direction US grand strategy were to take under Obama was conceptualized in his inaugural address on January 20, 2009, where he stated that: “The state of our

economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act – not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth”. He proceeded to warn Americans that the state of their country’s economy is “badly weakened”. In another part of his speech he outlined the principles of American policy, underlining that “our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint”. Putting these principles to practice, he said that “we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort – even greater cooperation and understanding between nations” (bartleby.com, 2009). This approach on policy was, more or less, repeated in the Obama administration’s NSS in 2010, positioning domestic economic matters over foreign policy. Indicatively, the paper mentioned that “at the center of our efforts is a commitment to renew our economy, which serves as the wellspring of American power” (The White House, 2010).

As much as President Obama focused on domestic matters, his administration was active from the beginning implementing several foreign policy initiatives that helped define his grand strategy. However, foreign affairs were subordinate to domestic considerations and initiatives were examined on the basis of whether they furthered, maintained, or risked key elements of the US domestic agenda (Dueck, 2015, pp. 33-34). So, starting in 2009, the Obama administration launched an extensive review of policy in Afghanistan and proceeded to consider withdrawing US troops from Iraq. Also, an issue that dominated Obama’s agenda was Iran’s nuclear program. Nonetheless, his biggest accomplishment against terror came when the administration launched the raid in Pakistan, on May 2011, that managed to terminate Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda (Martel, 2015, p. 326).

On a domestic level, at the beginning of Obama's term, the American people when still concerned with the threat of terrorism but, at the same time, they had already started to show signs of "war fatigue", reducing support for US presence in Afghanistan. This sentiment continued to grow in the following years. Indicatively, in 2012, public opinion polling data showed that 53% of the people interviewed wanted immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan and, 67% favored ending the US combat role by 2013 (Rasmussen Reports, 2012a, Rasmussen Reports, 2012b). Thus, the Obama administration shifted to "retrenchment", which was based on "scaling back foreign commitments or military capabilities, or both" (Trubowitz, 2011, p. 13).

Obama's approach recognizes the leading role of the United States in the international system, but at the same time considers it necessary to build new and deeper partnerships in each region and to strengthen international institutions and standards. He stressed that US national security should be based on alliances, where members will be actively involved in setting global and regional security priorities as well as seizing new opportunities for common interests. In practice, the doctrine – while recognizing the finiteness of American capabilities due to exhaustion from the policies of previous years - aims to mobilize allies to share the burden of addressing security challenges. It is believed that through the active participation of allies, lasting results would be easier to achieve (The White House, 2010, pp. 1-11, 41).

In conclusion, it can be said that the Obama doctrine expresses the belief in a peaceful and internationally based international order, confirming the fact - however - that none of this can be achieved without the United States (Davidson, 2015). However, while moving away from the practices of pure hegemony, choosing to selectively

intervene through international institutions, with the cooperation and integration of other countries to achieve goals, President Obama was not a strictly pacifist president. In his heart, he truly believed that conflict was not at the heart of world politics and wished to promote genuine and overarching international cooperation, if possible, but, as he mentioned in his 2009 Nobel prize acceptance speech: “the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace ... war is sometimes necessary.” (The White House, 2009).

5.2. American Grand Strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Obama Administration

This sub-chapter is dedicated to the Obama administration’s implementation of the President’s grand strategy on the Eastern Mediterranean region through the analysis of selected case studies, such as the Arab Spring (Egypt and Syria) and Israel.

5.2.1. The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is an event that has managed to find US President Barack Obama and much of the international community unprepared. As a result, the rapid developments that have taken place in the region have created a need for the US administration to be - as much as possible – “on the right side of history”, without particularly deviating from its rebalancing policy. However, the raging crises that erupted in Libya and Syria put additional pressure on Barack Obama’s attempts to change US

grand strategy by burdening his government with the challenges of two major humanitarian crises (Pagliarulo, 2016).

The case of Egypt

The US approach to Egypt differed - from the outset - from that of the other countries affected by the Arab Spring. The stance of the State Department, and especially of President Obama, not only do indicate that the United States would not react to any internal change in Egypt, but, on the contrary, that the Americans would welcome such a development. In fact, since 2009 - the first year of Barack Obama's term - the President himself has been shaping the environment in the Middle East, by announcing his point of view on democracy in Cairo. Specifically, during his speech in the university of Cairo, Obama declared that he was there to usher in a new era in the relationship between us and Muslims around the world. Also, he outlined seven important points of his policy. As a first point, he mentioned "violent extremism" and referred to the war on terror, the gradual reduction of the US presence in Afghanistan, but also the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by 2012. Then, moving to the second point, he spoke about the settlement of the Palestinian issue with the creation of a Palestinian state, which will coexist with Israel and, as a third point, he raised the issue of nuclear proliferation.

