

## NEW GEOPOLITICS OF CONTAINMENT: THE US GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

### NOVA GEOPOLÍTICA DA CONTENÇÃO: A ESTRATÉGIA GEOPOLÍTICA DOS EUA NA SEGUNDA DÉCADA DO SÉCULO XXI

DOI: 10.29327/2293200.14.2-8

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**Abstract:** The United States and China have been undoubtedly the two major powers in the international system and have progressively amplified their competitive assertiveness. Such an international dispute instigates a comparative politics with the United States (US) Foreign Policy in Cold War context under the geopolitics of containment. This article has the purpose to analyse if a new containment version could be used in a Sino-US geopolitical dispute context for the coming decades. The main hypothesis would be that Joe Biden's Foreign Policy has returned to the precepts of containment to make China's rise in the 21st century unfeasible, mainly through the case studies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the AUKUS, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). Using the empirical-deductive method, based on bibliographic review and primary analysis of official documents, a research, backed by realism in international relations was carried out. It aimed, as a result, to evaluate the US new geopolitical arrangements based on a New Geopolitics of Containment as an instrument for blocking and containing China's rise.

**Key-words:** New Geopolitics of Containment. United States. China. Sino-American dispute. Foreign policy.

**Resumo:** Os Estados Unidos e a China são as duas grandes potências do sistema internacional e têm ampliado progressivamente a sua assertividade competitiva. Esta disputa internacional instiga uma base comparativa com a política externa dos EUA no contexto da Guerra Fria sob a geopolítica da contenção. Este artigo visa analisar se uma nova versão de contenção estaria sendo utilizada em um contexto de disputa geopolítica sino-estadunidense para as próximas décadas. A hipótese principal seria que a política externa de Joe Biden tenha retornado aos preceitos da contenção para inviabilizar a ascensão da China no século XXI, principalmente por meio dos estudos de caso da Organização do Tratado do Atlântico Norte (OTAN), do Diálogo Quadrilateral de Segurança (QUAD), da AUKUS e do Quadro Econômico Indo-Pacífico para a Prosperidade (IPEF). Utilizando o método empírico-dedutivo, baseado em revisão bibliográfica e análise primária de documentos oficiais, foi realizada uma pesquisa, apoiada no realismo nas relações internacionais, visando como resultado avaliar os novos arranjos geopolíticos dos EUA, baseados em uma Nova Geopolítica de Contenção como instrumento de bloqueio e contenção da China.

**Palavras-chave:** Nova Geopolítica da Contenção. Estados Unidos. China. Disputa sino-estadunidense. Política Externa.

**Recebido:** 09/09/2023

**Aprovado:** 10/10/2023

### Introduction

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In the second decade of the 21st century, the United States and China have been amplifying their relationship complexity in international relations. Whether through an “asymmetric bipolarity” perspective (Stuenkel, 2016), a pattern of “cooperative coexistence” (Kissinger, 2011) or “competitive coexistence” (Shambaugh, 2013), or even in the perspective of the imminent war based on the “Thucydides Trap” (Allison, 2020), the fact is that these two major powers in the international system have progressively guided the international political economy agendas.

Such an international dispute instigates a parallelism with the United States (US) Foreign Policy in Cold War context under the geopolitics of containment. This was an instrument used to block the expansion of Soviet power and influence, both in its strategic surroundings and elsewhere, with the prerogative of interfering in any part of the international system from the discourse on the dangers of communism and the need for its containment for national security. Currently, a broader debate is considered opportune to question whether a new version of containment is actually taking effect.

This article has the purpose to analyse if a new containment version could be used in a Sino-US geopolitical dispute context for the coming decades. The hypothesis would be that Joe Biden's foreign policy has been returning to the precepts of containment to make China's upsurge in the 21st century unfeasible. Using the empirical-deductive method based on bibliographic review and primary analysis of official documents, a research, backed by realism in international relations will be carried out, with the objective to evaluate US new geopolitical arrangements based on a New Geopolitics of Containment as an instrument for blocking and containing China's rise.

To this end, the work is structured in three sections, in addition to this introduction and final considerations: firstly, a containment policy theoretical review will be carried out. Secondly, the transition of *Pax Americana* to a New Geopolitics of Containment will be approached through the analysis of the United States' National Security Strategy. Thirdly, Joe Biden's case studies related to Foreign Policy will be analysed, more precisely the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the AUKUS, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).

## **1. (Geo)Policy of Containment's theoretical bases**

The conceptualisation of geopolitics may seem like a simple task, but it can only be considered if it is taken into account that different national interests in the international system are asymmetrical, hierarchical, and competitive. Concomitantly, different geopolitical visions are developed in order to establish causal relationships in different spaces and times. Geography itself is essentially

political, of strategic knowledge, knowing how to think about space with the aim of acting effectively.

