

## ***Section 8 – Relazioni internazionali***

### **Panel 6. Is the Cold War Back? Unfolding the Multiple Shapes of the US-Russia Competition Chairs: Mara Morini, Gabriele Natalizia, Marco Cilento**

The 2014-2018 timeframe experienced the maximum peak of competition between Russia and the US since the end of the Cold War. The Euromaidan protests, Yanukovich's defenestration, the Russian overtake of Crimea, the civil war in Donetsk and Luhansk, the mutual international sanctions, the Kremlin's intervention in Syria, the deployment of four NATO battalion battle groups in Poland and the Baltics, the Russian military exercise "Zapad 2017", the Russiagate and, finally, the description of Russia as a revisionist state in the NSS-17 are just the main steps of a dangerous escalation.

Therefore, when the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev used the "New Cold War" image (MacKinnon 2007; Lucas 2009; Legvold 2014, 2016; Kalb 2015) to depict the US-Russia relations at the Munich Security Conference 2016, it was not out of the blue. To outline the competitive dynamics occurring between Washington and Moscow some others handy labels have been coined, as the "New Twenty Years Crisis" (Sakwa 2008), or the "New Great Game" (Trenin 2014). Even if fascinating, all those representations do not grasp the exceptional nature of the ongoing political reality. They do not say anything about its role within the wider challenge against the unipolar system or its influence on the domestic political processes.

As far as the latter are concerned the Russian presidential election 2018 (March 18th) can be labelled as "expecting the expected" since Vladimir Putin's indisputable rule in the country will last till 2024. So, which virtues (opportunities) and vices (risks) do the Russian presidential system represent for its political development and relationship to the West?

Differently from the full-scale competitions of the bipolar system, the US-Russia competition finds its main goals in Washington's will to preserve the unipolar moment and in Moscow's search for the great power status recognition. Moreover, it is mainly rooted to the Post-soviet space, where the Kremlin can exploit the "weight" of its geographical proximity. However, this dynamic is affecting the closest areas to the Russian borders, as Eastern Europe and Middle East, and is also emerging in Western Europe. By contrast, similarly to the Cold War period, the current confrontation is widening its spectrum. Reflecting on its evolution allows us to shed new light on many of its aspects:

- the struggle for democratic enlargement/retrenchment;
- proxy wars;
- cyberwars;
- the external influences on presidential and parliamentary elections;
- analyses on the Russian electoral cycle 2016-2018;
- the use of social and traditional media for political propaganda and disinformation;
- the support to pro-Russian or anti-Russian parties/factions within the Post-soviet space, Europe and Middle East.

To unfold the multiple shapes of the US-Russia competition and to advance new interpretations on it, our panel welcomes papers with theoretical, quantitative or qualitative approaches, as well as those based in the International relations or Comparative politics field of research. We hope to divide the panel into two sessions, to distinguish the real competitive dynamics from the hype and thereby contribute to a more nuanced discussion about its potential effects.