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**Reconfiguring Power Dynamics: The Impact of Donald
Trump's Foreign Policy on the Middle East (2017-2021)**

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DECLARATION

We hereby declare that this thesis entitled, “Reconfiguring Power Dynamics: The Impact of Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy on the Middle East (2017-2021)”, is the product of our own research efforts and all the sources we quoted from have been duly acknowledged by means of references.

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late father, my first teacher, my mother, my small family, and everyone who encouraged me to continue studying the English language.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses foreign policy under the President Donald Trump administration regarding the Middle East from 2017 to 2021, unpacking its role and the extent to which it reshaped the power balance of and regional alliances. This study is based on the assertion that the approach adopted by the Trump administration, based on the “America First” slogan, has contributed significantly to fundamental changes in how the United States handles key issues such as the Iranian nuclear issue, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This study employs an analytical approach to understand the various dimensions of these transformations and their political and ideological motivations by analysing the crucial decisions made by the US administration at the time. It also seeks to measure the variant geopolitical repercussions of these policies on both regional and international actors, as well as their impact on the nature of strategic interactions within the region. The study's findings indicate that Trump's policy was not just a temporary practice, but rather constituted a new strategic direction characterized by both pragmatism and bias in favor of certain specific allies that the U.S. deems worthy, leading to a redrawing of the network between regional alliances and the undermining of certain pillars of traditional US foreign policy that had been precedent thought the Middle East. The conclusion in this research is that the future continuation of these policies across upcoming US administrations and the long-term effects on regional stability should be investigated further.

Keywords: Donald Trump, U.S. Foreign Policy, Middle East, Arab-Israeli Conflict, Iran

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**GENERAL
INTRODUCTION**

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

The Middle East is considered one of the most sensitive and complex geopolitical regions in the international system due to its strategic location and rich underground, which is abundant with oil, gas, and natural resources. Its long history witnessed political, ideological religious, and cultural struggles. Over the years it has been a hotbed of conflict and strife, attracting Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Islamic conquests and modern colonialism. It is a center of global power politics, particularly today for the United States, which has maintained a presence in the region, directly through military bases and indirectly through support for a wide range of regimes, since the end of World War II. US involvement has ranged from military alliances and strategic interventions to economic and technological cooperation, diplomatic initiatives, partnerships, and security cooperation. Nonetheless, in the wake of Donald Trump's triumph in 2017's US presidential polls, significant shifts have emerged in US foreign policy toward the Arab world and the Middle East. President Trump and his administration have adopted a more assertive, unilateral, racist, partisan, and transactional approach than their predecessors. At the core of this shift was the "America First" doctrine, which prioritized America's immediate economic and security interests, even at the expense of established alliances and multilateral commitments made by previous administrations and presidents. This approach was reflected in numerous decisions related to the Middle East and the Arab world in general. He withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a historic and previously unimaginable recognition, and oversaw the normalization agreements between several Arab states and Israel, collectively known as the Abraham Accords.

1. Rationale of The Study:

The topic "Reshaping Power Dynamics: The Impact of Donald Trump's Foreign Policy on the Middle East (2017-2021)" is of academic importance because it addresses a crucial historical phase in American foreign policy and the Middle East. For us, this topic represents a turning point. Our choice of this topic stems from objective and research considerations drawn from the history of contemporary civilization, a period that witnessed a major shift in American policies toward the Middle East. This shift should be addressed because of its significance and the significant threat it poses to the region. It also includes attempts to circumvent the Palestinian issue, the focus of Arab and Islamic interest, explain its gravity, and warn of its consequences. It also aims to understand American history and its transformations, provide a deeper understanding of the American political system and its foreign policies, as well as global and regional policies and the ideological and liberal backgrounds that govern the conflict, to understand, control, direct, and confront its dangers. The subjective reasons lie in the research trends toward such academic topics related to the Middle East and the United States, as the center of power and control. We are concerned with this historic movement. Trump's Middle East policy was not a series of isolated decisions, but rather an expression of a new vision of international relations based on bilateral deals and short-term gains. This vision often ignored the complexity of regional balances, the legacy of historical alliances, and the broader consequences of American actions for regional stability.

2. Significance of the Study:

Trump's Middle East policy was a series of biased decisions that altered previous concepts based on respect for international law and previous agreements. This poses a direct threat to the Arab countries, of which we are a part. Enlightening decision-makers with analysis and explanation of the danger of negative changes in American foreign policy, and promoting

preparedness, caution, alignment, and consultation. Providing the university library with new references on the subject and bridging the knowledge gap in the specialty. Exposing the danger of the coming transformations in the Middle East and the further complexity of the Palestinian issue, rather than achieving detente and peace. Changes in American foreign policy and the imposition of realist policies, which are tools for resolving disputes and promoting cooperation. The Arab division over the Palestinian issue, the issue of dealing with Israel, and the normalisation issue.

The issue of Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state and Zionist intransigence with the American bias and support for Israel in various fields at the expense of the Palestinians and Arab and Islamic countries, especially Iran.

3. Literary Review:

Many references address our topic, including the book by Professors:

- **Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy* (2007).**

This book examines the role of the Israeli lobby in American foreign policy and its effect on political decisions regarding the Middle East, in particular the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and the distortion of foreign policy in favor of Israel. It defines the concept of the lobby, then the Israel lobby, and the influence of individuals and groups within the United States, and then its influence on directing American policies, waging wars, and pressuring countries. This is detrimental to the interests of the American people, especially Syria, Iran, Palestine, and Egypt. The authors emphasize that these policies have harmed America's reputation and interests, and that anyone who criticizes Israel is accused of anti-Semitism and is subject to punishment and exclusion. The authors call for a review and rebalancing of relations with Israel and the countries of the Middle East, emphasizing realism and balance.

- **Cohen, Raymond. *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Volume V: America in the Middle East* (2018)**

This book examines the history of American relations with the Middle East, with a view of how American policy has influenced the region, including the Trump presidency. It discusses the historical roots of relations with the Middle East, especially after World War II and the discovery of oil. It discusses the Cold War period and the revolutions in Iran and Egypt. It then touches on the transformation after the Cold War and the Iraq War. It analyzes the Palestinian-Israeli issue and its various stages and trajectories. It also discusses the Arab Spring. It devotes significant space to Trump's first term and his various policies, such as the "Deal of the Century," the Palestinian issue, economic deals, Iran, the Abraham Accords, and normalization

- **Gause, F. Gregory. *The International Relations of the Middle East* (2020)**

This book is a comprehensive reference for understanding the evolution of regional dynamics in the Middle East. It provides a context for understanding the impact of US policy under the Trump administration. Its analysis is brilliant in the context of the influence of external factors on internal ones. Its model is the Middle East, focusing on the Trump era. It compares powerful Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Lebanon. It discusses foreign interventions in the Middle East, viewing the United States as a model for intervention by pressuring Iran and Palestine and supporting Israel. It also discusses the power shifts after the Arab revolutions between fallen regimes and those that remain, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Syria. It discusses the role of Iran and Turkey vis-à-vis the United States. It addresses the crisis of the nation-state and the rise of unofficial actors. It also discusses the political economy of wars and how they have become profitable for some parties.

- **Khalil, Issam, and Nader Qabbani. Trump's Foreign Policy and the Middle East: Changing Geopolitical Dynamics (2020)**

This book provides a meticulous analysis of the political policies pursued by the dominant powers in the Middle East, specifically the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and its redefinition of privileged relations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It also addresses the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and its impact on the Arab and Islamic world, as well as the reshaping of concepts in the Middle East. It analyzes the "Deal of the Century" and the marginalization of the Palestinians. It also examines how Trump prioritizes Saudi Arabia and Qatar because their interests are stronger, as they are wealthy countries with significant financial surpluses. It also writes about how Trump handled the Qatar blockade crisis, the Yemen war, putting pressure on Iran, withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear agreement, normalizing relations with Israel, and the Abraham Accords. Finally, it recommends redrawing the United States' role in the Middle East on the basis of military presence, cooperation, and a clearer definition of interests and gains.

4. The research problem of The Study:

The United States' power derives from many factors that have made it dominant, and its policies hold significant weight in the Middle East, beginning with alliances, partnerships, ideological affiliation, and decision-making. We find that it always sides with Israel at the expense of the Arab states. This is due to many different factors, and its intervention in favor of one party will have an impact on the other.

How did Donald Trump's foreign policy between 2017 and 2021 affect the geopolitical balance and power dynamics in the Middle East? And how did his administration's focus on unilateralism, economic deals, and alliances with key regional actors impact traditional alliances, regional enmities, and stability in the region?

Under the main problem falls a set of questions to analyze, deconstruct, explain and understand the subject more:

- What are the most important policies pursued by Trump in the Middle East?
- What are the most important political transformations that the Middle East witnessed during Trump's first term?
- Have these policies succeeded in the Middle East?

To answer these questions, we propose the following hypotheses:

5. Hypotheses:

To answer the main problem, we propose two basic hypotheses:

- Donald Trump's foreign policy between 2017 and 2021, which focused on unilateralism, economic deals, and selective alliances, may have reshaped the geopolitical balance in the Middle East by undermining traditional alliances and fostering a new regional polarization, impacting regional stability and conflict dynamics.
- The "Deal of the Century" and the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital may have exacerbated polarization and the Arab-Israeli conflict, negatively impacting prospects for peace and regional stability.

6. Methodology of The Research:

The multiplicity and diversity of research methods make the process of choosing a method important and difficult, as there are factors that affect the choice, such as the nature of the topic, the researcher's ideological and intellectual orientations, the field of research, the nature of the data and information, and even the problem that is to be solved. Therefore, we decided to choose the descriptive method, the historical method, and the case study method.

- **Descriptive Method:** We use the descriptive approach because the subject of the study is to describe the phenomenon as it is in reality, and to interpret and analyze it in terms of the agent, interpret the characteristics, and determine the relationships between them without changing them. Here we find a match between the concept of the descriptive approach and the subject of our study in that it is realistic and a contemporary subject, and relies on observation and analysis, and it helps us describe phenomena and find solutions and proposals.
- **The historical method** is used in historical studies, and here we are studying a historical topic that has an impact on the present and future of policies practiced by US President Trump related to the Middle East. The topic is open to analysis and historical interaction with it regarding American history and the Middle East.
- **Case study approach:** Here we study the Middle East region, specifically the group of Arab countries, Iran and Turkey, as separate and distinct geographical units.

7. Structure of the Dissertation:

To achieve these objectives, the dissertation is structured into two primary chapters. The first chapter takes into consideration the political and ideological environment under which Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East operates by analyzing the underlying beliefs that guided his administration and the internal and strategic forces that influenced its policies. The second chapter discusses the significant policy shifts imposed by the Trump administration, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, U.S.-Iran relations, Gulf alliances, military withdrawals, and normalization agreements, with a focus on evaluating these policies' regional and geopolitical consequences.

The significance of the work is not just in its specificity to a recent political era but also an attempt to understand the nature of the change in U.S. involvement in the Middle East.

It aims to assess the consequences of the Trump administration's foreign policy, especially in light of rising regional and international competition for presence in this strategic and unstable region.

CHAPTER ONE:

Foundations of Trump's Middle East Policy

Introduction:

The “America First” policy was launched by Donald Trump during his 2016 presidential campaign and implemented during his first term (2017–2021). It is a populist and nationalist doctrine that puts the U.S. economic, security, and sovereignty interests over multilateral cooperation and engagement. For example, President Woodrow Wilson’s 1916 pledge of neutrality and the noninterventionist America First Committee opposing U. S. involvement in World War II. Under Trump, this modern iteration emphasized economic protectionism and had a relatively sceptical view of America's global alliances. The link between “American carnage” and the need for lessening the USA’s international commitments, renegotiating NAFTA and similar deals, and prioritizing unilateralism over multilateral norms is clear. This chapter analyzes the “America First” ideological foundation in terms of its economic nationalism, security approach implications, and rejection of multilateralism and globalization. It examines the role of Trump’s aides (Jared Kushner, Mike Pompeo, and John Bolton) and domestic factors (lobbyists like AIPAC and electoral considerations) in shaping U.S. foreign policy. With a special focus on the Middle East, this chapter also examines how the doctrine redefined American global role through bilateral deals and energy security by focusing on the strategic alliances with allies such as Israel and Gulf states while confronting geopolitical and strategic adversaries like Iran.

1. Ideological Framework: The "America First" doctrine: Prioritizing U.S. economic and security interests over multilateralism:

"America First" is a term that refers to a populist political movement in the US that puts the nation's interests at home ahead of its needs abroad, manifesting in the U.S extreme involvement abroad through adopting a non-interventionist, nationalistic stance and defending the US economy through protectionist trade policies. The idea origin traces back when President Woodrow Wilson promised to keep the US out of World War I during his 1916

campaign. Similar demands were made during the interwar years by the America First Committee, a pressure group that opposed American involvement in World War II.

Later, during his 2016 election campaign and throughout his presidency (2017–2021), President Donald Trump brought back the slogan, focusing on reducing the United States' international commitments and withdrawing from certain agreements and organizations. This policy has led some of his critics to describe it as not “America first” but “America Alone,” due to its isolationist tendencies. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/America_First_\(policy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/America_First_(policy))).

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump portrayed the United States as a country that faces serious threats, is plagued by chaos, violence, and deteriorating economic and social conditions, warning that it was on the verge of losing everything. In his acceptance speech for the Republican nomination, he emphasized that only he could reform the existing order, pledging that "Americanism" would remain the core of political doctrine, not global trends. He also ran his campaign as the "law and order" candidate and a champion of marginalized voices who are often ignored. In his first speech as a president on January 20, 2017, Trump reiterated his campaign's messages about America's crisis and decline, he talked about what he described as "American carnage," which he showed through the existence of abandoned factories, economic problems, and rising crime, while promising to usher in a new political era focused on improving security, strengthening the economy, and rebuilding domestic reconstruction capabilities. (Jenna Johnson, 2016).

2. Economic Nationalism:

The economic concept of Trump's policy, known as Trumpism, is based on refocusing on American national interests by strengthening the domestic economy, particularly through infrastructure development and encouraging investments within the United States. This approach is based on creating jobs domestically, favoring confrontational policies and self-

interest over traditional ideological alliances and external support. With Trump's victory in the November 2016 election, the era of political consensus that had prevailed since the late 1970s ended. This consensus combined liberal and neoconservative tendencies, influenced by trends such as economic openness, free movement of individuals, and privatization. This was due to long-standing economic failures, including declining investment in the transportation and energy sectors and weak labor protections. It is noteworthy that centrist policymakers in the United States (such as the Clinton Democrats), as well as in Britain (such as the New Labour Party), and several European left-wing movements, have largely adopted the principles of this liberal approach, based on the idea of "free trade and mutual benefit" proposed by Milton Friedman. ([https://www.analysefinanciere.org/trumponomie/- 12 -03- 2024](https://www.analysefinanciere.org/trumponomie/-12-03-2024)).