Throughout history, different authors have sought to define geopolitics. It may be the study of the State as a geographic organism (Kjellen, apud Backheuser, 1952) or the doctrine of vital space (Vives, 1950). It can also “be defined as the science of the relation of politics to geography [...], which includes the relationship between geography and military strategy, national development, expansion, and imperialism” (Child, 1979, p. 89) or as “the impact on foreign security policies of certain geographic features” (Kelly, 1997, p. 4-5). It may be seen as “the influence of geography on human divisions” (Kaplan, 2013, s.p.) or “the study of political control relations in space” (Teixeira Júnior, 2017, s.p.) too.

For Fiori (2014), “it is strategic and normative knowledge that evaluates and redesigns geography itself based on some specific project of power, defensive or expansive,” and for Rodrigues (2020; 2022), it is a method of dynamic study of the influence of geographic factors on the development of States with the purpose of guiding their internal and external policies.

In other words, it is a method that studies politics derived from geographical aspects and it is a foreign policy analysis tool that seeks to understand, to explain and to prospect international political behaviour, mainly in terms of spatial variables.

Coming from the great debate between Sea Power and Land Power, Spykman presents geopolitics’ conception in his books “America's Strategy in World Politics” (1942) and “The Geography of the Peace” (1944), both written during the Second World War for a US Geo-strategy and Security. In general, his power conception advocated a power policy whose central axis was the influence of geography on foreign policy, the balance of power in Eurasia through a Geo-strategy of containment, and the United States’ security policy.

The policy of containment was a term used in the late 1940s to inflame public opinion in the preamble to the Cold War. The name was also given by the peripheral sea power to what the Heartland power calls “encirclement”, or the idea of preventing a communist empire from extending its control from the Heartland to the Rimland (Kaplan, 2013, p. 99).

This policy became the key slogan that links the internal atmosphere and the external operations on a single front and guarantees the passage from the New Deal to the Truman Doctrine (Anderson, 2015, p. 39). It also guaranteed a national policy that established the prerogative to interfere in any part of the Globe, from the discourse on the communism dangers and the need for its containment for national security.

One of its main objectives was the balance of power. From an equidistant azimuthal projection centered on the North Pole, the geographer resizes the US and other continental masses' space and position, whose concentration in the Northern Hemisphere and geographical proximity between North America and Eurasia across the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic (Costa, 1992, p. 178) would consist of an unprecedented confrontation area.

This characteristic reinforces the need for a balance of world power: if Eurasia were dominated by a single or set of powers, it would accumulate uncompensated power and project itself into the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In addition, in a pincer movement (derived from this geographical parallelism), it would encircle the Western Hemisphere, since it was the potential America's encirclement by Eurasia or Eurasia's by America that would define the broad lines of world politics in this century (Mello, 1999, p. 103-105).

For Spykman (apud Tosta, 1984, p. 78), the possibility of encircling or being surrounded depends on the power potentials of both worlds and on the ability to integrate or not, each of them, in a single unit or coalition policy. This dilemma resolution would be a direct US participation in the Eurasian balance of power to keep the political-military forces from Europe and the Far East divided and neutralised (Mello, 1999, p. 118).

Hence, a North American power surplus, in order to project itself in the two oceans and establish its first transoceanic defense line on the Eurasian borders, would be the US Grand Strategy main vector in world politics. (Mello, 1999, p. 97-98)

In order to geopolitics of containment be viable, the territorial dispute for the maritime fringes that skirted Eurasian great central plain (Mello, 1999, p. 120) would be the strategic zone of world power capable of compensating the Eurasian continental mass dominance. For him, the Rimland would be a double front region, that is, the one that have contact zones towards the center of the continents and towards their maritime edges.

It is the maritime circumferential path (Costa, 1992, p. 179), a vast buffer zone of conflicts between Land Power and Maritime Power (Tosta, 1984, p. 76), an expansive amphibious power by sea and by land, whose Eurasian fringe areas would be, with their maritime orientation, crucial for contact with the outside world. (Kaplan, 2013, p. 98)

In Cold War's empirical reality, the US diplomat performance in Moscow, George Kennan, was the fundamental basis for the establishment of the US containment geopolitics in relation to the former Soviet Union. In the document called "Long Telegram" (Kennan, 1946), the author presented the USSR expansionist tendencies regarding the West that served to formulate the US Foreign Policy strategy throughout the Cold War.

When analysing Russian Geo-strategies in the period, the diplomat reiterated the importance for the US to contain Russian expansionism through a non-provocative and non-combative resistance strategy, mainly through economic and financial aid to allies in order to guarantee the necessary cohesion between Western states and avoid power vacuums at strategic points.

The diplomat George F. Kennan introduced the United States to the idea of containment in 1946 with his “Long Telegram” to the State Department, in which he, as chargé d’affaires in Moscow, laid out his perspective on how to counter the rise of the Soviet Union. In 1947, he published those views anonymously in a Foreign Affairs article. In the latter, Kennan recommended a “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” If the United States frustrated Soviet expansionist tendencies long enough, he believed, Moscow might “mellow,” allowing for a negotiated settlement with Washington. (Larson, 2021, s.p.).