The point of interest of his speech though was the fourth point, which concerned democracy, to which he added issues such as women's rights, religious freedom, and the right to economic development and freedoms, stating that no system of government can and should be imposed by one state on any other (Kouskouvelis, 2012, pp.16-17).

Following the mass demonstrations that erupted throughout the Arab World, which aimed at toppling existing governments – Egypt's included – Obama switched

from maintaining the long-standing policy of engagement and alliance with the government of Hosni Mubarak to calls for peaceful regime change, which were then followed by attempts of US engagement and accommodation towards the Muslim Brotherhood, that assumed power until 2013. These policies are a product of the Obama administration's desire not to stray away from retrenchment and non-intervention (Dueck, 2015, pp. 75-76). Thus, after massive pressure from different directions, on February 11, 2011, Mubarak resigned and left Cairo and the Egyptian army assumed power via an interim government, paving the way for elections. In November, the Muslim Brotherhood, a previously outlawed organization, managed to gather a plurality of seats and votes in the national parliamentary elections and, in June 2012, Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood member, won the presidential elections (France24, 2012). President Obama was not disturbed by this development as he was willing to take a chance on the Muslim Brotherhood, believing they had moderated their stance over the years and that the procedures of governance would pivot them in the right direction. As mentioned by Nasr (2014, pp. 169-170), "American envoys met with Brotherhood members, and the White House even hosted a delegation from the group in April 2012 to discuss economic and political issues and future US-Egyptian ties". In fact, this approach involved significant risks as numerous members of the Muslim Brotherhood had, in the past, frequently expressed their support for attacks on US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, spoken about the US as an "illegitimate" oppressor that deserved hostilities and championed rampant anti-Semitism (Kirkpatrick, 2013). The fact that this kind of statements and sentiment were quite common among the members of the Muslim Brotherhood leads to the realization that they should be taken seriously as they indicate

core beliefs (Kissinger, 2012). So, having seized power within Egypt for the first time in their history, the Muslim Brotherhood began taking the country in an Islamist direction by building relations with Iran, distancing itself from the US and offering military support to Hamas (Atwan, 2013, pp. 222-225). At the same time, the Brotherhood reassured the US that they would not disrupt the peace with Israel, as American aid to Cairo was considered essential. On a domestic level, Morsi and his government appeared to be incapable of handling a modern economy and imposed a series of authoritarian and Islamist measures on the people, resulting – in the summer of 2013 – in a number of vast protests. Consequently, the Egyptian army stepped in and deposed – again – an unpopular government. At this point, Obama did not know how to react given the apparent legal issues, on one hand, and regional American interests, on the other. Thus, his movements were hesitant. He suspended some military assistance to Cairo – without entirely stopping it or describing the overthrow as a “military coup”. However, the Egyptian army and Egyptian liberals perceived Obama as a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood (Dueck, 2015, p. 81).

In effect, the Obama administration found itself being unpopular among the liberals, the army and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a result of the little forethought given to what might come next in Egypt after Mubarak and the assumption that liberal democratic forces would somehow prevail in the hostile Muslim Brotherhood’s mindset turning it into a viable partner for the US. Three years since the army’s overthrow of power and with the victory of presidential victory of general Abdel Fatah al-Sisi in 2014, the United States had returned to their Mubarak-era approach in Egypt (Bouchet, 2016).

The case of Syria

The Arab Spring “hit” Syria early in 2011 in the form of peaceful protests against Bashar al-Assad’s government, which were violently repressed by the regime. These developments led to more forceful protests that soon turned into an armed rebellion by mainly Sunnis against a regime dominated by the Alawite minority turning the country into a battlefield of clearing regional accounts, against different dogmas and international competition (Ajami, 2012).

In August 2011, the atrocities of the Syrian government against civilians pushed Obama towards embracing regime change in Syria, stating that Assad should step aside. At the same time, the United States imposed economic sanctions against the Syrian regime and offered humanitarian assistance to civilians (The White House, 2011). In 2012, Obama also stated that the use of chemical weapons on civilians by Assad’s regime would constitute a “red line”, which would result in US military action (Landler, nytimes.com, 2012). The US president, though, feared that American weapons sent to Syria’s rebels could end up used by jihadi forces and that even limited military aid could lead to the expansion of the US intervention in Syria, which would create issues of domestic legitimation for his administration at a time when he was running for re-election (Alter, 2014, p. 285). Thus, even though leading advisers, for instance Secretary Clinton, CIA director David Petraeus and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, supported that course of action (Mazzetti, Worth, & Gordon, 2013). While the president’s concerns were valid, the outcome came to be, more or less, the same as the radical Islamists – such as

Jabhat al-Nusra - managed to gain prominence in Syria. American abstention did not dilute al-Qaeda's affiliates but it allowed them to grow (Jones, 2013, pp. 53-72).