The economic policies of the first Trump administration featured several notable features, including tax cuts for individuals and businesses, efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), trade protectionism, deregulation of the energy and financial sectors, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. These policies reduced federal taxes while increasing public spending, causing the budget deficit and national debt to rise significantly. Although Trump inherited a strong economy from the Obama administration, with a labor market near full employment and record levels of household income and wealth, he imposed protectionist tariffs, particularly on Chinese imports.

On the other hand, the number of Americans without health insurance increased by 4.6 million during his first three years in office, while tax cuts favored high-income earners and failed to deliver on their promises to improve economic justice. This exacerbated income inequality and negatively impacted resources allocated to essential programs like health insurance and Social Security.

Trump took office for the first time at the height of the longest economic expansion in American history. The 128-month (10.7-year) economic expansion that began in June 2009 abruptly ended at a peak in February 2020, with the U.S. entering a recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. unemployment rate, which had hit a 50-year low (3.5%) in February 2020, hit a 90-year high (14.7%) just two months later, matching Great Depression levels. In response, Trump signed the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) on March 27, 2020 which helped maintain family incomes and savings during the crisis, but contributed to a \$3.1 trillion budget deficit (14.9% GDP) for fiscal year 2020, the largest since 1945 relative to the size of the economy. Trump left office with 3 million fewer jobs in the U.S. than when he took office, making Trump the only modern U.S. president to leave office with a smaller workforce though this was, in part, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout his presidency, Trump mischaracterized the economy as the best in American history.

Despite saying during the 2016 campaign that he would eliminate the national debt in eight years, Trump as president approved large increases in government spending, as well as the 2017 tax cut. As a result, the federal budget deficit increased by almost 50%, to nearly \$1 trillion (\$1.18 trillion in 2023) in 2019. Under Trump, the U.S. national debt increased by 39%, reaching \$27.75 trillion by the end of his term; the U.S. debt-to-GDP ratio also hit a post-World War II high.

Analysts argued that there is little evidence that either the economy or employment was impacted in the first 2.5 years of his term despite the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) and other policies. Additionally, a review by the Tax Policy Center indicated that the TCJA had little impact on business investment. (https://en.wikipedia.org.translate.google/wiki/Economic_policy_of_the_first_Donald_Trump_administration?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=ar&_x_tr_hl=ar&_x_tr_pto=rq)

The doctrine promotes protectionist trade policies such as tariffs and the renegotiation or withdrawal from multinational trade agreements. The U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 was a major manifestation of this policy (Rachman, Gideon, 2016, 79-80). Trump also renegotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA),

Replacing it with the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) to secure better terms for American workers (Brands, H., 2018, 4-3). Trump considers all agreements that do not serve the United States unacceptable and seeks to withdraw from them.

3. Security and Sovereignty:

It is often associated with the claim that the Congress of Westphalia was the first occasion on which ‘all the major powers of an international system’ joined together to conclude a definitive peace for the system as a whole. Equally common is the idea of the territorial state, with an emphasis upon the defensibility of external borders and exclusive jurisdiction within these borders. Sometimes this is given a distinctly Weberian twist, as is evident in the description of the Westphalian state system as ‘a system of territorially bounded sovereign states, each equipped with its centralized administration and possessing a virtual monopoly on the legitimate use of force to these could add the ‘Westphalian norm of nonintervention the idea that Westphalia created a balance of power and even the presumption of some form of congruence between state and society. In most of these formulations it is Westphalian sovereignty in one guise or another that forms the core of the model. (Robert Schuett and Peter M. R, 2015, p 09).

Under “America First,” national security is tightly linked to border control and military strength. This includes restricting immigration and increasing defense budgets. The 2017 National Security Strategy emphasized defending U.S. sovereignty and rebuilding military capabilities (White House, 2017, pp11-15). This approach aligns with what Walter

Russell Mead (2017) calls the “Jacksonian” tradition in American politics which favors strong national government.

Defense and skepticism toward foreign entanglements. When Barack Obama launched his campaign for the United States presidency in 2008, he famously promised to deliver "change we believe in." Many Americans assumed, and even hoped, that he would be a "transformational" president if elected. One key area of assumption was foreign policy. This perception was based on candidate Obama's campaign rhetoric, in which he sought to distinguish himself and his prospective foreign policy not only from that of President George W. Bush, but also from that of his Republican opponent, Senator John McCain. Throughout 2008, Obama indicated that his administration would seek to "renew American leadership" by correcting the unilateral interventionist policies of the Bush administration, most notably those related to the Iraq War and the "War on Terror."

However, Obama's foreign policy after winning the White House has sometimes puzzled critics and supporters alike. For example, descriptions of the administration's foreign policy have ranged from abandoning the "democracy promotion tradition" in American foreign policy, to "ideological pragmatism," to "incoherence," to even "realism."(<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2017.1347448>).

4. Skepticism of Multilateralism:

The doctrine often criticises international organisations like the United Nations and alliances such as NATO, claiming they constrain American freedom of action. For instance, Trump repeatedly threatened to reduce U.S. funding for NATO, arguing that other members were not contributing their fair share.

The United States and our 27 allies are strongly committed to NATO's three core tasks of collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. In pursuit of these tasks,

NATO seeks a range of capabilities and other resources from allies. These capabilities are provided mostly from allied national inventories, but also in the form of military personnel assigned to the NATO Command Structure and a range of common-funded communications, command, control and intelligence capabilities to support that NATO Command Structure.

Like all allies, the United States does not actually transfer forces to NATO until the Supreme Allied Commander Europe requests them for a particular NATO-led operation that has been authorized by NATO's North Atlantic Council. (Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, 2016, pp 07-08).

NATO has helped advance freedom and democracy in key regions of interest to the United States, thereby also advancing a key US strategic interest: promoting US values among friends, allies, and potential adversaries.

NATO's Strategic Value Historically, the United States has expended immense blood and treasure responding to aggression overseas. This was especially true in the conflicts that dominated the twentieth century. Through deterrence, NATO and other US alliances have served important roles in preventing these bloody and resource-draining conflicts from reoccurring. The deterrent value of the alliance has increased in the past few years, in light of Russia's newly aggressive posture. (HANS BINNENDIJK AND MAGNUS NORDENMAN, 2018, pp 03-05).

5. Unilateralism over Globalism:

During the Trump administration (2017-2020), the US government not only withdrew from a series of multilateral international agreements and organizations but also threatened its allies with revision, while the international community remained committed to upholding multilateralism in various ways. Diplomatic behavior is in stark contrast to this reality. First, the Trump administration's "withdrawal" diplomatic behavior, in some cases, indicates that its

essence is unilateralism, which has numerous negative implications for the United States. Moreover, the current international community consensus still supports multilateralism. China, some regional organizations, and many countries remain committed to upholding multilateralism. Finally, this comparison demonstrates that, in the current context of globalization and global issues, countries must actively advocate for the concept of multilateralism and take practical measures to promote cooperation and integration among countries. (Wenzhu Dong, 2022, p 664)

The “America First” stance rejects globalism in favor of unilateral actions. It emphasizes that the U.S. should not be bound by global norms or international institutions when those conflict with national interests (JOSEPH S. NYE, JR, 2017, pp 10–16). The “America First” stance rejects globalism in favor of unilateral actions. It emphasizes that the U.S. should not be bound by global norms or international institutions when those conflict with national interests (JOSEPH S. NYE, JR, 2017, pp 10–16)

Although the United States has been the leader and advocate of globalization, it includes trade, financial, and economic liberalization, as well as political conditions imposed on states and various global and international institutions to implement the terms of globalization. This view challenges the liberal international.

Transactional Diplomacy: A Focus on Bilateral Deals and Economic Gains over Traditional Alliances

Introduction:

Recent decades have witnessed significant changes in global diplomatic patterns, most notably the emergence of what is known as reciprocal diplomacy, which focuses on concluding bilateral deals and achieving immediate economic gains, transcending shared values and traditional alliances. This trend reflects a new kind of pragmatism in foreign policy, where

success is assessed based on short-term practical outcomes, rather than ongoing commitments or long-term loyalties.

1. Definition of Transactional Diplomacy:

In his book "Diplomacy," Henry Kissinger looks at the evolution of international relations and diplomacy within a chronological and strategic context, by focusing on analyzing the ideal Western model since the seventeenth century. Kissinger says that the function of diplomacy is not only limited to managing and resolving conflicts and disputes, but also includes keeping a balance of power between competing international actors, protecting the state's interests and preventing them from being involved into war. His vision is based on upholding the principle of balance of power and preserving state sovereignty as a fundamental foundation of diplomacy.

He is a member of the realist school and believes that realism is better for managing international relations than idealism and moral values. He also believes in the role of powerful individuals who have changed the course of their countries for the better. As for the United States, its diplomacy has oscillated between isolationism and intervention, and he advocates adopting a well-thought-out policy instead of moral idealism. (Henry Kissinger, 1994, pp 137-167). Transactional diplomacy refers to an approach in international relations that prioritizes short-term, concrete exchanges of benefits between states, often neglecting or sidelining the traditional values and principles upon which long-term alliances are usually built. Under this model, national interests primarily economic or commercial take precedence, with little concern for long-term political or strategic consequences.

According to Henry Kissinger, this method "turns diplomacy into a tool of direct bargaining rather than a means to build stable international structures" (Henry Kissinger, 1994, p 716-721). Reciprocal diplomacy refers to a form of diplomatic engagement where mutual

benefits and actions are exchanged between states. It emphasizes equality, balance, and the principle of "give and take" in international relations. This approach promotes cooperation and trust by ensuring that diplomatic actions are met with equivalent responses. (G. R. Berridge, 2015, p 142)

2. Characteristics of Transactional Diplomacy:

- **Priority on Economic Gains:** Emphasis on trade exchanges, investment agreements, and deals that yield immediate financial benefits.

- **Focus on Bilateral Relations:** Preference for direct agreements between two states rather than engagement through multilateral institutions such as the European Union or the United Nations.

- **Short-Term Perspective:** Little attention is given to building enduring partnerships, with a focus instead on immediate returns.

- **Conditionality and Political Leverage:** Support and cooperation are offered based on direct reciprocation, often using tools like economic sanctions or trade threats to achieve objectives.

- **Mutual Respect and Equality:** Reciprocal diplomacy is grounded in the idea that all states are equal and should be treated as such. It rejects hierarchical or unilateral diplomacy. (G. R. Berridge, 2015, p 142)

- **Principle of Reciprocity:** The core principle is the exchange of equivalent actions or benefits. For example, if one country opens its markets, the other does the same. (Barston, R. P, 2014, p 93)

- **Trust Building and Stability:** Reciprocal diplomacy fosters long-term relationships through trust and consistency, often reducing the likelihood of conflict. (Hamilton, Keith, and Richard Langhorne, 2011, p 178)

- **Cultural and Educational Exchanges:** Reciprocal diplomacy can extend beyond politics to cultural diplomacy, where nations exchange students, artists, or scientists to build soft power. (Nye, J. S. *Soft Power*, 2004, p 56)

3. Real-World Examples:

- **Trump's Foreign Policy (2017–2021):** Embodied transactional diplomacy by renegotiating trade agreements (e.g., replacing NAFTA with USMCA) and linking military support to increased financial contributions from allies like South Korea. (Schweller, R. L, 2018, p 188–194)

- **U.S.-China Relations:** The United States engaged with China through direct trade negotiations, imposing heavy tariffs to pressure China into economic concessions.

Criticisms. (Bown, C. P, 2020)

- **Erosion of Traditional Alliances:** Analysts like Joseph Nye argue that an overreliance on transactional diplomacy weakens trust among traditional allies, thus threatening international stability. (Nye, J. S. *Soft Power*, 2004, p 139)

- **Promotion of Economic Nationalism:** This approach can fuel economic nationalism, which increases the likelihood of trade wars and undermines the liberal international order.

- **Strategic Short-sightedness:** By focusing solely on immediate gains, states may overlook the necessity of building strategic relationships that are critical to long-term national security.

Transactional diplomacy represents a significant shift in international relations in the twenty-first century. While it may offer short-term economic and political benefits, it also carries long-term strategic risks that may destabilize the international system based on cooperation and multilateral alliances.

During his first term, US President Donald Trump's diplomacy was marked by an unusual style that favored direct talks between the US and other countries over US commitments to traditional international alliances like NATO or the Paris Climate Agreement. His foreign policy focused on achieving direct economic gains, and the "America First" principle often prevailed over multilateral commitments.

First: Bilateralism as the Foundation of Diplomacy Trump relied on direct bilateral relations with countries rather than working within multilateral frameworks. For example:

In relations with North Korea, he preferred direct negotiations with Kim Jong-un without relying on the United Nations or regional powers. With regard to the European Union, he downplayed the importance of the union as an institution, focusing on individual agreements with countries such as Germany and France. (Nye, Joseph S, 2020, pp 198-202)

Second: Economic Gains as a Driver of Foreign Policy Trump viewed foreign policy through the lens of economic deals. Examples of this include:

The trade war with China: imposing massive tariffs to force China to renegotiate trade relations, which was made apparent by renegotiating NAFTA and replacing it with the USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement) to obtain more favourable terms for the United States.

The United States withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) because it harmed American workers. (Bolton, John, 2020, p 143-147).

Third: Ignoring Traditional Alliances, in which Trump threatened to withdraw from NATO unless member states increased their defence spending. The United States withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement, claiming that it harmed the American economy. He expressed disdain for the role of the United Nations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Ikenberry, G. John, 2018, p 7–23)

Trump's diplomacy represented a shift away from the traditional American approach to foreign policy, replacing multilateral alliances with bilateral negotiations and focusing on immediate economic returns. While this approach provided the United States with some short-term gains, it raised questions about America's strategic sustainability and global standing with the most prominent example of this trend is US policy under President Donald Trump (2017–2021), who adopted the "America First" principle, prioritizing bilateral trade deals and immediate economic gains over long-term diplomatic commitments. This can be categorised as one of the most prominent policies that embody reciprocal diplomacy during his term:

-US withdrawal from multilateral agreements:

He withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017, It includes 11 countries: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. justifying the decision by saying that the agreement did not serve American workers. (Wright, Thomas, 2017, p109). He also withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement, considering it an economic burden on American companies and industries (Bremmer, Ian, 2018, p115). The agreement includes commitments from all countries to reduce their emissions and work together to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and calls on countries to strengthen their commitments over time. The agreement provides a path for developed countries to assist developing countries in their climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, while establishing a framework for transparent monitoring and reporting of countries' climate goals. This Agreement provides a permanent framework that will guide global efforts for decades to come. The goal is to raise countries' climate ambition over time. To reinforce this, the agreement stipulates two five-year reviews. The Paris Agreement represents the beginning of a transition to a low-carbon world, and there is still much more to be done. Implementing the agreement is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

because it provides a roadmap for climate action that will reduce emissions and build resilience to climate change.