Consequently, such a strategy would hamper Russian expansion in Eurasia and make any conditions of military imposition unachievable (Kennan, 1948), pressuring it to seek other negotiating fronts through diplomatic channels. Since Russia was configured as not only a military problematic, but also, above all, a political one, the Kennan's geopolitics of containment was configured as a geographic blockade formed by an alliance or a military bases network in specific vital points, whose main objective was Western values cohesion through a cordon that separated, mainly, the West from the Soviet world.

As visualised, it is important to consider this theoretical framework to analyse the international situation and the possibility of establishing a New Geopolitics of Containment. Although containment received its final validation with the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, in 1991, there is continuity within the rupture in the US behaviour from the Soviet context in the Cold War to the Chinese today. As Pejić argues (Pejić, 2018, p. 1402),

in its primal form containment is nothing more than a traditional policy of power balance, using military or diplomatic tools to counter the potential aggressor. From this perspective containment will still have a role in today's multi-polar world order balancing the power among global players.

Even in a Sino-US interdependence context, the main features related to the geopolitics of containment originally outlined are supported by new externalities: China's political, economic, and military neutralisation; re-establishment of the balance of power in Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America; multilateral cooperation promotion; power projection in the Pacific and Eurasia; economic control via commercial and technological warfare; Rimland buffer zones' domain; and, mainly, the attempt to maintain the United States' world hegemony.

As will be demonstrated throughout this article, the combination between Biden's Administration Plan, National Security Strategy, and U.S. new geopolitical structures completed

and substantiated the character of new containment that has been gradually developing in the first years of the 2020s.

In addition, given the particularities of each historical period, this new approach presents spheres of convergence with Spykman's geostrategic of containment ideas and Kennan's policy of containment, especially with regard to the proposition that the United States should implement “a long-term patient, but firm and vigilant containment of expansive Russian tendencies” (Kennan, 1947, s.p.), in addition to, analogously, a new containment of Chinese expansionism in contemporary times.

In short, from the containment policy perspective during the Cold War, there was a trajectory of building unilateral control, maintaining geostrategic dominance in order to deter competing regional and global powers through political, military, and economic mechanisms to the promotion of a so-called peace, democracy, and free markets. (Anderson, 2015, p. 153) The geopolitics of containment will be briefly abandoned by the United States in the 1990s and 2000s, returning with increasing emphasis from the 2010s and potentiated in Joe Biden's International Political Economy.

## **2. From the *Pax Americana* to the New Geopolitics of Containment**

Since the end of the 20th century, Brzezinski (1998, p. 53) pointed out China as one of the major and active players in the current global circumstances, in which a “Greater China” as a key geostrategic player has to be prevented. Mearsheimer (2001, p. 362) had already classified “a rising China is the most dangerous potential threat to the United States in the early twenty-first century.” Consequently, a policy of engagement is doomed to fail and it is essential that the United States “would seek to contain China, probably by trying to form a balancing coalition.” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 4).

As Bandeira (2013) states, the main objective of the United States is to maintain its global dominance, including strategies to disintegrate China internally. They aimed to reproduce on Chinese territory what they did against the Soviet Union during the war in Afghanistan, where they fought the enemy using proxies, terrorist organisations, and third countries.

Nevertheless, as the Obamas' National Security Strategy (United States, 2010) point out, China's containment strategy has already presented preliminary nuances since his administration, by emphasising the need to strengthen US military presence in order to counterbalance China.

Although focused on resuming economic prosperity after the 2008 crisis, based on three-dimensional liberalism (Trans-Pacific Partnership - TPP; Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership - TTIP; and Trade in Services Agreement - TISA), the document aimed at reaffirming

the engagement and confirming the enlargement to build the foundations of US leadership in the 21st century.

Notably, the Indo-Pacific region itself becomes the main pillar of the Obama administration's Foreign Policy, which removes the US from the Bush Doctrine's focus on the Greater Middle East.

China's containment in Asia-Pacific, since the beginning of the 21st century, has become the center-piece of the United States' strategy for the region. The US strategic documents, in addition to promoting the shift in Washington's Foreign Policy towards the Pacific Century, mention China and Russia as revisionist powers, that is, whose objective is to expand their power projection from the reducing presence of Washington. (Nascimento & Pires, 2023, p. 164)

This factor continues in Trump's Administration and rises with greater momentum in the Biden's Administration with the aim at responding to the China's rise challenge. This way, it is only with Biden that the New Geopolitics of Containment appears with greater force. Consequently, this section aims to analyse the last US Government official document. The selected paper is the Joe Biden's Administration National Security Strategy (NSS), both the interim (United States, 2021a) and the official (United States, 2022a) versions.

Since the NSS serves as a guide for planning, organising, and executing tasks relevant to the Departments and Agencies subordinated to the Executive Power (Silva, 2013, pp. 454-455), the choice of these specific documents is justified because the US Foreign Policy reorientation, from the *Pax Americana*, in the post-Cold War, to the New Geopolitics of Containment, in the 2020s, is clearly visualised.