In the summer of 2013, once the Syrian regime's extensive use of chemical weapons was proved, the Obama administration was cornered into enforcing the aforementioned "red line" so, the US began to prepare, though reluctantly, for limited US airstrikes against the regime. The goal, however, was to punish Assad, not to overthrow him (Blake, 2013). As Obama struggled to get Congress and the American public to support a military intervention in Syria, a Russian offer to help broker a peaceful dismantling of Assad's chemical weapons arsenal offered him a way out (Kalin & Mohammed, 2013). A few days later, Assad formally agreed to place his government's chemical weapons under international control stating that he decided to do so as a result of the Russian proposal and not US threats (France24, 2013).

The chaotic situation inside Syria created an opportunity for the Islamic State, which took control of much of Iraq and Syria and whose members were fighting rebels, al-Nusra jihadists, Assad regime forces and Kurds (Cronin, 2015). In September 2014, the United States, led by a coalition of mainly Western nations, conducted airstrikes inside Syria aimed at weakening and destroying the Islamic State, and a year later, Russia became involved - alongside its ally, Assad. - against the Islamic State, although there were voices saying that it was hitting the Syrian opposition (BBC, 2014; BBC, 2015). In any case, the initial declaration by Barack Obama that Bashar al-Assad should "step aside", was forgotten from a point on and left to the negotiations between the dictator and his Syrian opponents. Washington's main problem was that, despite its commitment to defeating the Islamic State, such an action would require ground forces, which the United

States had refused to provide. Thus, President Obama resorted to the empowerment of local partners and allies in order to take on a larger share of the burden (Mendelsohn, 2015).

American policy in Syria may be a source of confusion, however, if seen under the light of non-intervention and promotion of diplomatic negotiation, it makes sense. This fact is evident in the address given by Barack Obama to the United Nations, on September 2013, where communicated that there was not any really vital interest in the Syrian conflict, calling it “someone else’s civil war” (The White House, 2014).

5.2.2. Israel

Since the state of Israel came into existence from the whirlwind of war, it has defended its people and won in other wars. Israeli leaders realized early on the severity of the threat Israel was under and so, gradually created a unique operational strategy which, however, was never formally binding but has served the state for years. Even though, in recent years, new challenges have risen for the Israeli state, its four basic national security concepts have remained the same: deterrence, intelligence superiority, defense, and victory. At the same time, the state’s security strategy always operates under the assumption that state’s deterrence and peace treaties might collapse. In brief, Israel implements the Latin adage “Si vis pacem, para bellum” (If you want peace, prepare for war) (Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019, pp. 47-48).

The Israeli side has classified the threats against it as follows: first, domestically, the Israeli conflict with Palestine, second, the threats from neighboring states, such as

Syria and Jordan, and third and last, the wider area that includes Iraq and Iran. Each level presents different issues, dynamics, and pressures for Israel's security and all together are mutually reinforcing (Menashri, 2006, p. 109).

The “special” relationship with the US

In many geopolitical analyzes, Israel is described as a friendly country of particular importance to the advancement of American interests in the Middle East, an area that hosts most of the world's oil reserves (Kiouisi, 2014). This fact is confirmed by the US National Strategy for 2015 which states that the superpower is committed to the security and prosperity of Israel as well as to upgrade its role in ensuring stability in the wider region (The White House, 2015).

Common strategic interests play a vital role in the “special” relationship between the United States and Israel and explain the “interest-based” connection between these two states, on which other aspects of the relationship were built (Saltzman, 2017, p. 52). During George W. Bush’s term, the United States’ Middle East policy, which was marked by unilateralism and military interventionism, generally matched with Israel’s interests (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003). However, President Obama viewed his predecessor’s foreign policy differently. As mentioned before, his goal was to reinvigorate his country’s leadership position in the world through multilateralism and also, to end US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, issuing a series of policy objectives that eventually clashed with Israel’s and, at some point, created turbulences between the two countries.

US-Israel relations during Obama's term

Considering the tense nature of relations between Israel and Arab states, Obama believed that the US needed to distance themselves from Jerusalem as “promoting an agenda of championing the Palestinian cause and achieving a nuclear accord with Iran...would have put him at odds with any Israeli leader” (Oren, 2015).