Renegotiating trade agreements:

He insisted on renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which resulted in the signing of a new agreement, the USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement), which tightened the terms of trade in favor of the United States (Wright, Thoma, 2017, p 111-112. The agreement aims to establish a free trade area among them, remove tariff barriers, lift tax restrictions, and open the door to trade between the three North American countries, increasing growth and strengthening trade exchanges between them. This will ultimately lead to the creation of the largest consumer region that benefits from the advantages and opportunities of free trade.

Trump's Threat:

During the US election campaign in late 2016, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump threatened to suspend implementation of the agreement and withdraw from it, describing it as a disaster for the American economy and the worst trade agreement ever concluded in the history of the United States. After his election, he temporarily reversed his decision to withdraw and said he had agreed with his Canadian and Mexican counterparts to renegotiate the agreement as soon as possible. Trump said, "Now, if I can't make a fair deal... for the United States, which means a fair deal for our workers and our businesses, I will terminate NAFTA. But we will strongly support renegotiation."

(<https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2017/5/3/%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8%D8%A9%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9%D9%84%D8%7%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%82%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A8> :12_05_2025.)

Trade war with China:

He imposed huge tariffs on Chinese imports in an attempt to pressure Beijing to improve its terms of trade and protect American industries. This move stemmed from a logic of "interest for interest" rather than working within the World Trade Organization. (Rolland, Nadège, 2019, pp45-47)

China is a critical trading partner for the United States but is also a major competitor. China's harmful and unfair economic practices, including trade in illicit goods, use of forced labor, and theft of sensitive technologies pose risks to the U.S. economic and security interests. China is also developing its military capabilities, posing challenges to the U.S. military. Additionally, nearly a third of foreign students and scholars in the U.S. are from China and have made substantial contributions to university research efforts. These students and scholars are involved in developing many of the nation's leading-edge civilian and defense-related technologies. However, there is a concern that some foreign students and scholars will "export" sensitive information to their home countries, which may be hostile to U.S. interests. (https://www.gao.gov/u.s.-china-relations_12-05-2025)

Using aid and security assistance as leverage:

He froze military aid to some countries unless they met certain economic or political demands, as happened with Ukraine in 2019 (the first impeachment case), where he linked military support to achieving personal political gain. Summary of the Addendum. Trump's foreign policies were not driven by values or moral obligations, but rather were based on the principle of profit and loss. Under his presidency, the United States sought to achieve maximum economic benefit with minimum diplomatic obligations. This is the essence of reciprocal diplomacy.

2-Domestic Influences:

Internal Influences on Foreign Policy Decisions:

Internal factors have a substantial impact on a country's foreign policy. These are the domestic factors that can either curtail or propel a country's international actions. Hill argues that foreign policy cannot be properly analyzed without taking into account domestic pressures such as public opinion, economic performance, government ideology and political stability (Hill 2003). (Hill, 2003, p 45). Public opinion is another internal force in the sense that democratic states, such as China, have to listen to people's voices and try to retain power through elections. For example, the public's attitude toward military intervention has affected American decisions to use force abroad multiple times in the past. effecting foreign policy decisions, such as the withdrawal from Vietnam and later hesitancy regarding involvement in Syria. (Risse-Kappen, T, 1991, 479–512).

Economic conditions are another significant internal determinant. States affected by economic decline will seek to gain the most out of their deals and are likely to adopt a more transactional approach. As noted by Hameiri and Jones, the government is under pressure from internal economic actors due to fiscal constraints and the need for market access. (Hameiri & Jones, 2016, p.79). Political ideology defines the type of diplomacy a nation employs. Governments with a nationalistic or populist orientation focus on sovereignty and self-reliance rather than multilateral cooperation. For instance, the change in the US foreign policy during Trump's presidency was dictated by the domestic ideology of "America first." (Dueck, C, 2020, p 122).

Finally, institutional and governmental stability directly impact diplomatic coherence. Fragile or transitional governments often struggle to maintain consistent foreign policies due

to shifting internal alliances or leadership changes. As Hudson (2007) argues, internal political fragmentation weakens a state's international reliability. (Hudson, V. M, 2007, p38).

1-The role of key advisors (Jared Kushner, Mike Pompeo, John Bolton) in shaping policy:

Justin Frank, one of the most prominent psychologists who has written about Trump's personality, explained that Trump grew up in a violent environment, which made him prone to authoritarian and impulsive behavior. He described Trump as "internally confused, always trying to prove he's the strongest in the room." He also lacks even the most basic grasp of strategic science, and deals with major crises based on emotions and short-term gains. He emphasized that dealing with Trump requires high political intelligence and a delicate balance between national interests and avoiding provoking him. He considered the Trump administration a major challenge for Arab countries. (<https://www.skynewsarabia.com/world/1789600-20-05-2025>).

1-Jared Kushner: He is the son-in-law of former US President Donald Trump and the husband of Ivanka Trump. He was a senior advisor to the president in the Trump administration (2017-2021). His personality, in turn, has been a factor of great importance for both American politics and international diplomacy on Middle Eastern issues (e.g., the “deal of the century” and the Abraham Accords). Kushner’s personality is divided into General traits which are:

Pragmatic (utilitarian): He focused on economic interests and deals more than ideological principles, which is in line with transactional diplomacy.

Behind-the-scenes diplomat: He rarely appeared in the media, but played a pivotal role in negotiations behind closed doors.

Technocratic and unconventional: He was not a professional diplomat, but his role as an advisor was based on his insights as a businessman and negotiator.

Prominent roles reflecting "*transactional diplomacy*":

Abraham Accords: He contributed to the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, with promises of economic and security deals.

Deal of the Century (Trump Peace Plan): He proposed an economic-first solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, reflecting a focus on "deals" rather than political or historical values.

Documentation: In his book "Breaking History: A White House Memoir" (published in 2022), Kushner provides a personal account of his political roles, particularly in the Middle East, which clearly demonstrates his "transactional" view of diplomacy. In which he says "I approached diplomacy the same way I approached business: by focusing on shared interests and delivering tangible results." (Kushner, J.Breaking, 2022, p184).

2-Mike Pompeo: A Documented Biography

Michael Richard Pompeo is one of the most prominent figures in American politics in recent decades. Born on December 30, 1963, he graduated from West Point Military Academy in 1986, where he ranked first in his class. He served in the US Army until 1991, reaching the rank of captain. He then earned a Juris Doctor degree from Harvard University, where he served on the editorial board of the Harvard Law Review.

Pompeo entered politics through the US Congress in 2010, where he was elected as a representative from Kansas and re-elected to three consecutive terms until 2017. During this time, he was an active member of the Intelligence Committee and the Benghazi investigation committee, where his positions were characterized by sharp criticism of the Barack Obama administration. In January 2017, he was appointed Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and then became Secretary of State in April 2018 following the dismissal of Rex Tillerson. During his tenure as Secretary of State, he played a key role in the "maximum

pressure" policy on Iran, following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in 2018. (Mike Pompeo, 2023, PP 15–18-32-101-105).

Pompeo set twelve conditions for Iran to enter into a new agreement; all related to disarmament and limiting Tehran's regional influence (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/after-the-deal-a-new-iran-strategy/index.html>). That same year, the US embassy in Israel was moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a move strongly supported by the Trump administration despite international criticism. (Mike Pompeo, 2023, p 117). Pompeo also actively contributed to sponsoring the Abraham Accords, under which Israel normalized relations with Arab countries such as the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco.

Pompeo's position on China was clear in his memoirs, in which he considered the Chinese Communist Party the greatest strategic threat to the United States and sharply criticized the Vatican's position on the persecution of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, saying, "Pope Francis has failed morally In his memoir, he also detailed the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, explaining that he participated in planning the operation, which he considered necessary "to save American lives and deter the Iranian regime

Regarding his relationship with Saudi Arabia, Pompeo defended Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, describing him as "an exceptional leader seeking to modernize his country despite Western media attacks."

After leaving office, he joined the Hudson Institute as a political analyst and subsequently released his political memoir, *Never Give an Inch*, in 2023, in which he shares his views on American foreign policy and various international leaders, including President Trump himself. (Mike Pompeo, 2023, p 152-157- 190–194.).

3- John Bolton (born November 20, 1948, Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.) is an American government official who served as national security adviser (2018–19) to United States

President Donald Trump. Bolton previously was the interim U.S. ambassador to the United Nations (2005–06). Bolton was educated at Yale University (B.A., 1970; J.D., 1974), and much of his subsequent career was spent in government jobs.

A conservative Republican, he began his federal service in the administration of President Ronald Reagan, held positions in the U.S. Agency for International Development and as assistant attorney general (1985–89). From 1989 to 1993, under President George H.W. Bush, he was assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs. During the 1990s Bolton was active in prominent conservative organizations, including the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), at which he was a vice president in 1997–2001, and the Project for the New American Century. He was also an official of the Republican National Committee.

In the administration of the President George W. Bush, Bolton was undersecretary of state for arms control and international security affairs. He supported a number of reversals of U.S. foreign policy positions, including the retraction of support for the International Criminal Court and withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Bolton ran the administration's Proliferation Security Initiative, which attempted to broker bilateral agreements on arms control between the U.S. and partner countries, and in 2001 he succeeded in halting an international conference on biological weapons over verification issues. For a time, he was a member of the U.S. delegation in talks with North Korea, but he was removed in 2003 after he made derogatory comments.

John Bolton Ambassador to the United Nations, 2006.

Although Bolton had supporters, particularly those who advocated a strong unilateral U.S. foreign policy and reform of the UN, there were equally fervent critics. Among the most serious charges against him were that he had consistently pursued his own notions of what U.S. diplomacy should be, even when his views were not consistent with U.S. government policy;

that he had advocated an independent Taiwan despite a long-standing U.S. one-China policy; that he had pressured intelligence analysts to report findings that supported his own views and had attempted to have workers transferred or fired when they did not do so; and that he had given false testimony before Congress in 2003. Bolton commonly scorned the UN as well as international treaties and campaigned against a third term for International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohamed ElBaradei. Indeed, one of Bolton's first actions at the UN was to demand major changes to the draft of a document for reform of the body.

In January 2017, he was appointed Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and then became Secretary of State in April 2018 following the dismissal of Rex Tillerson. During his tenure as Secretary of State, he played a key role in the "maximum pressure" policy on Iran, following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in 2018. (Mike Pompeo, 2023, pp 15-18).

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Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, explaining that he participated in planning the operation, which he considered necessary "to save American lives and deter the Iranian regime."

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During the 2012 presidential election, he served as an adviser to Mitt Romney. In March 2018, President Donald Trump announced that Bolton was to replace Lieutenant. Gen. H.R. McMaster as head of the National Security Council. Bolton assumed the post, which does not require Senate confirmation, the following month. However, he later found himself at odds with Trump, especially concerning North Korea and Iran. While Bolton supported a hard-line approach to the two countries, Trump increasingly seemed to favour negotiations. In September 2019 Bolton stepped down as national security adviser; while Trump claimed that he had asked for Bolton's resignation, Bolton stated that he had offered to leave the post. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations/Organization-and-administration.24-04-2025>)

3-The influence of lobbying groups (e.g., AIPAC) and domestic political considerations.

Press groups, also known as interest groups or pressure groups, play an important role in shaping public policy and making political decisions in democratic societies. These groups seek to influence legislators, decision-makers, and public opinion without seeking political

office. Their activities include political lobbying, public campaigning, litigation, and direct communication with policymakers.

Definition and Classification:

A pressure group is defined as "an organized group that seeks to influence government policy or legislation without aiming to gain political power itself"(Heywood, A, 2013, p273).

Pressure groups are divided into several different and distinct types including :

Interest groups: These represent specific social or economic groups (such as unions or business associations).

General issue groups: These promote a particular cause or principle such as environmental protection or human rights.

Internal and external groups: Internal groups have direct relationships with decision-makers, while external groups rely on public campaigns and protests. (Grant, W, 2000, p13)

Functions of Pressure Groups:

Pressure groups perform several important democratic functions, including:

1. Representation: Provides a voice for groups that are underrepresented in traditional political parties.

2. Participation: Encourages political participation outside of voting.

3. Education: Educates the public and decision-makers about complex or marginalized issues.

4. Policy formulation: Some groups contribute to the formulation of laws through consultations and policy advocacy.

5. Accountability: Monitors government performance and holds officials accountable.

Methods of influence:

Pressure groups use several methods to influence, including:

Direct pressure (lobbying): Through contact with legislators or executive officials.

Public campaigns: Through the media, petitions, and demonstrations.

Legal Action: Filing lawsuits to challenge or uphold laws.

Research and Reporting: Providing information and expertise to decision-makers.

A prominent example of this is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which exerts significant influence on US policy toward Israel. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p 113-131).

Case Studies:

1. **AIPAC (US):** Acts as a pro-Israel lobby. Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) note that AIPAC influences Congress through donations, publishing policy reports, and mobilizing grassroots activists.

2. **Greenpeace (global):** An environmental NGO that uses direct action and political lobbying to raise awareness of environmental issues.

3. **Confederation of British Industry (UK):** An organization that represents corporate interests and lobbies for favorable economic

Criticisms of Pressure Groups:

Although pressure groups are an important component of pluralistic democracy, they have been criticized for:

Undermining democratic equality by giving greater influence to wealthy or influential groups. Pressure can lead to corruption or the "hijacking" of policies by special interests. There

is a lack of transparency in the funding and operating methods of these groups. (Domhoff, G. W, 2014, p 33). Pressure groups are an essential component of modern democracies, contributing to political representation and policy formulation. However, their influence must be monitored and transparency ensured to prevent the democratic process from being distorted in favor of narrow or elite interests. IN THE USA there are a lot of lobbies alike.