The Joe Biden administration's National Security Strategy (United States, 2021a), named "Renewing America's advantages", emphasises a US international engagement. It also reopens the discussion on global threats with collective action, particularly on issues such as pandemics and other biological hazards, global warming, cyber and digital threats, international economic crises, humanitarian crises, violent extremism and terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. In summary, the main points for US national security would be the following

- To defend and to cultivate the underlying sources of American strength, such as the economy, national defense, and democracy;
- To promote a favourable distribution of power to deter and to prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and its allies, by inhibiting access to the global commons or dominating key regions; and

- To lead and to sustain a stable and open international system, underpinned by strong democratic alliances, partnerships and multilateral institutions.

The last two points are fundamental to support the central hypothesis related to containment policy rebirth under new molds, mainly when listing China as the main adversary in the international system.

As the document attests, “this moment calls upon us to lean forward, not shrink back – to boldly engage the world to keep Americans safe, prosperous, and free.” (United States, 2021a, p. 6) In this sense, the Strategy confirms that international power distribution is changing, which would necessarily imply new threats.

Among those listed throughout the document, China presents itself as the most assertive, since it is “the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.” (United States, 2021a, p. 8)

Consequently, there is an imperative to re-establish and modernise the international cooperation architecture for the 21st century challenges, given that the alliances, institutions, agreements, and norms that the United States helped to found throughout the 20th century were being tested. It is at this point that the New Geopolitics of Containment’s prerogative presents its main nuances, both to emphasise international cooperation and to reconquer the US leadership position in international institutions, and to explicitly repress the Chinese advance in the international system.

Our democratic alliances enable us to present a common front, produce a unified vision, and pool our strength to promote high standards, establish effective international rules, and hold countries like China to account. That is why we will reaffirm, invest in, and modernise the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and our alliances with Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea – which, along with our other global alliances and partnerships, are America’s greatest strategic asset. (United States, 2021a, p. 10)

In addition to the aforementioned main alliances, the United States proposes to intensify partnerships around the world, establishing, as priorities for its national interests, a deeper connection with the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere. The literal citation of growing partnership with certain countries, such as India, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, and other member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as the commitment to transatlantic partnerships, proves the US global interest’s expansion and, concomitantly, a Chinese geographical enclosure both through economic-diplomatic and political-military means.



We will position ourselves, diplomatically and militarily, to defend our allies. We will support China's neighbours and commercial partners in defending their rights to make independent political choices free of coercion or undue foreign influence. We will promote locally-led development to combat the manipulation of local priorities. We will support Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments. We will ensure that U.S. companies do not sacrifice American values in doing business in China. And we will stand up for democracy, human rights, and human dignity, including in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet. (United States, 2021a, pp. 20-21)

The New Geopolitics of Containment would constitute one of the strategic variables to strengthen the United States' advantages in the competition with China. In other words, by restoring credibility and reasserting global leadership, the US seeks to set the international agenda, to shape new global norms and agreements that advance its interests and reflect its values, and, mainly, to strengthen and to defend its network of allies and partners with the main objective of preventing a "Chinese aggression and counter threats to our collective security, prosperity, and democratic way of life." (United States, 2021a, p. 20)

Joe Biden's National Security Strategy (2022a) consists of readjusting the U.S. geopolitics, configuring a New Geopolitics of Containment of China. In short, the main objectives are to invest in national power to maintain competitive advantage, use diplomacy to build stronger coalitions, modernize and strengthen the Armed Forces and carry out integrated deterrence against aggression from China, Russia and other states. (United States, 2022a)

In this sense, global priorities consist of outcompeting China and restraining Russia. To this end, strategies by region consist of promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific, deepening the alliance with Europe (and strengthening NATO), promoting democracy in the Western Hemisphere, support integration in the Middle East, establish partnerships with Africa, maintain a peaceful Arctic, and protect the sea, air and space (United States, 2022a). Specifically regarding China, the document is very clear:

Our strategy toward the PRC is threefold: 1) to invest in the foundations of our strength at home –our competitiveness, our innovation, our resilience, our democracy, 2) to align our efforts with our network of allies and partners, acting with common purpose and in common cause, and 3) compete responsibly with the PRC to defend our interests and build our vision for the future. (United States, 2022a, p. 24)

Whether through the *Pax Americana* or the Geopolitics of Containment, the US military-industrial complex is constantly proposing a continuous technological and military race within a system destabilised by the idea that war is a regular conflict resolution and that it can be waged at any time and in any place, against any rival, enemy, or former ally. (Fiori, 2018, p. 399).

Consequently, from the US perspective to respond to the “Beijing's challenge” (United States, 2021a, p. 20), it is critical for American rhetoric to inhibit Chinese advantages, such as unfair and illegal commercial practices, cyber theft, and coercive economic practices that harm US workers and their advanced and emerging technologies, in addition to seek to erode their strategic advantage and national competitiveness.

Just like in the policy of containing socialism around the world, in the context of the Cold War, ideological conflict, clash over narratives, military development, technological dispute and, as it will be analysed, control by geopolitical areas of influence are factors that present themselves as New Geopolitics of Containment's imperatives. In other words, a similarity can be seen in the fight against the expansionism of socialist ideals in both historical moments, mainly through a long-term policy that acted (in the Soviet context) and is acting (in the Chinese context) on a series of strategic geopolitical points.

