The large geographical span of the Middle East has seen a geopolitical competition between the United States and the Soviet Union since the end of World War II, expanding the scope of that geographical environment also to the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The bipolar confrontation resulted in a fragile balance dotted with local conflicts which had rotated on one side around the pivot of the Arab-Israeli interests, and on the other in the direction of the ideological opposition of local actors - which often changed, indeed. The end of the Cold War and the bipolar confrontation has generated in a prolonged economic crisis in the region, which resulted in the consolidation of the local authoritarianism and growth of Islamist movements in starting a new phase of conflict, essentially internal to the states. The economic crisis following the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not allow any real capacity for intervention of Russia in the region for nearly a decade, limiting the role of Moscow until the first years of the new century to a mere bland position as local political intervention and at the UN. Russia is rather stunning comeback to the forefront of regional chronicles from the beginning of the decade, showing an increasingly effective will to consolidate the sphere of its regional interests in the pursuit of the dual objective of consolidating its role on the one hand, and limit the sphere of US interests on the other. The United States has on the contrary to discount the impact of a prolonged as exhausting military action which since 2003 has seen them involved especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, by opting for a gradual reduction of its operational capacity on the ground and especially of their direct exposure in conflicts. The People's Republic of China does not have its own tangible and significant presence in the Middle East, neither militarily nor politically. Conversely, however, the role of Beijing in the region has grown exponentially over the past two decades thanks to a low-profile economic penetration but high return strategy, which ensured a steady consolidation also of potential political role by China. The framework of general instability generated, since 2011, by insurgent phenomena then passed into history with the name - quite inappropriate - of the "Arab Spring", and the subsequent conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen, have deeply changed the map of regional interests of the three major global players, fostering a new, although still deeply unstable, determining the local political balance.

**The United States and Russia today in the Middle East**

The eight years of the Obama presidency have greatly changed the face of the American presence in the Middle East. After the long, expensive and almost ineffectual intervention in Afghanistan, Washington has sought to accelerate the transition of military control of the country in the direction of the armed forces of Kabul, always supported and equipped by the United States and NATO, although with the intention of making them autonomous in the exercise of the soil control. The unresolved problems of governance, the tribalism, the widespread corruption and the inability to generate a virtuous economic model in the country have led to the failure of any local stabilization policy, bringing back the phenomenon of insurgency and reconsolidating the local interests of the Taliban groups. Afghanistan thus remains an essentially unstable country, from which the international community cannot assume a military demobilization, worth the almost immediate collapse of the central political system and a return to widespread conflict. Even the intervention in Iraq initiated in 2003 has been particularly traumatic for the United States.
The dissolution of the armed forces wanted the fall of Saddam Hussein has led on the one hand the immediate consolidation of the majority Shiite political structure and on the other the transformation in the key sectarian clash between the two main communities. The inability to manage this emerging conflict has brought Iraq to civil war, with the consolidation of matrix Sunni jihadist organizations that have progressively expanded their margin well beyond the borders of Iraq action.

The United States has not been able to cope with the challenge posed by the evolution of Iraqi local politics, arguing over the last decade the Al Maliki government, which has exasperated tones of sectarian conflict leading to the de facto split of the country and consolidation of new political entity of the Islamic State. The next phase of reconquest of the country under the leadership of al-Abadi Prime Minister has seen the United States actively participate in the support of Iraqi forces, although in a low media profile position designed to minimize the role of the national and regional levels.

The US military presence in the region remains secured and coordinated by the impressive deployment of personnel and equipment in Qatar, and especially in Al Udeid Air Base, under the coordination of CENTCOM. In Bahrain has instead headquarters base of the Fifth Fleet of the US Navy, responsible for the area of the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and part of the Indian Ocean. Always under the control of CENTCOM, the Fifth Fleet consists of 10 Task Force and four Combined Task Force with geographical coordination tasks.

The Obama presidency has definitely wanted to diminish the commitment and visibility profile of the United States in the Middle East, but remain involved in two large-scale regional crisis towards which Washington does not seem to harbour any real concrete interest. First in Libya and then in Syria, the United States have given their invaluable operational support to an impromptu NATO mission apt determine the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, and then in stemming Iran's role on the one hand, and monarchies Gulf on the other, in the bloody battle for control of Syria. In both crisis the US have tried, succeeding only partially, to exercise a policy coordination role in the peace agreements, however, often finding themselves forced to employ the use of force in supporting the feeble political prerogatives of local and international actors.

Where the Obama administration has reported net change in orientation is certainly in the relationship with Israel and with Egypt. In the first case, the friction with the government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu have arisen particularly with regard to the peace process and to the management policy of settlements in the occupied territories, and then over the nuclear agreement with Iran. In the case of Egypt, however, the United States suffered the violent military coup in 2013 that brought an end to the Muslim Brotherhood government, with which Washington had found a formula for national and regional dialogue. Cooling with General Al Sisi, who later became president, has gradually pushed Cairo first in the direction of the Gulf monarchies, and then toward Russia, in a desperate attempt to maintain political autonomy on the one hand, and providing the necessary aid the other economic.

The most significant result of the Obama presidency in the region is certainly represented by the agreement signed by the countries of the 5 + 1 with Iran, which put an end to the protracted dispute over Iran's nuclear program but at the same time fuelling an exaggerated fear from within Arab monarchies.

The start of the Trump presidency would seem to call into question many of the choices made by the Obama administration in the region, and particularly with regard to Iran, though the current situation is not clear how and where the priorities of the new administration are going to affect on the region.
Russia, after a decade of very low profile in the management of its role in the Middle East, is to return to play an active role after the Libyan crisis and the controversial intervention of Qatar and France in the change of the local political balance.

The decision to intervene militarily in Syria alongside Bashar al Assad and his allies had a very momentous impact in the evolution of the conflict, resulting in an overall change of the same and preventing the consolidation of the anti-regime front.

The conflict in Syria, however, is built on constructed motivations and interests more to negotiate the global position of Russia (and especially the crisis in Ukraine and the issue of the international embargo) not to consolidate the role of a modest and fragile regional ally.

Through intervention in Syria, however, Moscow anyway begun to redefine the "red line" of its sphere of regional influence, which moves from the east to the Mediterranean to North Africa, and could now include Libya and Egypt in an attempt - perhaps supported by the Europeans and the United States - to transfer on Russia the weight of the solution of the serious crisis we see also in that context oppose the interests of the Gulf monarchies and local actors.

Russia has also brought back its naval presence in the Mediterranean, more symbolic than real to be honest in order to make visible and permanent its commitment on a geographic scale growing and until now dominated by only the US presence and bland European capacity.

The biggest variable of the future in the region is now represented by Washington's intentions towards Moscow, under a policy that could lead ideally towards a relaxing process whose effects are today scarcely measurable. Greater relational capacity between the US and Russia would in any case certainly desirable especially from the European stakeholders, that sanctions against Moscow, thus benefiting of a concrete economic opportunities, as well as a concrete operational support could thus see revoked in regional crises.