Domestic political considerations in the United States that influence American foreign policy other than the influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). I will present these lobbies:

1. Military-Industrial Complex: Consists of an alliance between the US Department of Defense and major arms companies such as Lockheed Martin Raytheon and Northrop Grumman.

Influence: Pushes for policies that support increased military spending and foreign interventions to ensure continued supply demand for weapons with great examples such as: Pressures Congress to continue funding wars or arms sales to the Gulf States. (William D. Hartung, 2011, pp. 24–45).

2. US Elections and Public Opinion: The main influential factors related to electoral demographics.

Politicians often formulate their foreign policies in a way that satisfies their constituencies in their states or regions.

For example, the US interest in Cuba is partly linked to the influential Cuban exile community in Florida. (John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, 2007, pp. 136–140).

3. The U.S. Congress represents both parties in Congress (partisan interests):

Members of Congress make decisions influenced by domestic interests and reelection considerations, and they constitute a force independent of the White House. For Example, such as enact decisions to block funding for certain wars or pass legislation opposing the president's foreign policy. (James M. Lindsay, 1994, pp. 53–75).

4. Think Tanks: Such as the Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation, and Council on Foreign Relations. These institutions provide analyses and policy recommendations that may align with the ideological agendas or interests of particular funders.

Influence: Many American decision-makers come from or attend these centers. (Inderjeet Parmar, 2004, pp. 88–81).

5. Corporate Interests: consisting of Big Oil, Big Tech and large agricultural conglomerates, and other companies. These companies lobby through lobby groups to push for policies that serve their foreign interests, such as securing resources or opening markets. For example, the US intervention in the Middle East has often been linked to the interests of oil companies. (Michael Klare, 2004, pp. 63–84).

6- Media Influence: Manifesting in the American Media and Its Influence on Public Support for Wars or Agreements. The media creates narratives that justify or oppose interventions with great examples, like the directed media coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, helping mobilise public opinion. (Chomsky, Noam, 2002, pp. 19–38).

Domestic political considerations in the U.S. that influence foreign policy are not only limited to AIPAC alone, but include a large range of actors with significant influence through lobbying (pressure groups) in politics, especially in the United States, which is a large and complex system. In the case of the pro-Israel lobby, led by AIPAC, its influence can be summarized as follows: A lobby is an organized group that exerts pressure on decision-makers (such as

members of Congress or executive officials) seeking to influence policies and legislation to serve its interests. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p5)

The influence of the pro-Israel lobby (AIPAC) in American politics :

1. Influencing the US Congress:

AIPAC is keen to build strong relationships with both Democrats and Republicans.

It pushes for the passage of pro-Israel laws, such as:

Increasing military aid to Israel (reaching more than \$3.8 billion annually).

Imposing sanctions on Israel's adversaries (such as Iran or some Palestinian factions).

Resisting any UN recognition of a Palestinian state without Israel's consent.

2. Influencing elections:

AIPAC does not present itself as a direct donor, but rather, through a network of donors, it contributes to supporting candidates who support Israel and punishing those who oppose it. This leads many American politicians to adhere to pro-Israel positions to secure electoral support.

3. Media and Cultural Influence:

Supporting media outlets, research centers, and think tanks that promote the Israeli narrative. Influencing public discourse on Middle Eastern issues, particularly portraying Israel as a "democratic" state in an unstable region. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p. 24).

4. Influencing Foreign Policy:

Pressure to drag America into pro-Israel positions, even when these conflict with international law. Influencing Washington's positions on major issues such as:

The nuclear agreement with Iran.

The position on Jerusalem (moving the US embassy there).

Rejecting UN resolutions critical of Israel. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p226)

Critical Notes:

Some researchers and thinkers (such as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt) criticize the power of the Israel lobby and argue that its influence is not always aligned with American national interests.

In contrast, its defenders view it as simply a form of legitimate democratic action. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p366). Based on the two aforementioned elements regarding domestic influences on shaping US foreign policy, particularly concerning the Middle East, domestic influences on US policy can be summarised through the role of key advisors (Jared Kushner, Mike Pompeo, and John Bolton). These advisors played a pivotal role in guiding the Trump administration's Middle East policy, particularly in supporting Israel and exerting pressure on Iran. Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor, was the architect of the "Deal of the Century" and sought to strengthen relations between Israel and some Arab countries.

Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State, adopted a hardline approach against Iran and unconditional support for Israel. John Bolton, the National Security Advisor on the other hand, was a prominent advocate of using force and maximum pressure against America's adversaries, especially Iran. On the other hand, the influence of lobby groups (such as AIPAC) and domestic political considerations can be noted in several areas:

Pro-Israel lobby groups, most notably AIPAC, play an important role in shaping US foreign policy through influencing Congress and providing support to pro-Israel candidates. In addition, US administrations respond to electoral considerations, as support for Israel is seen as an important factor in winning the support of segments of the electorate, particularly

evangelical Christians and American Jews. Despite widespread criticism of these groups, they are widely considered to significantly influence and harm US interests by creating an imbalance between the various interests of the United States, international public opinion, and even American citizens themselves.

3-Strategic Interests:

A- Energy security: U.S. oil interests and their impact on relations with Gulf states.

It is necessary to define the concept of strategy and strategic areas. This concept comes from the Greek word *strategia*, meaning “generalship.” Traditionally, it referred to military planning and the art of war. Over time, the concept has evolved and been widely adopted across political, economic, and organizational fields. Strategy, in its broadest sense, refers to a planned set of actions designed to achieve specific long-term goals, often in a competitive or complex environment.

According to Richard Rumelt, strategy is not merely a vision or ambition, but a coherent set of analyses, policies, and actions that respond to high-stakes challenges (Rumelt, R, 2011, p.6). It involves diagnosing the situation, developing a guiding policy, and crafting coherent actions to carry out that policy.

Michael Porter (1996) emphasizes that strategy is about making deliberate choices to be different. It involves creating a unique position through a set of activities that distinctively deliver value. Strategic success depends not only on operational effectiveness but also on maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. (Porter, M. E., 1996, p 62- 61–78).

In both the political and diplomatic context, strategy often encompasses balancing of interests, leveraging power, and using different tools such as economic incentives, alliances, or military force to achieve national objectives. For instance, in international relations, strategy

might involve transactional diplomacy, where states prioritize bilateral gains over long-term alliances.

In conclusion, strategy is an important component in decision-making in all disciplines. It intertwines analysis, vision, and adaptability to decide future outcomes for the benefit of the goals of the strategist.

Concept of Strategic Interests in a Region:

Strategic interests refer to the geopolitical, economic, military, and ideological interests that motivate a state to intervene or become involved in a particular region. Strategic interests typically involve national security, access to key resources (such as oil, gas, or minerals), control of trade routes, ideological expansionism, or containment of an alternate power.

According to John J. Mearsheimer, the strategic interest of a state is primarily determined by its need to ensure survival and obtain a power balance in favor in the critical regions (John J. Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 29–32). According to him, great powers expand their influence to regions such as the Middle East or Eastern Europe not out of sheer aspiration but because of the potential threats or opportunities, these regions present in the international balance of power.

Similarly, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* argue that regions are strategic fields of interest when they are what they call a "regional security complex" a space where states' security is so interdependent that there is none that can be assessed alone. (Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, 2003, p 44–47).

In the Middle East, for example, the United States' strategic interest has in the past been driven by access to oil resources, containment of Iranian enemies, and protection of allies

such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Strategic imperatives have justified long-term military presence and bilateral alliances.

In Southeast Asia, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China has redefined strategic interest in terms of infrastructural presence and naval supremacy. Strategic interest here is not just about immediate security but about controlling economic corridors in the long term as well as exerting political influence. (Elizabeth Economy, 2018, p 121–124).

Last but not least, strategic interests shift with the currents of the world, priorities at home, and the shifting alignments of the powers of a region. They yield interventions, bases, alliances, or economic pressures, depending upon how states perceive threats and opportunities.

In the case of Energy Security under Trump's Policy and Its Impact on Relations with the Gulf States under President Donald Trump (2017–2021), the foreign policy of the U.S. went through a strategic realignment that was premised on "America First" and was oriented towards national energy independence and transactional foreign policy. Energy security was one of the prime areas of focus for this policy, which significantly influenced U.S. relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar.

Trump's Policy and "Energy Dominance". President Trump implemented the policy of "energy dominance," with a vision to establish the United States as a net exporter of oil and gas. The policy entailed deregulation of the energy sector, more development of fossil fuels, and reduced environmental regulation. (Goldwyn, D., & Bordoff, J., 2020, p 7 - 6- 15)

Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord in 2017 and the promotion of shale oil development in America represented a departure from previous administrations' more global emphasis on climate and energy. These policies reduced America's reliance on Middle

Eastern oil, rending asunder the traditional energy-driven rationale for U.S.-Gulf relations. (Colgan, J. D, 2021, p 230).

4. Impact on U.S.-Gulf Relations

The Gulf's Position in Global Energy:

The Arabian Gulf occupies a central position in international energy matters due to the enormous natural gas and oil reserves in addition to its leadership in international energy market stability. The strategic significance of the region has grown quite considerably since the mid-20th century and has served as an important pillar in the acquisition of the supply of energy for major industrialised nations.

The Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar are especially favorably endowed with a substantial share of the world's proven oil and gas reserves.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) possess approximately 30% of the world's proven oil resources and over 20% of the world's natural gas resources (EIA, 2023, p. 48). Saudi Arabia is the regional leader in oil production and reserve capacity, possessing in its own right nearly 15% of global oil reserves. (BP, 2023, p. 20) The Gulf plays a two-way role in the global energy market: on the one hand, it is among the world's largest producers and exporters; on the other, it has adjustable export capacities that allow it to penetrate foreign markets in an attempt to stabilize prices or adjust to nascent demand, especially in times of crises.

For how, for instance, in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Gulf oil became once more relevant as European nations sought alternative Russian sources. (Tagliapietra, Simone, 2022, p. 7) The strategic significance of the Gulf is also increased through its geographical location, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, which is one of the world's most strategic

oil transit chokepoints. About 20% of the global daily oil supply passes through this strait, and thus it is a crucial node in global energy security. (Cordesman, Anthony H, 2022, p. 34)

Economically, most Gulf States rely on oil and gas revenues, though the economies have worked to diversify in recent years through processes like Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" and the UAE's "Energy Strategy 2050." Yet, energy exports remain the backbone of foreign revenues and economic growth in the region. (Krane, Jim. Energy, 2019, p. 92)

Despite the world's shift toward renewable sources of energy, Gulf hydrocarbons remain a strategically vital source.

Experts believe that the international oil demand will persist for decades, particularly from Asia and Africa which maintains the position of the Gulf as an international energy player (Yergin, Daniel, 2020, p 312–315) The position of the Gulf countries in the international energy market is not replaceable, both in supply and geopolitically. While environmental challenges and international pressure force a transition toward clean energy, Gulf oil and gas will remain at the hub of the world energy system for the foreseeable future. Though reducing dependence on Gulf oil, Trump maintained close relationships with influential Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This was apparent in his first official foreign trip to Riyadh in 2017 when he inked military agreements worth over \$110 billion. (Wintour, P, 2017)

The policy of the administration was transactional: political and military assistance in exchange for arms sales, investment, and cooperation on critical regional matters, such as handling Iran. Gulf States were not just sources of oil but also strategic partners in Trump's anti-Iran coalition. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p. 57)

Trump's reluctance to pressure Saudi Arabia after the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi was proof of this strategic priority (Bronner, E, 2018, p56). Secretary of State Mike

Pompeo emphasized that maintaining a strong U.S.-Saudi alliance served American security and energy interests.

Geopolitical Consequences:

Despite the American energy boom giving the impression of diminished Gulf States' importance, they still had robust geopolitical significance. The Trump administration also endorsed the Abraham Accords, which incentivized Israel-Gulf state normalization agreements, demonstrating U.S. presence in Gulf politics persisted. (Blackwill, R. D., & Harris, J. M, 2016. p. 119).

Moreover, the 2019 Iranian drone attack on Saudi oil facilities, which was claimed to be carried out by Iran, revealed weakness in the Gulf's energy infrastructure and reinforced the need for continued coordination between the U.S. and the Gulf. (Bordoff, J, 2019.P.3)

Though self-sufficiency in energy reduced America's material dependence on the Gulf, Trump's energy policy did not lead to withdrawal from the region. Rather, it reframed U.S.-Gulf relations on more transactional, security-based terms. Energy security under Trump was about maintaining control, markets, and geopolitical influence rather than supply dependence, which continued to bind the U.S. to Gulf partners in strategic terms.

B- Pushing back at Iran: The Iran-centricity of Trump's Middle East strategy:

The current situation represents a sharp departure from the strategic environment that the Islamic Republic of Iran had striven to create in the Middle East for the past forty years. Since its 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran has developed its influence and authority over the majority of the states within the region, namely Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, by taking over, hijacking, or redirecting the sovereignty of these areas. (Brian Katulis, Alex Vatanka, and Patricia Karam, 2025, p13).

A History and Strategic Overview of U.S.-Iran Relations:

The United States-Iran bilateral relationship has been among the most intricate and volatile of modern international politics' bilateral relationships. From the 1953 CIA-supported coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh to the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis of 1979, the two countries have been defined by deep distrust, strategically counterpoised interests, and repeated collision.

1. The 1953 Coup and Early Relations:

The roots of the tension between the U.S. and Iran began in 1953 when the CIA staged Operation Ajax to overthrow Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. The intervention was due to the U.S. and British interests in having control over Iranian oil and blocking Soviet expansion in the Cold War. The coup reinstated the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who ruled with more authoritarianism under U.S. sponsorship. (Stephen Kinzer, 2003, p6–9)

2. The 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Hostage Crisis:

In 1979, the Shah was deposed by the Iranian Revolution and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic. The revolution turned around the momentum of U.S.-Iranian relations. Anti-American sentiments increased and found expression in the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and the holding of 52 American diplomats hostage for 444 days. The crisis effectively severed diplomatic relations between the two nations. (Mark Bowden, 2006, p 17–18).

3. Iran-Iraq War and U.S. Policy in the 1980s:

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the U.S. de facto supported Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a counter to the spread of revolutionary Islam. The U.S. even indulged in contentious

arms sales to Iran during the Iran-Contra affair, though it was officially opposed to the regime. (Malcolm Byrne, 1993, p21–22).