In the next section, brief case studies will be carried out to ratify the central hypothesis that the Biden administration has been implementing a New Geopolitics of Containment. It will focus on China, mainly through the activities' intensification of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the concepts of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the AUKUS, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).

### **3. The US New Geopolitics of Containment**

At first, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a political-military alliance of consultation, cooperation and joint operations in the defense and security fields. It brings together thirty countries from Europe and North America that share the strategic objective of maintaining security in the Euro-Atlantic area, and guaranteeing the freedom of its members through political and military means. All decisions are made by consensus and members are committed to the same values.

Since its foundation, the transatlantic alliance's flexibility has allowed it to adapt to different requirements of different times. Importantly, the Organisation was officially established on 4th April, 1949, with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty – more popularly known as the Washington Treaty – by 12 founding members. It derives its authority from Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, which reaffirms the inherent right of independent States to individual or collective defense.

The NATO'S emergence is fully correlated with the Soviet containment in the Cold War.

Despite of USSR disintegration, NATO continued its expansion as a strategy to protect Western civilisation and deny the possibility of Russia gaining territorial control, especially in Ukraine. Consequently, the first wave of post-Cold War enlargement began in the late 1990s and partially portrayed the new US containment of the former Soviet space.

In addition to its thirty member countries, the Organisation has an extensive network of partnerships with more than forty non-member countries, stretching from Central and Eastern Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. While these partner states do not have the same decision-making authority as member countries, they build individual relationships in areas of mutual interest that encompass different aspects of cooperation and dialogue, and some actively contribute to operations and missions led by the NATO.

Although partnerships are carried out with countries with multiple political tendencies, it is important to highlight, for the scope of this article, the expansion of NATO partnerships with certain countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, revealing an attempt to encircle China that is gradually becoming more evident in the 2020s and with Joe Biden's Foreign Policy.

NATO member countries have been debating the development of a common position, regarding China's ambitions and assertive behaviour as a challenge today, since 2019. At the Brussels Summit in June 2021, one of its results was the issuance of statements on China that focused on launching the NATO 2030 agenda. (Nato, 2021) .

By taking a more global approach, the strategy places China at the forefront, particularly in emerging technology areas. In other words, “China’s rise fundamentally shifts the balance of power” (Nato, 2021, p. 3), exerting pressure on international order that goes against the Allies’ rules of security, freedom and prosperity.

At the Madrid Summit in June 2022, for the first time, leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand attended a military alliance meeting. This originality is mainly aimed at strengthening the Alliance to resist China's assertiveness and the possible consequences for the Allies’ security. Although NATO ratifies the North American and European alliance’s continuity, the prerogative to face global threats and challenges is the justification for the gradual incorporation of partners from Asia-Pacific.

On the other hand, this new NATO’S scope has made China to feel increasingly surrounded and threatened. Since Vladimir Putin's incursion into Ukraine, in 2022, China has blamed NATO and the US for trying to establish a similar alliance in Asia-Pacific. The Madrid Summit Declaration itself makes such a discourse of China's systemic challenge in the international system explicit:

We are confronted by cyber, space, and hybrid and other asymmetric threats, and by the malicious use of emerging and disruptive technologies. We face systemic competition from those, including the People's Republic of China, who challenge our interests, security, and values and seek to undermine the rules-based international order. (Nato, 2022a)

Also at this meeting, the Strategic Concept 2022 was adopted, outlining the Alliance's priorities, key deterrence and defense tasks, and collective defense objectives for the next decade. For the first time, the document addresses the challenges that China poses to the Alliance's security, interests, and values, explaining and ratifying its incorporation in the new US policy of containment.

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. The PRC employs a broad range of political, economic and military tools to increase its global footprint and project power, while remaining opaque about its strategy, intentions and military build-up. The PRC's malicious hybrid and cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security. The PRC seeks to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply chains. It uses its economic leverage to create strategic dependencies and enhance its influence. It strives to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains. The deepening strategic partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests. (Nato, 2022b, p. 4)

In addition to the tussle with Russia, NATO's New Geopolitics of Containment has developed a comprehensive strategy for China. A number of factors together serve as a justification for incorporating China explicitly into NATO's Geostrategy in the 2020s. Firstly, the United States seeks to persuade its allies that Chinese policies would threaten the Alliance's interests. Secondly, China's growing international participation in economic and financial terms has been a destabilising asset for the international order established in the post-Cold War period.

In addition, the Chinese military modernisation programme would be linking the international alert in the South China Sea, in India's border dispute, and through the military cooperation with Russia, and, internally, boosting strives in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Taiwan.

Secondly, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is a diplomatic-military strategic security dialogue arrangement between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. The four countries committed to quadrilateral cooperation in a shared vision for free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific anchored by democratic values. The dialogue has been accompanied by joint military exercises and aims to establish development-linked initiatives to advance the common good and cooperative security, primarily through a rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas.