Accordingly, his administration's first main objective abroad was to push for a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. Even before becoming US president, Obama thought that if the US can solve the Israeli-Palestinian process, it will be “easier for Arab states and the Gulf states” to support the US when it comes to Iraq and Afghanistan (nbcnews.com, 2008). Hence, as first, US policies aimed at presenting an “even-handed” approach and pressuring for Israeli concessions, specifically enticing Palestinians to return to the negotiating table by stopping Israel from constructing settlements in the West Bank and the Eastern part of Jerusalem (Saltzman, 2017, p. 53). Also, the Obama administration repudiated important understandings that were in place since the Bush administration (Landler & Kershner, 2009). These actions caused dismay in Israel which was made worse by Obama's engagement with many Arab states during his first year in office and specifically, his approach of outreach to countries hostile to Israel, such as Iran (Lieberthal, Indyk, & O'Hanlon, 2013). Furthermore, during the Arab Spring, Netanyahu did not view Obama's stance in Egypt positively as he believed that the US turned against an ally, Hosni Mubarak, who had kept the peace between Egypt and Israel for several years (Freedman, 2017, p. 254).

Barack Obama's second term made a promising start on his administration's relations with Israel as the newly re-elected President visited Israel in March 2013.

However, due to a variety of reasons, relations between the countries deteriorated over the following years. First of all, the US severely criticized Israel's policy of enlarging settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Second, John Kerry's, the Secretary of State, peace efforts were rejected by Israel from July 2013 to April 2014, fueling critical comments by Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, which hurt bilateral relations. Third, Israel did not join the US in condemning the annexation of Crimea and also, offered its agricultural products as replacements to the embargoed ones by the EU. Fourth, the Israeli government disagreed with the US-supported formation of the Palastinian Authority-Hamas unity government (Freedman, 2017, p. 267). Fifth, another point of contention between the Israeli government and the US was also found the latter's approach to Iran's nuclear program. Israel's view was that Iran's nuclear ambitions posed a serious threat to its security, especially following the rapprochement between Iran and the United States in July 2015 and the agreement to increase international oversight of its nuclear program in exchange for the phasing out of sanctions against the Tehran regime (Pagliarulo, 2016).

Following the March 2015 elections, relations between the US administration and Israel met more challenges. Settlement expansion continued to be a cause of tensions between the countries until the end of Obama's term, although, the governments managed to sign a new 10-year military aid agreement that gave more funds to Israel than the previous one (\$3.8 billion/year). Nonetheless, the Israeli government was not to ask for a higher amount in the future (Freedman, 2017, p. 268).

In conclusion, it can be said that US-Israeli relations were not very good during the Obama administration, however, the alliance between them, which was forged decades ago, remains strong, unshakable and continues to strengthen.

CHAPTER 6:

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY: PRESIDENT TRUMP

Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States (2016-2020), rose into power through litigating past administrations and promoting an isolationist approach on US foreign policy under the banner “America First”. The impulsive behavior and contradictory policies that marked his presidency have made it difficult for analysts to determine whether Trump even has an actual “doctrine” guiding grand strategy. However, his presidency is freighted with grand strategic significance. This chapter includes a brief analysis of President Trump’s grand strategy in general and then, in the Eastern Mediterranean, focusing on the selected case studies (Egypt, Syria, Israel).

6.1. The “America First” Strategy

The Trump presidency began at a crucial point in American history. For seven decades before he was elected, the United States had pursued an ambitious project to “build the world in their image” based on their post-USSR primacy. Yet, in 2016, the world had started becoming a field of rising, new challenges for the superpower, which tested its economic and military predominance. The return of great power politics, the rise of authoritarianism challenging democratic values, the unfolding of explosive tensions in the Middle East and the rise of China together with mounting domestic weariness of American implication in world affairs created a unique blend of circumstances that led to the rise of a President that promised a grand strategy revolution (Schake, 2016, pp. 33-52). Under the consideration that his approach will increase American wealth, power and independence, Trump took aim at the multigenerational

project of creating a better world and attacked core values and ideas that rendered Washington a global leader (Brands, 2018, p. 212).