4. Nuclear Tensions and Sanctions:

Concerns about Iranian nuclear ambitions accelerated in the early 2000s with the U.S. leading the charge in imposing sanctions, trying to pressure Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment program. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 was a tremendous diplomatic success, limiting Iran's nuclear program in exchange for relief from sanctions. However, the Trump administration withdrew from the deal in 2018, which escalated tensions. (Trita Parsi, 2017, p 224)

5. Strategic Competition and Regional Wars:

U.S.-Iranian tensions played out in regional proxy wars with both countries backing opposing sides in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, with the 2020 drone killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani by the U.S. in Baghdad being a dangerous escalation that pushed the two countries to the brink of open conflict.

Factors behind Iranian Power:

1. Strategic Geographic Location:

Iran's geographic position provides it with a singular ability to affect energy flows and regional politics in which "Iran's geographic position gives it a singular ability to influence energy flows and regional politics." (Sick, Gary, 1985, p. 54).

Iran's control of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital chokepoint through which approximately a fifth of the world's oil supply passes, gives Tehran leverage over regional as well as global energy markets.

2. Natural Resources:

Iran possesses the world's fourth-largest proven crude oil reserves and second-largest natural gas reserves. These reserves constitute economic influence and the potential for strategic alignment with other countries like China, India, and Russia.

"Iran's hydrocarbon wealth underpins its regional power and ability to defy international isolation." (Cordesman, Anthony H, 2007, p. 23)

3. Ideological and Religious Influence:

As the leader of the Shia Muslim world, Iran possesses soft power among Shia communities in Iraq, Lebanon (via Hezbollah), Bahrain, Yemen (via the Houthis), and elsewhere. This ideological influence is often expressed in political and military alliances.

"Iran's potential to appeal to Shiite communities gives it transnational levers of influence matched by few states." (Nasr, Vali, 2006, p 98–100).

4. Asymmetric Warfare and Proxy Networks:

Iran has mastered the use of asymmetric tactics and proxy warfare. It backs armed non-state groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria. These proxies provide Iran's influence without the use of direct military action.

"Tehran's ability to sponsor proxy forces allows it to shape events throughout the Middle East at low cost." (Mearsheimer, John & Walt, Stephen, 2007, p. 285)

5. Strong Political System:

The Islamic Republic has kept political unity despite international sanctions and opposition from within. Its unique mix of elected institutions and clerical oversight has helped it deal with crises. As Keddie quoted saying "Iran's political resilience under unfavorable

conditions is a testament to its institutional depth and revolutionary legitimacy." (Keddie, Nikki R, 2003, p. 221).

6. Nuclear and Missile Programs:

Iran's nuclear technology pursuit, while controversial, has been a source of both a deterrent and a bargaining chip. Its missile program is still expanding its strategic reach, enabling it to strike its enemies anywhere in the region. As Anthony quoted saying "Iran's nuclear ambitions have greatly enhanced its regional influence and bargaining leverage." (Cordesman, Anthony H., 2005, p. 19).

7. Diplomatic Adaptability:

Iran has demonstrated an ability to shift diplomatic policy from conflict to accommodation. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) demonstrates how Iran used diplomacy to break out of isolation temporarily.

"Iranian diplomacy demonstrates a pragmatic tacticism intended to provide survival and strategic positioning." (Mearsheimer, John & Walt, Stephen, 2007, p. 287). This shows that Iran's ability does not solely derive from traditional military capability but from a combination of geography, ideology, resource richness, and strategic flexibility. This has allowed Tehran to be influential in the Middle East region despite facing international pressure and sanctions.

Areas of Disagreement between the First Trump Administration and the Iranian Government (2017-2021):

During Donald Trump's first term as president (2017-2021), relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America deteriorated significantly. The

Trump administration followed an aggressive approach that was radically different from the Obama administration. Some of the principal areas of disagreement were:

1. US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA):

Most significant among the policy shifts was in May 2018, when President Trump unilaterally withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), more commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal. Trump decried the agreement as flawed, bemoaning the fact that it did not cover Iran's ballistic missile program or its regional influence.

The nuclear deal is inherently flawed. If we don't do anything, we know what will happen. Within a short time, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism will be on the cusp of possessing the world's most dangerous weapons. (Trump, 2020, p 7)

Iran saw this withdrawal as a serious violation of trust and a return to animosity.

2. The "Maximum Pressure" Campaign:

After the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Trump administration initiated a "maximum pressure" campaign to strangle the Iranian economy and bring Tehran back to the negotiating table. This involved:

Re-imposing harsh sanctions on Iran's oil, banking, and shipping industries.

Designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in April 2019 was the first time the United States had designated part of another government as a terrorist organization. The IRGC designation marks the first time the United States has designated an entity linked to another government as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (U.S. Department of State, 2019; see also Taqiyeh, 2021, p. 134). These measures deepened Iran's economic crisis, triggering a sharp decline in oil exports and a collapse in the value of the Iranian rial.

3. Regional Power Struggle:

Iran and the United States competed for Middle Eastern influence, namely in:

Iraq: Trump accused Iran of orchestrating attacks on US bases by its proxy militias.

Syria: The two powers aligned with rival groups, with Iran supporting Assad and the United States supporting anti-regime forces.

Yemen: The United States supported the Saudi coalition against Iran-aligned Houthis.

Iran's expanding participation in local wars has been used as an excuse for perpetual pressure from Washington, especially with the Trump administration. (Friedman, U, 2020).

4. Qassem Soleimani Assassination: Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, was assassinated by the United States in a drone strike near Baghdad airport in January 2020. The Trump administration justified that it was to prevent imminent attacks. This assassination marked a sharp escalation in tensions." The killing of Soleimani marked the most confrontation between the US and Iran since the 1979 hostage crisis. "(BBC News; see also: Parsi, 2020, p. 102)

Iran responded by launching missiles at US bases in Iraq and accidentally shooting down a Ukrainian passenger plane (Flight PS752).

5. Diplomatic Isolation and Threats: Trump repeatedly threatened Iran on social media, including tweets warning of the destruction of cultural sites and a military response. He also rejected any diplomatic engagement unless Iran agreed to a "better deal." As Trump was quoted as saying, "The United States will respond disproportionately if Iran attacks any American interests or citizens (Trump tweet, January 2020)." This belligerent rhetoric contrasted sharply with traditional diplomatic discourse and contributed to the collapse of dialogue.

The Trump administration's approach to Iran represented a return to hardline policies centred on economic strangulation, military threats, and political isolation. These policies escalated hostilities and derailed the diplomatic progress made under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The relationship between the United States and Iran during Trump's first term was characterised by open confrontation, culminating in moments that verged on war, particularly after the killing of Soleimani.

The United States has been confronting Iran since the success of the Islamic Revolution, despite the differences between its presidents and the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties in terms of pressure, conspiracy, threats and siege, despite the concessions it has made. The reason is due to the presence of Israel and the Zionist lobby with its many powers and political and financial means, which plays the role of a guide and has a major interest in supporting Israel and Iran, has continued support for Hezbollah, the Palestinian resistance and the Islamic groups in Yemen.

C- Strengthening Israel's regional position:

A cornerstone of Trump's policy:

Here is an academic-style explanation of the concept of the State of Israel. The Definition and Foundation of the State of Israel as a modern nation-state established in 1948 in the historical region of Palestine. Its creation was rooted in the Zionist movement, which emerged in the late 19th century to create a national homeland for the Jewish people in response to widespread anti-Semitism and persecution in Europe. The movement gained momentum with Theodor Herzl's vision, expressed in *The Jewish State* (1896), and culminated in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948.

According to John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Israel is "a liberal democracy in which Jews enjoy full political rights, and

where Arab citizens have rights in theory but face significant discrimination in practice Religious and National Identity”. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p 83 Israel is both Jewish and democratic, then, an irreconcilable conflict between its ethno-religious identity and ideals of equal rights for all citizens, including the Arab minority. This dual identity lies at the heart of disputes about its legitimacy and what it will become. As Mearsheimer and Walt observe, "Israel's Jewish nature is codified in its Basic Laws and in several state practices, including the Law of Return, which grants automatic citizenship to Jews but not Palestinians who were forced out or fled in 1948."

Historical Controversy and Legitimacy:

The establishment of Israel has never been clear since hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes by force during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which is known among Palestinians as the Nakba (catastrophe). The authors state that the establishment of Israel "involved the violent dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians" (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p 84-85), which still fuels the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Strategic and Political Implication:

Israel is seen as a strategic Middle Eastern ally of the United States. However, the authors assert that American support for Israel has generally been more comprehensive than it has been strategically justified, being strongly influenced by the Israel lobby, such as AIPAC and other special-interest groups pro-Israel. (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M, 2007, p 112-135).

Factors behind Israel's Power:

Israel is considered one of the most prominent regional powers in the Middle East. This status is attributed to several strategic, military, economic, and technological factors.

1. Military Power and Technological Superiority:

Israel possesses a strong and well-equipped military, supported by advanced weapons systems and a highly developed defense industry, including companies like Rafael and Elbit Systems. It also has undeclared nuclear capabilities and is among the few countries capable of producing drones and missile defense systems such as the Iron Dome. (Cordesman, Anthony H, 2008, p75).

2. Unconditional U.S. Support:

Israel enjoys unwavering political, military, and economic support from the United States, significantly boosting its regional position. The Israeli military receives annual aid amounting to approximately \$3.8 billion under a 2016 agreement signed during the Obama administration. (Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen Walt, 2007, p 23–28).

3. Scientific and Technological Progress:

Israel is known as the "Start-Up Nation" and boasts an extremely high proportion of technology innovation and start-ups in relation to the size of its population. Israel leads in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and smart agriculture. (Senor, Dan, and Saul Singer, 2009).

4. Selective Immigration and Demographic Policy

Since its establishment, Israel has had an immigration policy of attracting Jewish immigrants across the world. It brought in skilled people and created an ideologically committed population to the task of the state. (Shafir, Gershon., 1995, p 36)

5. Influence of Global Jewish Lobby

Jewish pressure groups, particularly AIPAC, are the ones that have directed U.S. and Western policy to favor Israel, giving it constant international diplomatic backing. (Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen Walt, 2007, p 111–130).

6. Diversified and Knowledge-Based Economy:

Israel has successfully developed a diversified and strong economy based on knowledge, high-tech, and finance services without any natural resources. It has been classified as a developed, high-income economy by the World Bank. (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/israel>).

Supporting and consolidating the special relationship of Israel with America: This would involve ensuring American strategic support while continuing security coordination and military aid. This can be achieved through careful management of relations through strategic dialogue while easing any tensions and differences behind closed doors. The United States should also play a central role in initiatives towards Israel's return to international acceptability.

Maintaining U.S. bipartisan support: Israel needs to remain a beneficiary of bipartisan support within the United States and still be close to American Jewry. Advancing Israeli interests in the region: Increasing Israel's status in the region, normalizing relations with Arab and Muslim states through the expansion of the Abraham Accords, and keeping Israel as a leading partner for moderate Sunni Middle Eastern governments (Idad Shavit, 2025, p44)

Bold steps, unconventional strategies, and a focus on strengthening American influence in the region have characterized Donald Trump's approach to the Middle East

From his first presidency to the present day, Trump's vision for the Middle East reflects his leadership style of prioritizing economic interests, combating terrorism, and supporting allies.

Trump's unwavering support for Israel has been a cornerstone of his Middle East policy. During his first presidency, he recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the U.S. embassy there, a move that drew widespread international criticism but was celebrated by many in Israel. However, his vision for peace between Israel and Palestine has been controversial. Trump's peace plan, the "Deal of the Century," was strongly pro-Israel, proposing limited autonomy for the Palestinians while allowing Israel to retain control over major settlements. (<https://www.alweeam.com.sa/1124761/2025/%D8%B1%D8%A4%D9>)

Conclusion:

Donald Trump's initial presidency (2017–2021), when he implemented the "America First" policy, was a seismic shift in American policy, replacing national self-interest for the liberal international order that had been a hallmark of American leadership in the world since the mid-20th century. By promoting economic nationalism by way of protectionist trade restrictions, withdrawal from multilateral accords like the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Agreement, and transactional foreign policy, the Trump administration sought to restore U.S. economic and security dominance. Some of the achievements include renegotiating NAFTA into the USMCA, brokering the Abraham Accords towards normalizing Israel-Arab relations, and the hardline "maximum pressure" policy toward Iran. But they came at a price: frayed relations with traditional allies, increased domestic income inequality via tax cuts to high-earners, and heightened geopolitical tensions, particularly in the wake of the murder of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. The interlocutors' role of individuals like Jared Kushner, who led the Abraham Accords, Mike Pompeo, who espoused anti-Iran projects, and

John Bolton, who advocated for assertive unilateralism, accentuated the doctrine's reliance on internal political processes and interest groups like AIPAC. Critics believe that the doctrine's focus on short-term ends and unilateral actions eroded long-term strategic stability, detracted from the credibility of U.S. leadership, and challenged the international cooperative system. As the United States moves forward, the "America First" legacy results in close scrutiny of how to reconcile national agendas and global responsibilities, shaping debates about America's position in an interconnected world.

**CHAPTER TWO:
Key Policy Shifts and Their Regional Impact**

Introduction:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered one of the longest and most complicated conflicts in modern world history because historical resentment, political and religious interests, and territorial claims drive it with Palestine being the center of tensions since the first half of the 20th century due to Israeli policies, especially after Israel's establishment in 1948 and the resulting displacement of Palestinians known as Nakba. The war, based on two competing national histories and intertwined with Zionist goals and colonial heritage, has destabilized the Middle East through wars, occupations, and human rights violations. From the Balfour Declaration to the British Mandate and the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, history has repeated itself in cycles of violence and resistance in which During the Trump Administration (2017-2021), U.S foreign policy, which included actions such as recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and supporting the Abraham Accords, while bypassing Palestinian demands with the "Deal of the Century." This chapter revisits the historical and political roots of the conflict, the implications of U. S. policies, and the regional dynamics related to Iran's rising threat, Gulf states' alliance-building, and military campaigns. It also addresses how cyber warfare, targeted assassinations, and human rights abuses have fueled regional instability and calls for a concerted effort to adopt Palestinian rights for lasting peace.

1. The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict :

The Israeli-Palestinian dispute is one of the most famous and complex disputes of our times. It intertwines history, politics, religion, aspirations, and Israeli schemes of expansion to form a highly complicated picture of ongoing tensions. Palestine has been a battleground for prolonged struggles since the early 20th century. It has become a conflict zone whose repercussions have extended beyond it due to the aspirations of the Israeli entity, thus impacting the security and stability of the broader Middle East.