It is important to note that the Indo-Pacific prominence is related to the securitisation of this region given the rise of China (Kassab, 2023). Not only that, as stated by Nascimento and Pires (2023, p. 158), since what was previously defined as the Asia-Pacific “has been extended to the Indian Ocean as Indo-Pacific, in a clear attempt to involve India, a neighbour with which China has border disputes.”

Additionally, according to Turner, Nymalm and Aslam (2022), the Indo-Pacific is the most diverse, dynamic, and contested region on the international stage. Convergently, China's rapid development and growing influence in the region, as well as political and economic crises and disruptions within the United States, mean that the US has come to occupy a newly uncertain position and perceive a series of largely unknown challenges.

On 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, representatives from South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand were included in the weekly meeting intended to exchange information regarding the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This meeting became known as QUAD plus. These seven countries held subsequent meetings, discussing not only the fight against the pandemic situation, but also the sharing of technologies and mechanisms to rebuild the global economy. According to Rajagopalan (2020, p. 5), “the slow but steady institutionalisation of the Quad suggests that its future expansion is a real possibility”.

Currently, QUAD mainly focuses on military cooperation. In this sense, joint military training has offered broader defense cooperation, particularly in terms of sharing military technologies and establishing intelligence procedures. In practice, Malabar military exercises are the greatest example of this quadrilateral cooperation. (Jie, 2019, p. 64)

In 2017, the four countries began to reassess the QUAD, reaffirming their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) (Luthra, 2021), enabling a growing convergence in foreign policies once their interests converged in relation to China's international assertiveness. In other words, QUAD is an inherent reflection of the geopolitical changes in Asia and a counterweight to China's more incisive actions, presenting itself as the new construction of American Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific.

In particular, the economic clout demonstrated by Beijing's proposal and promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as well as the security influence reflected in it safeguarding its rights in the East and South China Seas, have made Japan, Australia and other Asia-Pacific countries worry that, with the absence of US check and balance, they will have to accept a new regional order shaped by coercive Chinese power. [...] Therefore, while developing their own new regional strategies, Japan and Australia have revived the Quad, trying to keep the United States engaged in the Asia-Pacific region, and bring India in to jointly cope with the rise of China. (Jie, 2019, pp. 57-58).

In this sense, in 2021, the four countries have become more aligned, since “what divided the four powers in 2007–2008 — China’s rise — is arguably now bringing them closer together.” (Envall, 2019, p. 5) In other terms, “Chinese coercion post-2015 further crystallised the alignment of interests underpinning the Quad.” (Buchan & Rimland, 2020)

In March 2021, the first QUAD leadership-level summit was held. On this occasion, the document “The Spirit of the QUAD” was ratified, with a broad and consensual vision for a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific. Through the explicit objective “to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond” (United States, 2021b), regular meetings’ continuity between experts and senior officials was also established at least once a year.

In September 2021, the first face-to-face meeting of the QUAD was held, whose countries “recommit to our partnership, and to a region that is a bedrock of our shared security and prosperity —a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is also inclusive and resilient.” (United States, 2021c).

In May 2022, another meeting was held, whose main guidelines focused on the document “Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement”. In this, countries ratified their commitment to the six leadership-level working groups: global health security, infrastructure, climate, cybersecurity, critical and emerging technologies, and space. (United States, 2022b)

Although the US, Japan, India, and Australia do not recognise that economic-military cooperation is aimed at contesting Chinese revisionist power “and the US and Australia particularly emphasise that the plan is an alternative, rather than a rivalry, to the Belt and Road Initiative, their true intentions cannot be clearer.” (Jie, 2019, p. 65). In fact, this ideological and geographical delimitation has raised hypotheses about the future intentions of the group, mainly by correlating “that it is the genesis of an ‘Asian NATO’, that it is a network to contain the rise of China.” (Buchan & Rimland, 2020)

Although they have not entered into a mutual defense pact, as they have common interests in maintaining a stable balance of power in the region, Lee (2020) points out that QUAD’s main geostrategic objective is to signal to Beijing that the four states share the intention to fight and prevent future Chinese actions, including the Maritime Silk Road project.

First of all, the transition from “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific” is a prominent feature of the Quad in terms of geography, which reflects the geopolitical trend in the disintegration and reconstruction of the regional order. [...] When he announced that the US Pacific Command was officially renamed the Indo-Pacific Command, US Defense Secretary James Mattis pointed out the increasing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and its vital importance to global maritime security. [...] This trend underlines the importance of the Indian Ocean. With

India's increasing weight in the world economy, and the growing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Indo-Pacific is being integrated into a broad strategic region. It is noteworthy that the "Indian Ocean-Pacific" line is precisely the main route of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which, while representing a broad consensus among countries with regard to geopolitical changes, reflects their competition as to the ultimate shape of the Indo-Pacific regional order." (Jie, 2019, p. 63)

In addition, according to Jie (2019, pp. 65-66), "the Quad is more explicitly targeted at China in the security field, while, economically, engagement and containment seem to coexist." Complementarily, Byrne (2019) affirms that the US positioning towards the Indo-Pacific is a response to the changing geopolitical realities, once "China's ongoing militarisation and power projections across the region have brought a new sense of urgency to US positioning." (Byrne, 2019).