In his time in office, Trump implemented his strategic vision through a variety of policies, such as imposing tariffs on steel and aluminium imports from close US partners (Canada, Japan, the EU and Mexico) on the basis of national security concerns, imposing a ban on immigration from many Muslim countries, withdrawing from major international agreements signed by his predecessor among which the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement (TTP), the Paris climate change accord and the Iran nuclear deal (Kagan, 2018). However, key policy ideas expressed by Trump, namely the need for more “burden sharing” in NATO, were based on realist ideas for offshore balancing and restraint that were voiced under the Obama administration (Byman, 2017). In September 2016, Trump echoed Obama when he stated that: “At some point, we cannot be the policeman of the world”. During his presidential candidacy, Trump referred to the NATO alliance as “obsolete” and insinuated that US troops should be withdrawn from Japan and South Korea, so that these countries manage their defense independently (The New York Times, 2016). As President, Trump reprimanded the Europeans publicly for “alliance freeriding” by failing to reach the NATO defense spending target - 2% of GDP. (Stephen M. Walt, 2017).

President Obama did wish to change the American grand strategy paradigm, although, he attempted to do so within the framework of American exceptionalism and liberal hegemony reflected in the views of the US political elites, national security experts and mainstream media. In opposition, Trump set his own discourse outside these social groups resulting in a more radical shift. His approach on foreign and security

policy, migrants and the economy reflected the opinions and concerns of his nativist base of ethnonationalist voters, where issues like illegal immigration and the negative economic impact of globalization were of great importance, and not Russia's interference in US elections (Kagan, 2018).

In the narrow transactional view of the world represented by "America First", the World Trade Organization poses limits to a state's economic freedom of action, economic nationalism or mercantilism and bilateral agreements are preferable to multilateral free trade agreements, interdependence and globalization. The United States are considered to be able to pressure other states for important concessions, thanks to their economic and military power (Miller B. , 2020, p. 230). Moving beyond realism's key commitment to protect the national security of the state, Trumpish represents a strong sense of an "ethnonational /racial /religious identity" based on a strong commitment to white Christians, with foreign policy implications (Miller B. , 2020, pp. 233-234).

Nevertheless, while distancing himself from US heritage of being the global champion for democracy, President Trump did criticize human rights abuses by opposing countries such as Iran, Syria, North Korea and Venezuela – although, no further concern with these issues was expressed (Brands, *The Unexceptional Superpower: American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*, 2017, pp. 20-21).

Another aspect of US influence that took a significant hit during Trump's presidency was America's soft power. In the past, the US have gained immense advantages through the esteem foreign countries have for their culture, politics and society, their use of non-coercive tools for geopolitical objectives and the fact that they stood for something more than self-interest when implicated in global affairs (Nye,

2005). During Trump's term, bureaucratic institutions through which the US exerted non-military influence were undermined. His first budget submission significantly elevated hard power with a proposed 3% increase of military spending and 30% cuts for the State Department and US Agency for International Development (Hellman, 2017). At the same time, his never-ceasing appeals to nativism and bigotry, his contempt for democratic norms, the appearance of official corruption diminished America's global esteem (Gibney, 2017). Even on a domestic level, Americans were not convinced that the US was "gaining ground" in the international arena, as 48% of the people that participated in a Washington Post-ABC News poll, six months into Trump's tenure, thought that US leadership in the world had become weaker since he took office and only 27% answered that it was stronger (Clement & Balz, 2017).

6.2. American Grand Strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Trump administration

Having outlined the basic elements of President Trump's approach on foreign policy, this sub-chapter proceeds to analyze his grand strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean and specifically in Egypt, Syria and Israel.

6.2.1. Arab Spring: The aftermath

Inheriting no commitments in the Middle East from the Obama administration, President Trump limited even further American efforts against authoritarian regimes and finally, let their leaders reassert power.

The case of Egypt

In 2014, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, Egypt's ex-army chief, was officially sworn in as Egypt's fifth head of state since 2011, nearly a year after ousting his predecessor Mohamed Morsi. His presidential win by 96% of the vote in a presidential ballot was accommodated by a crackdown on dissent, and a series of last-minute state-led attempts to increase turnout (Kingsley, 2014). From the beginning, the Egyptian government believed that it was in their interests to strengthen the strategic relationship with Russia – which had been an important ally against the Muslim Brotherhood. Also, the end of Obama's term meant that a major opponent and obstacle had been removed from their way and possibly, the new president, Donald Trump, would bring about a new strategic US-Egypt relationship that would upgrade their country's role in the regional balance of power (Dergham, 2016).

During its first year, the Trump administration opted to wait for the events in Egypt and Syria to unfold. The president was willing to take a more assertive stance in the Middle East, however, issues concerning countries - such as Egypt – were not considered to be directly connected to vital US interests in the region – the destruction of ISIS and the containment of Iran (Krieg, 2017, pp. 5-10). In addition, Trump did not hide his support for the Egyptian leader al-Sisi, even though, a significant number of international and Egyptian human rights organizations had issued reports expressing concerns about the track record of the latter's government. The same sentiment was shared by Republican and Democrat politicians. The administration, in general, expressed little concern regarding how Cairo operated domestically or regionally (Hellyer, 2017).