Despite all the factors fueling this conflict, its political and historical roots must be known to build resolutions that will bring long-term peace and equitable settlements. This conflict is an actual threat to regional stability due to the aggressive policies of Israel, whose effects have not only spilled over to the Palestinian territories but also to Lebanon and Syria. Additionally, the sequence of high-level targeted killings of top leaders such as Ismail Haniyeh, Hassan Nasrallah, and Yahya Sinwar indicates coordinated efforts towards creating power vacuums and domestic disturbances not just in Palestine but in the region as These acts combined with the killing and injuring of hundreds of Lebanese civilians using cyber warfare measures are threats to regional stability and indicative of the savage nature of this group. In addition, systematic human rights violations in Gaza and the occupied territories, for instance, attacks on civilians by the military, forced displacements, demolitions, and killings, continue to exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people and fuel far-reaching resentment across the region. These actions further destabilize the region and impact its economic stability.

The 1948 occupation of Palestine was not the first, but was preceded by a series of Crusades that were launched in 1095 when the Pope called on people to go and engage in warfare against Muslims in Palestine. Europe was, at that time, poor, and this made people, even the ones who were not religious, participate in the campaign in the name of religion. The Pope

excommunicated the non-participants and granted partial absolution to the participants in the name of liberating the Eastern Church.

But no one could deny the sheer greed for the land's resources. The Pope described the land as “flowing with milk and honey.” After Muslim leader Imad al-Din Zengi successfully liberated Arab lands from the Crusaders, new crusading campaigns were launched, leading to the continuation of the conflict. Later, the concept of Zionism emerged, targeting the Jewish population as a tool to be exploited due to their marginalisation in European societies.

Zionism originated in 17th-century Protestantism and then evolved as a secular Jewish movement in mid-19th-century Europe, demanding the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as an economic entity.

The Old City of Jerusalem, which covers less than one square kilometer, is of unmatched religious significance to the followers of the three faiths. It is subdivided further into four neighborhoods: Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Armenian. It is called the City of King David by Jews, while it contains holy sites, primarily among which is the Western Wall, also called by Muslims the Buraq Wall and by Christians as the site of Jesus' crucifixion. It is significant to Muslims because it is where the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock are situated.

Palestine had been under Ottoman rule for over four centuries, with the period marked by its religious and cultural diversity and the peaceful coexistence of its Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities (Saleh Mohsen Mohammed, 2012, pp. 11-12). At the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Palestine came under British mandate. In 1917, Britain's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issued his famous statement vowing to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine without seeking the cooperation of the Arab people, which led to feelings of distrust and rejection amongst them.

During the years of the British Mandate, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased, a factor that contributed to growing tensions between Jews and Arabs and pushed the emergence of movements such as the Histadrut and the Haganah to further the Jewish settlement enterprise.

On May 14, 1948, Israel declared its Statehood, forcibly displacing approximately 700,000 Palestinians in what has come to be known as the Nakba (catastrophe). This was a dramatic shift in the direction of the conflict, as Palestinians saw their land and national identity taken from them. This was followed by the outbreak of numerous wars, most notably the 1967 war, in which the West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied, strengthening the Palestinian human rights crisis and fueling anger and frustration.

Palestinian organizations began mobilizing to resist the occupation by 1965, and a new generation of the Arab-Israeli conflict began. This witnessed the intensification of the wars in the region with more and more American support for Israel. This was particularly the case with the growing role of pro-Israel forces within Congress after the Republicans' capture, along with the role of Zionist lobby groups, research centers, and political think tanks, and with their influence in the US Departments of Defense and State.

US support for Israel is a compelling force determining the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was perfectly exemplified during the October 1973 War (Yom Kippur War), when the United States supplied Israel with some 22,000 tons of high-technology arms and military equipment, enhancing its power and affecting the war's balance of power. This is to point out the extent of political and economic relations between Washington and Tel Aviv and the degree of complexity that they introduce into Palestinian and Arab reality. Despite popular worldwide and international outrage against the violations of the Israeli occupation and Western-backed policies, the absence of a unified Arab and Islamic position, either in the

guise of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation or the Arab League, has perpetuated fragmentation and watered-down power.

The article points out the significance of capitalizing on this international rejection to establish an Arab and Islamic front that can influence global decision-making circles, to limit American hegemony, and achieve balance for Palestinian rights.

Regarding the Palestinian cause, the population in the occupied territories suffered deplorable conditions before the outbreak of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" incidents.

Since 1948, the Palestinians have been subject to mass abuses of their basic rights, including restrictions on freedoms, land confiscations, economic and social repression, and generalized human rights violations. The Israelis used repressive tactics, intending to force the Palestinians to leave their nation. These tactics resulted in approximately 800,000 individuals displaced, 531 villages and towns demolished, and a total of 70 massacres committed against them during the Nakba. Between 2000 and 2016, the occupation forces murdered more than 10,000 Palestinians, and between 100,000 Palestinians were arbitrarily detained (Jawad al-Hamad, 1995, p. 66), showing the chronic suffering of the Palestinian people for decades of occupation. All these deteriorating conditions exacerbated the daily misery of Palestinians and changed their lives entirely.

Also, historic sites were deliberately destroyed to erase Palestinian identity. Even before 1948, Zionist paramilitary forces committed massacres, such as the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948, when Irgun and Stern Gang paramilitary forces launched a mass killing and expulsion action on the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin near Jerusalem. The majority of the victims were civilian women, children, and elderly people, with the death toll estimated from 250 to 360 by Arab and Palestinian sources and 109 by Western sources. (Kana'ana and Zeitawi, p 56) Throughout the Gaza uprisings of recent times, Europe's stance was

ambiguous. Some countries, like Germany wholeheartedly supported Israel, while others like Spain were against it. There were divergent views even among members of the European Union, such as the President of the European Commission, who was with Israel, while the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs disagreed with Israel's actions. However, there has been an overall tendency to support Israel and criticize Hamas in Europe. It also seems like popular opposition to their governments' support of Israel in America and Europe.

This has been shown through massive protests against the genocidal activities of the Zionist regime.

On collective punishment against Palestinians as retaliation for the October 7 incidents, the European Union at first decided to suspend humanitarian aid, an action opposed by some member states. This opposition has caused the EU to reconsider and restructure its policy of distributing aid in a way that protects Israel and blocks aid from reaching Hamas-ruled Gaza. These current events in occupied Palestine have also made it apparent how strong Western and American support exists for the regime of occupation, exposing the hypocrisy of the arguments on human rights traditionally used by the West to legitimize interference with other countries' affairs. A few European countries, such as the UK, Italy, and Germany, went so far as to condemn Palestinian resistance and portray the genocidal Israeli entity as a victim in need of protection. They rationalized Israel's actions as self-defense, despite the gross atrocities having been perpetrated, such as shelling hospitals, schools, and humanitarian organizations. France, under pressure from within and without, reversed its position from calling for an international coalition against Hamas to calling for civilian protection and a humanitarian ceasefire, although it remained opposed to condemning Israel. Austria and Hungary, concurring in these positions, voted for a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, only to then give it their approval. Nations such as Norway, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium all condemned Israel's maltreatment of Palestinians. While

governments in the West and some media outlets attempted to portray Israel as the victim of the Al-Aqsa Flood, reality finally emerged, and atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians reached Western consciousness.

That shift in awareness ushered in protests, such as those at the BBC building in London, where protesters criticized the network for twisting facts and misleading the public for the sake of Israel, even in its atrocities.

This shift turned into mass demonstrations against the Palestinian genocide. As the public lost faith in mainstream media, people began seeking alternative and credible sources of information. Consequently, support for Palestinians grew four times as much as that for Israel, which resulted in mass mobilisations, especially in the UK.

American universities also joined the flurry of mass demonstrations against Israeli aggression. These developed into sit-ins and camp-ins, which were suppressed through police raids and arrests. Students called for a stop to the genocide, the halting of Zionist aggression, and divestment and boycotts of institutions supporting Israel's war efforts. 15,000 persons protested in 18 European countries against Israeli forces, with the biggest protests in the United Kingdom, involving around 250,000 persons. American and European celebrities have exposed the hypocrisy of Western democratic ideology not only based on police brutality against protesters but also because of political repression.

For example, the US House of Representatives Speaker called for the impeachment of Columbia University's president on charges of suspected embezzlement. He considered this the necessary step, even though she had previously requested that police not be injured on campus (Nofal Ahmed, 2010, pp. 22-24). Meanwhile, the United States remains Israel's best political canopy, casting its veto in the Security Council, taunting Jews for their hunger and immunity and not for its barbarities. The later US administrations have all blamed Israel for

continuing to maintain its actions behind the guise of "self-defense," a position that barely demonstrates empathy for the members' desire. The Council typically contented itself with loose appeals for restraint, without taking strategic measures that would provoke violence.

Meanwhile, Washington is involved in reducing the Council to merely calling for a humanitarian window for easing Gaza. It fails to meet Israeli standards, and it does not serve the purpose of providing a deterrent. The Security Council has passed 90 resolutions on the Palestinian issue since the passage of Resolution 42 on 5 March 1948, and the recent one, Resolution 2728 of 25 March 2024. There were 18 requests, 12 demands, 13 condemnations, 7 censures, in addition to expressions of concern, regret, and various recommendations. But they were weak in overall terms, ineffectively enforced, and completely ignored by Israel without consequences.

1.1. Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and embassy relocation (2018):

The issue of Jerusalem represents a very crucial and sensitive matter that is typically avoided by politicians in the Arab-Israeli conflict as it is considered an exceptionally complex and difficult issue, not only because it concerns the national identities of both sides, but also due to its profound religious sensitivities, as it is home to the Western Wall, the Holy Sepulcher, and Al-Aqsa Mosque.

U.S. presidents have consistently sought to maintain strict policies avoiding any form of pre-judgment regarding the status of Jerusalem. Accordingly, they have refrained from engaging in official activities that might be perceived as recognizing Jerusalem as falling under Israeli sovereignty. This policy is rooted in the executive vision that any premature move on the Jerusalem issue could tarnish the U.S.'s credibility as a neutral facilitator in peace negotiations, potentially harming the peace process and undermining U.S. interests. For this reason, the U.S. maintained its embassy in Tel Aviv.

Thus, despite campaign promises by several U.S. presidents from Harry Truman to Barack Obama to move the American embassy to Jerusalem, these pledges were quickly abandoned upon taking office due to the adverse consequences such a move would have on the core of the Middle East peace process.

However, President Donald Trump chose to break with decades of U.S. policy and longstanding international consensus on the issue. He fulfilled his campaign promise by officially recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel a historic departure from the position maintained by the U.S. over the past fifty years. (Jack Thompson,2016, p.1715).

Trump asserted that previous U.S. presidents lacked the courage to implement the congressional decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem, which had been passed in 1995. He emphasized that he was the only one who promised to move the embassy during his campaign and actually fulfilled that promise. Trump directly criticized Congress and the policies of former presidents, accusing them of failing to deal with reality and instead relying on assumptions which, from his perspective, were incorrect. In particular, he rejected the justification offered by past administrations that moving the embassy would harm the prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. As Trump stated: "It is now clear that delaying the recognition did not advance the cause of peace!".

Trump's decision appears to stem from two possible reasons. First, he surrounded himself with ideologically committed supporters of Israel who showed little to no sympathy for the Palestinian side. Second, it seems he sought to showcase his administration's bold departure from traditional U.S. policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict, claiming to be working toward a lasting resolution through the much-publicized "Deal of the Century." (Iman Zahran, 2017, p56)

With Trump offering three main justifications for his decision:

- **Israel is a sovereign state** and, like any other sovereign state, has the right to determine its own capital.
- **Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital** is a necessary condition for achieving peace.
- **The United States had already recognized the State of Israel** under President Harry Truman, and had implicitly treated Jerusalem as its capital ever since. (Eke Onyemaechi Augustine, 2018, p.2).

Trump also framed his decision as fulfilling a legal obligation under the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act, despite opposition from his senior advisors in the National Security Council. This highlights a deeply personal aspect of Trump's decision, as he had failed to fulfill most of his campaign promises, yet his desire to appear as a decisive leader, unafraid to make controversial decisions, led him to view the Jerusalem issue as an opportunity to showcase that image. (Trump's Decision to Announce Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel: Motives, Implications, and Prospects, 2017, p66).

Trump also had strong political motivations, such as pleasing his electoral base and powerful supporters, chief among them the pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. In March 2016, he delivered a speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the most influential pro-Israel lobby in the U.S., in which he pledged to move the American embassy to "the eternal capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem." According to various reports, billionaire Sheldon Adelson a prominent Jewish Republican donor threw his support behind Trump after that speech, donating \$20 million to a pro-Trump political action committee (PAC), followed by an additional \$1.5 million to fund the Republican National Convention where Trump was officially nominated as the party's presidential candidate. Since Trump's election, Adelson

continued to remind him of his promise and reportedly expressed frustration when Trump initially bowed to pressure from his advisors and signed a waiver delaying the embassy move.

According to American media outlets, on November 27, 2017, Trump suddenly walked into a meeting of his top national security advisors as they were discussing whether to postpone the embassy move again. He insisted they provide him with an option that would allow him to fulfill his campaign promise despite the warnings of both the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State, which ultimately led to the decision being implemented as announced. On another front, Evangelicals make up approximately 25% of the American population, with nearly 80% of white Evangelicals voting in favor of Trump in the most recent presidential election. The issue of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was one of the top priorities for this voting bloc. Many Evangelical groups actively pressured Trump to expedite the embassy move and to formally recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

For Evangelicals, the embassy move is not merely a political matter it is perceived as the fulfillment of a prophecy that paves the way for the return of Christ. According to this belief, the path leads to the apocalyptic battle of Armageddon, which is expected to take place in the valley of "Megiddo." At that point, Jews are believed to eventually accept Christ as their savior, having rejected him in the past. Thus, it was unthinkable for President Trump to risk alienating this powerful and loyal segment of his electoral base.

Trump's announcement on Jerusalem came within a context that, from the U.S. perspective, supported such a decision. According to the research by Iman Zahran (2017), these contexts include :

- Legitimising the status quo
- Rising Middle East crises

- Low risk of escalation

Trump's move regarding Jerusalem had been anticipated since his victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as his campaign platform included a key promise to relocate the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem upon entering the White House. After winning the presidency, he made no secret of his determination to fulfil that promise, repeatedly stating that it was only a matter of time. In June 2017, Trump, like his predecessors, postponed the embassy relocation for six months. However, once the six-month period expired, instead of renewing the waiver, he decided to go ahead with the move and fulfil his campaign pledge.