In other terms, Kassab (2023, p. 592) states "by mashing together two great oceans, an alliance between India can also furnished placing the balance of power firmly in the QUAD camp and possibly deter China from further aggression."

China has raised concerns about the increasing engagement of the QUAD (and the Malabar exercises in particular). In fact, the United States' strategic containment rhetoric (Byrne, 2019) has generated dissatisfaction among Chinese policy-makers, since "China views the Quad through the lens of 'wei qi' (encirclement strategy), dismissing the initiative as representing a 'Cold War mentality'." (Luthra, 2021, p. 6).

Just as it did during the initial Quad in 2007, China has officially protested Quad 2.0 as a thinly veiled attempt at containment. Editorials in state-run Chinese media have regularly lambasted the grouping as a threat to not simply China's own ascent to power but also traditional diplomatic touchstones such as ASEAN centrality; further criticism can also be readily found attacking the Quad nations for insufficient care regarding the infrastructure needs of Southeast Asian nations. (Buchan & Rimland, 2020)

The QUAD's resumption is inseparable and directly proportional to China's economic rise and international assertiveness in the first decade of 2010. As a New Geopolitics of Containment's pillar, the objective is to build a new regional order, whose main focus is to establish control in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and East Asia.

In addition to economic competition and political-diplomatic challenges, including China's influence in multilateral institutions, the US is also concerned about the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and the growing Chinese military presence. Consequently, they seek to use QUAD to extend their hegemony and sustain their global geopolitical dominance.

Fourthly, the AUKUS is a trilateral partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Announced on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2021 (United States, 2021d), the agreement has the main objectives: to strengthen support capacity, to promote deeper sharing of information and technology, to integrate science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains, and to deepen military cooperation. The AUKUS's partnership implementation has two main lines:

- One related to submarines, from the provision to the Royal Australian Navy of a conventionally armed nuclear propulsion submarine capability, maintaining the highest standards of non-proliferation, with a focus on interoperability and mutual benefit; and
- The other one is linked to advanced capabilities, in which there will be the development and provision of joint advanced military capabilities to promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. (United States, 2022c)

Through AUKUS, our governments will strengthen the ability of each to support our security and defense interests, building on our longstanding and ongoing bilateral ties. We will promote deeper information and technology sharing. We will foster deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains. And in particular, we will significantly deepen cooperation on a range of security and defense capabilities. (United States, 2021d).

The three countries have held several high-level meetings since AUKUS was announced. These include the following:

- The Senior Officials Group, where National Security Advisors met virtually to review progress on AUKUS and provide guidance for the trilateral partnership in the future;
- Joint Steering Group meetings, for each of AUKUS's two lines of effort, including face-to-face sessions in Canberra, London and Washington; and
- The Working Groups, totaling seventeen, nine related to nuclear-powered submarines and eight related to other advanced military capabilities. (United States, 2022c)

Undoubtedly, the most sensitive point is the nuclear-powered submarines' construction for Australia, using the US technology (which had only shared its submarine technology 60 years ago with the United Kingdom). With the agreement in force since 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2022, the Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement (ENNPIA) allows AUKUS partners to share naval nuclear propulsion information trilaterally.

In March 2022, the Australian government announced the plan to establish a future submarine base off at Australia's East coast to support a future nuclear-powered submarines installation. Additionally, it is securing land to build the nuclear-powered submarine construction yard, including areas adjacent to the Osborne North shipyard in South Australia.



Although none of the three countries mentioned China specifically, the agreement is widely understood as a response to Beijing's expansionism in the South China Sea and the Pacific. Despite being Australia's biggest trading partner, Canberra has been accusing Beijing of meddling in its domestic policy, blocking Chinese investment and banning Chinese telecom giant Huawei from operating on Australian technology infrastructure.

In Cheng's view (2022), AUKUS is considered as deterioration for the geopolitical situation in the region. As an audacious shift in US global strategy, the new core would disrupt regional order by fueling arms race, heightening regional tensions, and undermining relevant institutions for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

“For China, AUKUS is a targeted and substantial threat to be reckoned with. This is another historic move in the process of forging an ‘Asia-Pacific version of NATO’.” (Cheng, 2022, p. 6) Furthermore, the AUKUS would possess a “demonstration effect” that would alarm the Chinese, as it would open up the possibility that the QUAD would follow suit in military cooperation, causing Japan to seek to acquire nuclear submarine technology.