An indicative event of this approach was al-Sisi's visit to the White House, where Trump sought to "reboot" the countries' bilateral relationship at the talks after the Obama administration froze some US military assistance to Egypt in response to the crackdown in October 2013 (BBC News, 2017).

At this point, it should be noted that the Trump administration's erratic behaviour towards Egypt can be traced to fundamental disagreements between the president and his Secretary of State at the time, Rex Tillerson. Tillerson mainly reflected the views of the State Department bureaucracy by maintaining that the aid freeze towards Egypt was done in response to the Egyptian government's draconian law against human rights organizations and its human rights violations, convincing – for the first year – Trump to go along with them. In fact, Congress had shared three conditions to discontinue the freeze on the Egyptian government: First, resolve the NGO “foreign funding” trial – where many Americans were convicted -, change the NGO law and cease to provide assistance to North Korea. President Trump was concerned only with the last matter so, after firing Tillerson and replacing him with Mike Pompeo, he proceeded to pursue his own foreign policy. Soon, Pompeo released vast amounts of aid to Egypt while ensuring that the funds would not be suspended (Aftandilian, 2018).

In 2019, Egypt held a popular referendum on amendments of the constitution that would allow him to become an exception to term limits and stay in power until 2034. The amendments also guaranteed him the ability to intervene in politics and will tighten his grip over the judiciary (Dunne, 2019). When asked about this constitutional reform, Trump states that “I think he's doing a great job. I don't know about the effort, I can just tell you he is doing a great job ... great president.” This encouragement was followed by a

White House statement saying that the “the United States encourages the Egyptian government to preserve space for civil society and to protect human rights”. Despite the fact that U.S. lawmakers, reporters and Republican politicians had expressed their uneasiness and questioned the administration on its approach towards Egypt on various issues, the White House responded that “all matters were addressed through negotiations and with respect to international best practices” or, in some cases, the president did not even respond (Mason & Rampton, 2019).

In general, the Trump administration’s approach towards Egypt combined public endorsements of the Egyptian president with occasional private attempts for changes in policy, which were often unsuccessful. Besides Donald Trump’s appreciation of al-Sisi, the US government seemed to sustain the situation in Egypt as it were, instead of being more assertive. The result was a system of unrestrained support for Egypt’s military and security regime (Wittes, 2020).

The case of Syria

As mentioned before, President Trump had made clear – since the beginning - that defeating the Islamic State was a top priority. He had also expressed that this could potentially be done through Russian assistance and the reevaluation of American support for the Syrian opposition (Center for the Middle East, 2017, pp. 3-4). At first, it appeared that Trump was interested in entering a grand bargain with Russia, in which the situation in Syria would be an important component (Rabinovich, 2017). Gradually, more coherent policies emerged and the Trump administration changed the US stance in Syria, where the Obama administration had inadequately responded to violations of the former

president's "red line", by ordering air strikes on one of Assad's air force bases after there were reports of another chemical attack on citizens (France24, 2017). In any event, the grand bargain with Russia in the Middle East had to be postponed due to reports of Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections (BBC, 2018). These initiatives were welcomed by the bipartisan foreign policy elite but also, were mirrored in internal staffing changes as Trump fired or marginalized some of his "America First" radicals – such as Steve Bannon – during 2017 (Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*, 2018, p. 300). Nevertheless, the administration's policy had already stumbled by abandoning the narrative against Assad, which could have encouraged him to resume large-scale chemical attacks (Cooper, 2007). Under the confusion of the strategic effects the airstrikes against Assad's forces could produce, the US lost any leverage that they could have yielded them in Syria by examining whether they were a prelude to more military action or a reversal of Trump's past positions on Syria and Assad (Stuster, 2017).

On the ISIS front, the Trump administration placed great emphasis on coalition airpower strikes together with Iraqi and Kurdish ground forces while making sure to limiting US ground forces, resulting in important battlefield victories that significantly reduced ISIS control of several territories in both Syria and Iraq. Encouraged by these successes, Donald Trump repeatedly declared triumph and then, in December 2018, ordered a complete withdrawal of US forces from Syria (Landler, Cooper, & Schmitt, 2018). This unexpected announcement was followed again by confusion as the US was no longer capable of defining clear objectives and a plan to achieve them. Senior US officials resorted to "reverse engineering" strategic reasons for US military forces to remain in Syria while, at the same time, refusing to provide economic or humanitarian aid

– or any other non-military means of power (Bolan, 2019). The pattern of military disengagement from Syria was continued in October 2019, when the President ordered US troops to vacate a part of north-east Syria where Turkey has threatened to launch a military attack, deserting the Kurdish militias that had been key US allies in the fight against the Islamic State. The decision announced after Trump decided to speak with Turkey’s president Erdogan, who wanted to establish a “security zone” deep into northern Syria and so, to undermine the Kurdish enclaves there (Pitel & Cornish, 2019). Some argued that ordering this withdrawal, also, empowered the position of other American opponents, such as Iran and Russia (Miller B. , 2020, p. 244).