The U.S. began to dismantle the core issues of the final-status negotiations, starting with Jerusalem. Following Trump's official recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Roie Yellinek, 2017, p1.), the U.S. embassy was relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on May 14, 2018, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of the founding of Israel, a date Palestinians commemorate as the Nakba (Catastrophe). This move paved the way for other countries to consider recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Less than a month after the embassy decision, the Trump administration turned its attention to the refugee issue, one of the most sensitive and complex topics in final-status negotiations. In December 2018, the U.S. cut half of its funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), amounting to \$65 million, and on August 31, 2018, it announced a complete termination of its funding.

The Trump administration claimed that UNRWA's continued existence perpetuated the conflict, arguing that the Palestinians' insistence on the right of return as stipulated in international legitimacy and particularly UN Security Council Resolution 194 was fundamentally incompatible with the "Jewish character" of Israel, and therefore an obstacle to any possibility of achieving peace between the two sides. (Mohamed To'ma Jawda, 2018, p.4.)

1.2. The "Deal of the Century": Content, implications, and regional reactions:

The plan announced by the U.S. administration consists of two main components: the political and the economic. On the surface, the so-called "Deal of the Century" or Trump's Peace Plan is presented as a proposal to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, drafted by then U.S. President Donald Trump. The plan includes the creation of a global investment fund to support the economies of the Palestinians and neighboring Arab countries. It was expected to be unveiled by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, during a conference held in Bahrain on June 25–26, 2019. Jerusalem would remain unified under full Israeli sovereignty, with over 100 West Bank settlements formally annexed effectively eliminating the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

The plan offers \$50 billion in investment funding for 179 business and infrastructure projects, to be managed by a multilateral development bank under conditions of transparency, anti-corruption measures, and guaranteed terms. The administration envisioned the funding to come mostly from wealthy Arab nations and private sector investors. The financial breakdown includes \$26 billion in loans, \$13.5 billion in grants, and \$11 billion in private investments. (Saleh Mohsen Muhammad, 2012, pp. 82-85).

The majority of this \$50 billion would be spent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with \$9 billion allocated to Egypt, \$7 billion to Jordan, and \$6.3 billion to Lebanon. The plan outlines specific projects, such as building a travel corridor connecting the West Bank and Gaza via highway or potentially a railway, significantly expanding border crossings, developing power plants, improving tourism infrastructure, rebuilding and upgrading Palestinian hospitals and health clinics, creating a land ownership database, enhancing potable water supply and sewage treatment, and establishing a new Palestinian university ranked among the top 150 globally.

Trump's Plan declared its support for an independent, sovereign State of Palestine with its capital in the eastern suburbs of Jerusalem, dependent on the Palestinians taking steps toward establishing self-governance. The plan offers the Palestinians a future State of Palestine, which would not be established until four years after the plan's implementation. This future state would be demilitarized (without armed forces) and would remain so. Recognition standards are closely tied to the envisioned Palestinian state and must be pursued in good faith by both Israel and the United States, in consultation with the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinians would be required to establish a governing system with a constitution or similar framework that ensures the rule of law, including freedom of the press, free and fair elections, respect for the human rights of every citizen, protection of religious freedom, safeguarding the rights of minorities to practice their faiths, equal and just law enforcement, an independent judiciary, and legal accountability for those who break the law.

They would also be expected to establish financial institutions that are transparent, independent, trusted by Palestinians, and capable of operating in global markets similarly to financial institutions in Western democratic nations. The system of governance would need to prevent corruption, ensure the proper use of funds, and be based on a legal system that protects investments and aligns with market expectations. Furthermore, Palestinians would have to eliminate all programs, including school curricula and textbooks that promote or encourage hatred or hostility toward their neighbours, or that incite criminal acts of violence.

Palestinians would be expected to achieve full civil legal control over their territory and ensure that all their citizens are disarmed. They must also adhere to all other conditions of the plan. The deal pushes toward removing Palestinian and Jordanian oversight over Islamic and Christian holy sites. It recognizes Israel's right to all of "undivided Jerusalem," acknowledging it as the capital of Israel. Palestinians would have access to neighborhoods in

the outer areas of East Jerusalem, beyond the Israeli security wall in the West Bank including Kafr Aqab, the Shuafat refugee camp, and parts of Abu Dis described as “eastern parts of Shuafat and Abu Dis.”

The plan places Al-Aqsa Mosque, including the Qibli Prayer Hall, under Israeli sovereignty, while claiming to maintain the current status quo. It denies Palestinian claims to the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary), assigning oversight instead to Jordan. The plan grants Israel the role of protecting holy sites and ensuring freedom of worship. (Mahmoud al-Rantisi, p 76). Positions varied between outright rejection, cautious skepticism, subtle discontent, reluctant approval, political promotion, full endorsement, and formal signing. How did Palestinians respond to the deal? Was it an opportunity for unity in rejecting it, or did it deepen their divisions?

- **Palestinian Rejection of the Deal:** Palestinians expressed deep anger and categorical rejection of the terms and implications of the “Deal of the Century,” taking to the streets in mass protests on the very day it was announced. President Mahmoud Abbas denounced Trump's plan, declaring: “Jerusalem is not for sale. All our rights are not for sale or bargaining. This conspiracy deal will not pass and our people will consign it to the dustbin of history, just like all other liquidation and conspiracy projects that targeted our just cause.” He reaffirmed the Palestinian strategy of continued struggle “to end the Israeli occupation and establish the independence of a state with East Jerusalem as its capital.” Abbas also expressed readiness to take the matter to the International Court of Justice and affirmed: “We have heard promising reactions rejecting Trump’s plan and we will build on them. We are ready for negotiations based on international legitimacy, which remains our reference.” He reiterated a commitment to the national principles adopted by the Palestinian National Council in 1988: “We will not abandon any of them.”

Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat pointed out that the Deal of the Century mirrored a proposal previously submitted by Israel on September 23, 2012. The Palestinian government further asserted that President Trump “killed any possibility of a negotiated solution.” President Abbas branded the deal “the slap of the century,” reiterating his refusal to negotiate based on it. Abbas and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh even agreed to meet in Gaza in response.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki described the American plan as “an unprecedented attempt to deny the rights of the Palestinian people,” and said it “destroys the foundations upon which peace negotiations were built.”

Hamas vowed to thwart the plan, asserting that “any deal or project that infringes on our full rights to our land and holy sites will not pass.” Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem added: “All attempts to impose this deal will be crushed by the steadfastness and resistance of our people. The Palestinian people will determine their destiny through their ongoing revolution, legitimate struggle, and unwavering belief in the justice of their cause.” (Saleh Mohsen Muhammad, 2012, pp. 100-105).

- **Arab League:** In an emergency meeting held on February 1, 2020, Arab foreign ministers unanimously rejected the American peace plan. Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit confirmed that the decision was made with full consensus.
- **Arab Parliament:** The Arab Parliament declared that “no unjust resolution to the Palestinian issue that does not guarantee the historical rights of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital will be accepted.” It affirmed that peace can only be achieved through direct, serious, and balanced negotiations based on the two-state solution. The Parliament described the plan’s documents as having their rightful place “in the dustbin of history.” (Azmi Bishara, 2020, p 11).

- **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):** The OIC, representing 57 member states, also rejected Trump's plan during an extraordinary meeting in Jeddah. The final statement urged all member states not to cooperate with the U.S. administration in implementing the plan and reaffirmed support for establishing a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. OIC Secretary-General Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen emphasized the organization's support for international efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace.
- **European Union:** The EU reiterated its consistent support for a two-state solution that respects the legitimate aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis. The German Foreign Ministry emphasized that a lasting peace requires an agreement acceptable to both parties and noted that Trump's proposal raises questions that need to be addressed at the EU level.

Rejecting States :

- **Tunisia:** Reaffirmed support for full Palestinian rights and rejected any change to the legal or historical status of Jerusalem.
- **Algeria:** Reiterated unwavering support for the Palestinian cause, emphasizing that Palestinian rights are non-negotiable and advocating for unity among Palestinians.
- **Syria:** Condemned the plan as “a surrender recipe” to Israeli occupation and a continuation of U.S. efforts to liquidate the Palestinian cause.
- **Iraq:** Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi rejected the deal, calling it a failed attempt and reaffirming Iraq's unconditional support for the Palestinian people.
- **Lebanon:** Voiced concern over linking international aid to acceptance of the deal and reiterated support for the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the right of return for Palestinian refugees.
- **Iran:** Described the plan as “the betrayal of the century” and doomed to fail.

- **Turkey:** Condemned the deal as “stillborn,” aimed at killing the two-state solution and annexing Palestinian land. (Mahmoud al-Rantisi, pp. 151-159).
- **Russia:** Questioned the viability of the plan, highlighting widespread Palestinian and Arab rejection and emphasizing that it ignores internationally recognized settlement frameworks.
- **France:** President Macron doubted the U.S. plan’s effectiveness, said Paris was ready to propose alternatives, and underscored the importance of not abandoning the political process.
- **Italy:** MP Michele Piras criticized the deal and reaffirmed support for a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem, withdrawal from occupied territories, and a return to negotiations. He suggested Italy and Turkey could propose an alternative peace plan.

Several countries participated in the Bahrain workshop titled “Peace to Prosperity” on June 25, 2019, including the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. Some other Arab countries also expressed implicit approval.

- **United States:** President Trump claimed the deal offered a detailed and unprecedented vision, with Jerusalem remaining Israel’s undivided capital. He promised \$50 billion in investments for a future Palestinian state and described the plan as a way to end Palestinian dependency on foreign aid.
- **Israel:** Prime Minister Netanyahu praised Trump, describing him as “Israel’s greatest friend in the White House.” Netanyahu emphasized the disarmament of Palestinian resistance and the annexation of the Jordan Valley and other areas included in the plan.
- **United Kingdom:** The Foreign Office called Trump’s plan “a serious proposal.”
- **Egypt:** Appreciated U.S. efforts toward a comprehensive peace, emphasizing the importance of stability and security in the Middle East.

- **Jordan:** Stressed that a just peace must be based on the two-state solution, with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, in line with international law.

Notably, some Arab states that supported the plan diplomatically later echoed regional and international institutions in rejecting it, likely as a way to appease public opinion.

1.3. Cutting aid to UNRWA and its impact on Palestinian refugees:

The campaign against UNRWA intensified in parallel with the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, reaching its peak when Israel accused Palestinian employees of the international organization of participating in the attack on its settlements in what is known as the "Gaza envelope." This accusation prompted the United States to freeze its funding of UNRWA, followed by several European countries. However, some of them later reversed their decisions after Israel failed to provide any evidence to support its claims, after an independent committee formed by the United Nations confirmed that there was no evidence to substantiate the Israeli allegations. Nevertheless, this did not alter the position of the U.S. administration, which was reinforced by a Congressional resolution that froze the funding for a full year. On the Israeli side, matters escalated further with the passage of a law in the Knesset designating UNRWA as a hostile entity.

The services provided by UNRWA to Palestinian refugees have notably declined due to decreasing international funding particularly following the suspension of U.S. contributions in 2018 and again in 2024, and due to the natural increase in the number of Palestinian refugees and the resulting rise in service demands. This decline has been further exacerbated by the ongoing Israeli aggression against the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli war on Gaza between 2023 and 2024 destroyed approximately 80% of buildings and all hospitals and infrastructure, and caused around 150,000 casualties, including martyrs, missing persons, and the injured. These developments necessitated the allocation of support for the reconstruction

of civilian infrastructure and financial assistance for housing and relief of those affected by Israeli attacks factors that have all objectively contributed to the emergence and continuation of UNRWA's financial crisis.

Firstly, the natural population growth of Palestinian refugees projected to reach 8.5 million by 2030 has raised serious questions about whether donor countries are prepared to support this increase, and whether UNRWA can continue to meet the growing demands. These include increased needs for diverse healthcare services, employment and training programs, and social and relief assistance, especially given demographic changes and the rising average age of Palestinian refugees. (Michael Dumper, 2016, p 34).

Secondly, Israeli attacks on UNRWA facilities have posed a serious challenge even before the most recent war in Gaza. These attacks have hindered the work of technical teams and restricted their access to schools, health centers, and relief service centers, resulting in reduced services for Palestinian refugees. During its repeated assaults on Gaza and ongoing military operations in the West Bank, the Israeli occupying forces have committed various violations against UNRWA institutions and staff. These include targeting agency facilities such as schools and clinics, killing and injuring UNRWA staff in Gaza, subjecting UNRWA employees and vehicles to searches at checkpoints across the West Bank, and obstructing their freedom of movement.

Thirdly, before the most recent aggression (2023–2024), ongoing Israeli attacks in the West Bank and Gaza prompted UNRWA to redirect its support toward the reconstruction of civilian infrastructure and the disbursement of financial aid to affected Palestinian refugees. This shift, as part of the agency's emergency programming, came at the expense of its core programs designed to serve Palestinian refugees. The scale of reconstruction needed in Gaza

after the recent genocidal war exceeds UNRWA's capacity assuming it is even permitted to oversee the rebuilding and rehabilitation of Gaza's devastated civilian communities.

Amid these field-level challenges and international funding cuts, UNRWA had already decided to reduce its services to Palestinian refugees. In 2015, Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl sent a memorandum to the UN Secretary-General outlining the agency's financial deficit of \$101 million at the time. He explained that in light of this shortfall, UNRWA would be forced to implement austerity measures across health, education, and employment sectors. Under its 2016–2021 strategic plan, UNRWA cut many services, including closing its vocational and technical training center, limiting healthcare to primary services only, and restricting medical referrals to social hardship cases. It also raised the maximum number of students per classroom to 50, threatening the quality of education, reduced staff numbers, froze hiring, cut funding for major medical procedures, ended rent subsidies for displaced families, reduced food assistance, and suspended its scholarship program. In Lebanon, UNRWA asked Palestinian refugees to co-finance part of their medical treatments, sparking tensions between the agency and the refugee community.

These service cuts severely impacted Palestinian refugees, especially in Gaza, where they coincided with rising poverty and unemployment due to the Israeli blockade, the closure of borders, and limited import/export opportunities. This was further compounded by the ongoing political and geographic division between Fatah and Hamas, and between the West Bank and Gaza, a rift that has persisted since mid-2007.