Officially, the Chinese government has voiced its contempt for the deal, as it is seen as being, at least in part, a response to China's status as an increasingly assertive emerging superpower. In an editorial in the *Global Times* (2021), it was ratified that, by following a unilateral US-oriented policy in the Chinese-American strategic game, Australia has become a China's adversary. According to Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian (2021),

cooperation on nuclear-powered submarine technology between the US, the UK, and Australia will gravely undermine regional peace and stability, aggravate arms race and impair international nuclear non-proliferation efforts. It runs counter to regional countries' wishes. The three countries should discard the Cold War zero-sum mentality and narrow geopolitical perspective, follow the trend of the times for peace and development, and stop forming exclusive blocs or cliques.

The AUKUS project is seen as the New Geopolitics of Containment's military mainstay in the Pacific Basin. As China seeks to make diplomatic, economic, and military advances in the South Pacific, it is increasingly clear that the triad has as its main geopolitical objective China's containment in the region.

At last, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) is an arrangement that aims to strengthen and deepen economic ties between the US and countries in the region. Launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2022, by President Joe Biden, through the “Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity” (United States, 2022d), the framework has Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam as members, representing 40% of the world's GDP and 60% of the world's population.

Hence, in directing the United States as an economic power in the Indo-Pacific, IPEF's flexible economic strategy is to strengthen relations, promote economic stability, and expand the US economic leadership in the region.

According to the official document of the block (United States, 2022d), a change is seen in the pattern of economic engagement aimed at incorporating new challenges. It should be noted that the IPEF is not a free trade treaty, as it does not discriminate against market access or tariff reductions, nor does it require congressional approval, which can be interpreted as a direction towards a more political than an economic approach. Additionally, the high degree of flexibility allows members to agree to only a few rules/pillars, which enabled the US to take quick and direct action in the region.

Considered a new international economic engagement pillar in the Indo-Pacific, the initiative is compared to Trans-Pacific Partnership's replacement, from which the United States withdrew in January 2017, under the Trump's administration.

At the same time, it is also understood as a confrontation with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a free trade agreement between the Asia-Pacific States under China's leadership and which has 15 member countries representing about 30% of the world's population and 30% of global GDP, making it the largest trading bloc in history.

According to Ward (2022), the IPEF framework contains notable geopolitical victories for the US, such as:

- India's inclusion (distinguishing it from RCEP, from which India withdrew in 2020) and South Korea (constituting the first structure in that Tokyo and Seoul will work together in an Indo-Pacific context) among the signatories;
- Strengthening relations with Japan; and
- The US security allies strengthening in the region (Australia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand), including QUAD members.

In Sterling's view (Sterling, 2022), in addition to the expected concrete and material benefits, this agreement would demarcate one more factor away from the failed Washington Consensus towards a new and stronger paradigm of government linked to the Cornwall Consensus.

By presenting Indo-Pacific countries with an alternative to China's approach, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework signals the beginning of competition within global institutions between the US and China (Tan, 2022), being widely seen as a US effort to combat China's influence in the Asia-Pacific region (Bo-Eun, 2022), especially when considering Asian countries' importance at the centre of the region's supply chains.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi criticised the initiative as an attempt at economic decoupling, provoking surveillance, creating divisions, inciting confrontation, and aiming to erase the achievements and momentum of peace and development promoted by regional countries with joint efforts. (China, 2022)

In other words, the New Geopolitics of Containment gains another structuring element with the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, since it would mean security together with the economy that would drive the US engagement to combat and contain China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Final considerations**

This article aimed to present the US New Geopolitics of Containment, in theory and in practice, mapping through the international policy perpetrated by Joe Biden's administration. In this way, the new US geopolitical groupings and alliances game reactivation and incentives to their traditional partners were analysed as an instrument for blocking and containing China's political, military, economic, and ideological power in the international system.

The US international policy-makers have torn between engaging and containing China since the end of the Cold War. In the latter view, it would be a threat and a competitor in global hegemony, but it would have domestic contradictions and economic vulnerabilities that could be exploited.

As a result, simultaneously with global engagement strategy's resumption, the Biden Doctrine has been intensifying the prerogative of controlling China's power, aiming at its socio-political disruption, moving from co-optation via globalisation to containment via geopolitics, in what could be called an "Engagement for Containment" Geostrategy.

The New Geopolitics of Containment is more complex and contingent than the original. Unlike the Soviet model, it is in the process of being built and adapted to the challenges presented by China in the 21st century. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the differences between the instruments applied in the Indo-Pacific strategy: NATO, QUAD, and AUKUS has essentially a military nature (closer to geopolitical) and IPEF aims to be a geo-economics instrument.

In other words, while "*postmodern*" containment has differences in certain aspects from its predecessor (such as the implementation of new military technology, new generation of warfare, and the scope of global media involvement), it still reflects a key variable in the US international policy.

In short, this revamped strategy is being implemented and developed in an attempt to contain multilateralism, multipolarity, and reorientalisation; to curb globalisation with Chinese characteristics; to disrupt the Belt and Road Initiative; and to derail a Sino-Russian alliance.

That is, despite institutional differences and economic, political and ideological objectives, it is likely that there will be a New Geopolitics of Containment's deepening and continuity based on actions carried out by NATO, QUAD, AUKUS, and IPEF, especially as long as China continues to challenge key *status quo* aspects of the liberal order in the international system.

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