The decision to disengage US forces from Syria may have been a correct one for his supporters or even a significant part of the American people, as seen in polling results during that time (The Hill, n.d.). However, there was little support among Republicans and some senior US officials who warned that ISIS resurgence remained a possibility (Cassidy, 2019). Nonetheless, in the following months, the President’s national security team discreetly sidestepped his decision and withdrew only half of the 2.000 troops from Syria while resuming the US partnership with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Seligman, 2019). Official communications from the State Department and the US Agency for International Development indicated that there were still underlying goals for the defeat of ISIS, the minimization of Iranian influence and assistance to Syria towards a new political settlement (Department of State’s Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 2019).

Taking advantage of the President’s lack of interest, officials tried to “do more with less” that was often at odds with Trump’s desire to disengage from Syria (McGurk, 2019). The vagueness of US policy in Syria allowed Trump to take credit domestically

for keeping the defeated ISIS under control while ending US presence in the country and, to enjoy affirmative talks with select foreign counterparts, such as Turkey's Erdogan and Russia's President Putin. Even so, this confusion was due to become a liability as, after the withdrawal from Northern Syria, the US lost significant influence in the region while Russia and Turkey gained sway and territory and Assad's regime gained control over areas that it wouldn't have been able to militarily win (Brown F. Z., 2019).

6.2.2. Israel

In the course of his presidential campaign, Donald Trump had made a number of grand promises regarding the Middle East and specifically, he had proclaimed that he would manage to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue and that he would move the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem (Sokolsky & Miller, 2016). In office, President Trump stayed true to his pro-Israeli sentiments, first of all, through his administration's National Security Strategy. In the NSS document, it was declared that Israel is not the cause of the Middle East's problems, setting the tone for the years to come (Cortellessa, timesofisrael.com, 2017).

Israel was one of the countries that Trump included in his first trip as President. In addition, he was the first incumbent President to visit the Western Wall. As early as 2018, a year after the Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by relocating the US embassy there, Benjamin Netanyahu referred to Trump as one of the greatest benefactors of the Jewish people (Miller A. D., 2020). A few months later, Trump announced that he was defunding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), reversing a policy that had been kept for 70 years and represented a cornerstone of US values to provide for the most vulnerable. This move did not only deprive millions of Palestinians of food, education, and healthcare but also, it could erase some Palestinians' refugee status and so, their right to return to their homes (Amr, 2018). In addition, his administration put an immediate halt on \$220 million that the previous administration had destined for the Palestinian Authority and, also, signed the Taylor Force Act – a law that prevents US funding of the PA until it stopped providing social welfare for the families of martyrs and prisoners (Cortellessa, 2018).

In 2019, briefly before Israeli elections, Trump announced recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights contravening international law and the next year, a one sided-peace proposal for the Israeli-Palestinian issue that he called “the deal of the century”. These decisions were perceived favorably, not only by Netanyahu, but also from many Israeli and American citizens (Miller A. D., 2020). On the diplomatic front, the Trump administration made some moves that had a damaging effect on its international reputation. First, the State Department seemed to have revoked the visas from prominent Palestinians in the US, such as PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi (Reuters, 2019). Second, the Trump administration attacked several international institutions while defending Israel. Specifically, the US withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council and attacked the International Criminal Court, imposing sanctions on the prosecutor working on the Israel-Palestine matter (Harris, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2020). Third, the administration took several other pro-Israeli measures through anti-Irani actions, such as the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, an Obama administration project that took years of diplomatic effort, and the

implementation of “maximum pressure” strategy against Iran (Smith D. , 2019). On a domestic level, Trump implemented a series of measures against dissent towards US-Israeli policy, the most prominent of which was an executive order “aimed at combatting anti-Semitism on US college campuses” (Munayyer, 2020).

In his final months as President, Trump guaranteed another success for Netanyahu through facilitating normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab states - the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain first and then, Morocco and Sudan – which were called the “Abraham Accords” (Wilson Center, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

On the Obama Doctrine

As mentioned at the beginning, Obama began his term believing that it is better to avoid the use of force and, if an intervention is necessary, it is better to be multilateral. Subsequently, the United States in the Obama era attempted to gradually withdraw from different parts of the world and focused on diplomacy, international organizations and international governance, economic integration and globalization, and soft power. In essence, the US moved away from military security strategy and towards concepts such as the fight against poverty, disease and climate change - while at the same time promoting economic development and gender equality (economy, domestic policy). Based on all this, Obama believed that the United States should set an example in the international environment rather than impose US values and policies through intervention (international litigation). In 2014, during President Obama's second term, the challenges his administration faced faced a partial shift in attitude and a return to a balance of power strategy - which, however, was selective and involved powers such as Russia and China.

Obama & the Eastern Mediterranean

Despite America's pivot to Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean region still help strategic importance. President Obama, abandoning his predecessor's foreign policy approach in favor of a flexible policy that leaves a less negative impression on the Muslim world, sought to improve the image of the United States in the international

arena (international legitimation). however, it may have weakened - according to his critics - its image as a superpower.

A prime example of Obama's approach is the US multilateral strategic approach of the issues present in Syria (from the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons and the fight against the Islamic State) - avoiding US ground forces – which put an emphasis on diplomacy, air operations and strengthening local partners (proxy warfare).

On Donald Trump and “America First”

The Trump era differs significantly from the liberal strategies that characterized the Obama era. The “America First” doctrine, whose content is not clearly defined, challenges in many ways key pillars of the American liberal international order. The “America First” nationalism focuses considerably on concepts such as the international balance of power and relative material gains.

Trump represents an ideological stance that rejects the promotion of democracy, the promotion of human rights, free trade, economic interdependence, globalization, multilateral processes, and international organizations. For him, the idea of international co-operation was an anathema and every relationship - whether personal or transnational - was perceived in zero-sum terms. US commitments to allies were perceived as exploitation and treated as such (international legitimation, diplomacy). Based on this logic, international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, impose restrictions on the economic freedom of states (economy). As mentioned earlier, multilateral agreements and processes are losing their value and are being replaced by a

preference for bilateral agreements that allow America to reap more relative benefits as a more powerful player.

Domestically, Trumpism presents a strong element of national, racial, and religious identity that opposes liberal elites (for instance, media, intellectuals) and immigrants who differ culturally, racially, and religiously from nationalists. Moreover, from the outset, the differences between the positions of President Trump and his administration were evident as the former moved and expressed himself - mainly via Twitter - based on his personal sympathies and aspirations while his government remained - to some extent - linked to the reality of great power politics.

Trump & the Eastern Mediterranean

With regard to the Eastern Mediterranean, and in particular the cases under study in the present paper, President Trump follows to some extent the Middle East retrenchment approach followed by the Obama administration. Unlike the previous administration, however, Trump went a step further and refrained from expressing dissatisfaction with issues of liberal principles and values in other countries, such as the violation of human rights and civil liberties by the Egyptian government, while maintaining good relations with authoritarian leaders. Despite the retrenchment from the region, the Trump administration has shown that the US was willing to use force against the regime in Syria, for example, but also, not willing to proceed with long-term, consistent military engagement in the area as it later withdrew its forces from the northern part of the country. In the case of Israel, it was clear from the outset that Trump would develop stronger ties with the Israeli government by tearing down the foundations

Obama had laid for resolving the Palestinian issue through multilateral diplomacy and engagement with the Muslim world.

Concluding Remarks

Since the end of the Cold War, liberal hegemony has been at the heart of the American establishment's ideology, especially in foreign policy, on which hundreds of theories and approaches to the US position in the world have been built.

However, in the Obama era, a new trend emerged that dictated restraint in foreign policy, under which President Obama limited the use of force and military intervention. This shift led to the formation of a doctrine that was at times vague in nature as it balanced between an American-centered hegemonic identity and a post-American practice of hegemony. This ambiguity then revealed the limits of the change that could be made to the grand strategy in a country where identity paradigms are established and recognizing the complexity of the system to the satisfaction of the reductionist demands and identity narratives may not bear fruit. At this point in time, the Trump presidency posed a threat to the idea of American exceptionalism and the very existence of the American-led liberal international order. Trump attacked the liberal elites and positioned his populist rhetoric as a break away from previous administrations who set aside “ordinary” Americans.

In conclusion, Obama's and “America First” doctrine posed domestic challenges to the continuation of American liberal hegemony as it were in the past, even though each president took a different path in implementing his vision for the US.

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