Before the latest war on Gaza, UNRWA continued issuing warnings about the implications of its financial crisis on the economic and social conditions of Palestinian refugees. During the UNRWA Pledging Conference on June 2, 2023, Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini stated: “We will have no cash available as of September to maintain

operations of our schools, health centers, and other vital services,” which would negatively affect “humanitarian services in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and the West Bank.” More than one million students risked being deprived of schooling, over two million people could lose access to healthcare, and more than 1.2 million would be cut off from humanitarian aid, including the social safety net for the most impoverished. (“Remarks by UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, 2023, p 12)

Since 2015, UNRWA’s policy of cutting services has been met with strong opposition from Palestinian refugee communities and popular committees, who viewed it as a threat to their political, legal, social, and economic rights. The occupied Palestinian territories witnessed widespread protests against service cuts and the suspension of monthly rental aid for those whose homes were destroyed in Israeli attacks. The agency was accused of conspiring against refugee rights. Protesters closed UNRWA distribution centers in response to the "Unified Coupon" system, which deprived over 700,000 refugees of their right to food aid. Protesters demanded a return to the previous system, which categorized aid based on extreme poverty, absolute poverty, and differentiated between “yellow” (enhanced) and “white” coupons, considering it a fairer model for those most in need.

The services UNRWA provides to Palestinian refugees are now under threat from Israeli and American campaigns aimed fundamentally at dismantling the agency’s role initially by drying up its resources, then by seeking to transfer its mandate to the UNHCR, and finally by attempting to criminalize it during the recent war in Gaza. These efforts are part of broader regional and international plans aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause, with the right of return at its core. These plans are closely linked to the conditions of the so-called "peace process." (Mohsen Muhammad Saleh, 2018, p 45).

The Israeli-American threats have taken several forms, including persistent incitement against UNRWA's role, legitimacy, and necessity, as well as direct actions by successive U.S. administrations, in coordination with Israel to cut funding to the agency. This has exacerbated UNRWA's crises, forcing it to implement emergency spending measures for essential sectors while searching for a long-term solution to its financial instability.

2. U.S.-Iran Relations :

The US-Iran relations have been tense since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and the tensions were further heightened recently over Washington's exit from the nuclear deal in 2018 by President Trump, and subsequently slapping hard sanctions on Tehran. Despite attempts by the Biden administration to revive the nuclear agreement, deep-seated differences exist over Iran's missile development program, its regional influence, and its support of armed militias. The Gaza war (2023–2024) induced fresh escalation, particularly with reciprocal attacks in Iraq and Syria and tensions across the Strait of Hormuz. The relationship is that of cold confrontation, and a direct confrontation is not likely, but in a regional environment prone to ignition.

2.1. Withdrawal from the JCPOA (2018) and the "maximum pressure" campaign:

In May 2018, the United States' withdrawal from the nuclear agreement officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was signed in 2015 between Iran and the world's major powers (the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China), was announced by former U.S. President Donald Trump. This pulling back was a decisive turn in Washington-Tehran relations, soon followed by the launch of the "maximum pressure" initiative aimed at building economic and financial sanctions against Iran

to drain its military and nuclear powers and impose more stringent terms on the Iranian regime. (Costello, R,2020, p36)

The declared aim of the "maximum pressure" policy was to put pressure on Iran to return to the nuclear agreement with changed terms, such as an end to assisting the militias in the area and halting its ballistic missile program. That policy, however, significantly impacted the Iranian economy, which experienced a sharp decline in its domestic currency and lower oil sales, deteriorating economic and societal conditions in Iran and placing the government under additional pressure.

Politically, the move generated more tension between Iran and the United States and increased the level of conflict within the Middle East region. Iran responded to the American withdrawal with various measures, including ending its commitments under the nuclear deal and boosting its nuclear program. It also raised funding for proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, creating regional fears regarding the stability of the Middle East. (Noura Ali Abdallah. 2022, P: 141).

Internationally, the policy of America was widely condemned by the European nations in the nuclear deal who wished to preserve the deal and pressure Iran to comply despite American sanctions. The campaign also complicated international diplomatic efforts towards achieving regional stability.

Overall, the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal and the "maximum pressure" policy ushered in a new era of tensions between Tehran and Washington, creating huge challenges in world politics and generating complex economic and political consequences that have shaken regional and global security, with its implications still unfolding today.

2.2. The assassination of Qassem Soleimani (2020): Motivations and regional fallout:

The assassination of Qassem Soleimani in January 2020 marked a shift in the geopolitics of regional and international relations. Soleimani was the commander of the Quds Force, a branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps tasked with implementing the country's external and regional operations. The U.S. assassinated him at Baghdad International Airport as part of a strategic initiative to curtail the Middle East influence of Iran and discourage what Washington saw as an increasing threat from Iran.

The reasons for the killing of Soleimani were complex. It was primarily a reaction to Iranian-backed militia attacks in the region, specifically rocket attacks on American forces in Iraq, and Soleimani was regarded as the principal planner behind the operations. Moreover, the attack aimed to slow down Iran's increasing presence across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, where Soleimani was a key figure in backing Shiite groups and armed groups in Iran's regional proxy network. (Kristian, B, 2020, p. 34).

Regionally, the massacre suddenly escalated tensions among Iran, the United States, and allies. Iran reacted with a missile strike on U.S. military installations in Iraq, elevating the threat of direct conflict. The region also witnessed a surge in violence and heightened fears of broader conflicts among various countries. (Noura Ali Abdallah. 2022, p. 157).

Furthermore, Soleimani's death reinforced the position of certain regional states that perceive Iran's growing power as a direct threat to their security, prompting them to strengthen security alliances with the U.S. and other partners. Conversely, Iran leveraged Soleimani's assassination to rally internal unity and deepen its ties with proxy groups, affirming its commitment to its regional agenda. (Kerr& Katzman, 2018, p. 25).

Briefly, the killing of Qasem Soleimani was a tipping point that exacerbated existing complexities and tensions across the Middle East, having a major impact on regional power dynamics, whose consequences continue to shape the political and security landscape to the present day.

2.3. Impact on Iran's regional influence and proxy networks:

Iran's Middle Eastern influence has been dramatically altered over the last few years, supported by rapidly shifting political and security realities. Most prominent among them were America's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in 2018, imposing widespread sanctions under the "maximum pressure" approach, and the assassination of Qassem Soleimani in early 2020. These all served to undermine Iran's ability to manage its network of proxies but not eliminate its presence in the region. Instead, they compelled Tehran to rethink and adjust its policy to suit the demands of new geopolitics.

Iran has built much of its regional power through close ties with armed organizations and paramilitary groups across the Middle East. They include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and varied factions in Syria and Palestine. These networks have been crucial in advancing Iran's interests beyond its borders, either by confronting its adversaries or by establishing spheres of influence ideologically and politically connected to Tehran. (Noura Ali Abdallah. 2022, P: 145-157).

The heightened American sanctions drastically cut Iran's revenues and financial assets from oil, preventing it from completely funding and backing these allied forces. The majority of the factions most notably Hezbollah have been brought under financial strains, resulting in cutting social and welfare schemes, thereby affecting their popularity at the local levels. Thus, Iran became more frugal in its finances, making investments in strategic interests and a more

flexible, cost-efficient policy instead of the extensive, unconditional assistance it previously provided.

The killing of Qassem Soleimani, the Qods Force commander, was a huge symbolic and operational Iranian loss. Soleimani was the person in charge of Iran's on-the-ground proxy relations and had at his disposal a personal network through which the Iranian leadership could coordinate with its allies directly. Although his successor filled the gap, Iran's proxy management shifted towards a decentralized structure. This gave more leeway to some groups, yet posed problems in maintaining coordinated efforts within the so-called "Axis of Resistance."

Rather than retreating, Iran shifted its strategy to that of lower-cost, more nimble tools. Iran moved away from direct intervention and instead focused on asymmetric conflict, including cyber conflict and the deployment of drones. Iran also increased the application of proxy war in unstable regions. Concurrently, it undertook an attempt to forge closer ties with world powers like Russia and China as a way of countering Western ostracism and gaining alternative economic and diplomatic outlets. (Noura Ali Abdallah. 2022, P: 152).

External pressure is also being met by Iran through domestic opposition in the regions where Iran has maximum leverage. In Iraq and Lebanon, popular movements and civil society groups, especially youth, have demonstrated increasing resistance to Iranian meddling, which reflects a decline in popular legitimacy. On the regional front, countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE have gone ahead to deepen their security alliances, be it defense pacts or new blocs, to balance out Iranian expansion.

While Iran's influence in the Middle East still has not disappeared despite consecutive setbacks, it has definitively moved into a new phase of strategic realignment. This phase is marked by cost-squeamishness, increased reliance on non-state actors, and the exploitation of

political and security vacuums of failed states. As Tehran fights to retain its status as a regional power, ongoing internal and external strains continue to put to the viability and stability of its regional policy in jeopardy, jeopardizing its future influence more than ever before.

3. Gulf State Alliances :

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are a leading regional coalition in the Arabian Gulf, comprising six states that enjoy strategic locations and abundant natural resources, especially oil and gas. The council emerged with the objective of deepening political, economic, and security collaboration among its member countries in order to respond to mounting regional as well as international challenges. In recent decades, the Gulf alliances have evolved internally and externally as the nations tried to solidify their steps towards stability and development, as well as establish strategic alliances with regional and global actors to solidify their security and common interests. The alliances have played a key role in shaping regional policy and framing the global landscape amid complex geopolitical transformations and numerous crises affecting the region.

3.1. Arms deals and strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE:

Between 1973 and 1975, U.S. arms sales to the Gulf Arab states sharply increased, following the October 1973 War and the subsequent oil crisis, which brought about sweeping changes in international politics and economic relations among nations. According to U.S. reports, the Department of State, the total worth of weapons deals signed by the United States with Gulf states in this time surpassed \$8 billion, a strategic U.S. move to reassert its authority in the region. (Al Mazrouei, N.S. 2016, p46).

Saudi Arabia was the largest purchaser of American arms during this time, signing deals amounting to approximately \$5 billion, according to statistics from the Stockholm

International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). These exchanges included advanced combat fighter planes such as the F-15, air defense systems, and other advanced military hardware. Other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, also saw higher arms imports; Kuwait completed deals worth approximately \$1.5 billion, while the UAE deals were worth \$1 billion during the same timeframe.

These arms sales occurred under the cover of a complex political environment. The United States attempted to consolidate its ties with the Gulf states in a broader policy framework for countering Soviet influence in the Middle East, especially in the context of Soviet support for Arab states during the October War. Further, the heightening of oil revenues, fueled by the 1973 Arab oil boycott, enabled Gulf states to finance these massive weapons acquisitions.

The interest of the United States in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia began in the 1940s and greatly grew after the October War of 1973, when Saudi Arabia played a leading role in an oil export ban on countries that supported Israel. The leadership role attracted the attention of American policymakers, who now saw being on good terms with the Kingdom as imperative to U.S. national security. (Al Mazrouei, N.S. 2016, p52)

The two countries' relations are based on two pillars of development and security. In the security pillar, the relations go back to World War II, when the United States sent an American military mission to Saudi Arabia to assess its defence needs. Due to growing threats within the region, particularly from pro-Soviet South Yemen and Iraq, Saudi Arabia attempted to strengthen its defence capacities by procuring advanced U.S. arms.

The 1970s witnessed remarkable growth in military cooperation, and Saudi Arabia signed numerous arms deals with the U.S., acquiring fighter jets, air defence systems, warships, and tanks. American training missions and military advisers were also dispatched to help train

Saudi forces, and U.S. companies were behind the construction of military infrastructure within the Kingdom. (Korany, B., and Fattah, M.A., 2008, p 81-87).

Economically and developmentally, Saudi Arabia relied on Americans' expertise and investment in modernizing itself, especially in the industrial, agricultural, and educational sectors. The United States became the primary importer of Saudi oil, once again entangling the economic interests of the two nations.

In effect, the Saudi-American partnership evolved into a strategic partnership, not just on the basis of commerce or arms deals, but on common interests fighting Soviet penetration in the region and employing Saudi petro-revenues to help finance significant arms sales that were economically lucrative for both partners.

Meanwhile, since its establishment as a federal union of seven emirates, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Fujairah, and Ras Al Khaimah, the United Arab Emirates has witnessed increasing growth in its military and economic relations with the United States. On 2 January 1973, the UAE became eligible for Foreign Military Sales (FMS) under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Act, the precursor to greater defense cooperation between the nations.

During this first phase of the relationship, most of the military purchases were done on a commercial basis. Dubai, for instance, acquired two Jet Ranger helicopters in 1973, and there were additional acquisitions in 1974, including Bell 206 and Bell 204/205 helicopters. Abu Dhabi, for its part, bought two Lockheed C-130 Hercules planes in August 1973. It also considered purchasing fighter planes, helicopters, and armored vehicles from France and Jordan. Abu Dhabi subsequently expressed interest in buying 30 U.S.-licensed armored personnel carriers.

Economically, U.S. exports to the UAE increased exponentially from approximately \$50 million in 1971 to \$100 million in 1973. Meanwhile, during the same period, U.S. investment and project involvement in the UAE in most areas increased, particularly in energy, infrastructure, and health care. Most significantly, a leading US engineering firm secured a \$367 million contract to build an oil refinery, and another firm was commissioned to design a \$300 million liquefied petroleum gas plant, and a US architecture firm secured a \$65 million contract for designing and overseeing the construction of a new hospital in Abu Dhabi. These projects provided not only direct payments for services but also spurred sales of related equipment and materials, U.S. exports to the UAE likely to grow at an annual rate of 25%. (Al Mazrouei, N.S. 2016, p61).

Although the collaboration with America continued to widen in 1975, the largest share of the UAE arms deal for the year was with France and Britain. In 1975, Abu Dhabi purchased 18 French-made Dassault Mirage III aircraft including six two-seat trainer models equipped with Martlet air-to-ground missiles especially to strike ground radar locations.

These developments illustrate that, during the early years, each emirate had its own independent free-standing arms procurement policies. The contact with the U.S. began with commercial activities prior to becoming formal military arrangements. At the same time, American corporations were dominant in various economic sectors even as France and the UK remained dominant in supplying the UAE with arms during this period.

3.2. The Trump administration's response to the Yemen war and the Khashoggi murder:

The Trump administration's policy within the U.S.-Saudi engagement between 2017 and 2021 saw a sensitive and controversial episode, especially amidst complexities such as the war in Yemen and the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The Trump

administration's policy on these issues was characterized by political pragmatism, whereby strategic and economic interests took priority over global and moral pressures.

Trump supported the Saudi-led Arab coalition in Yemen since the start of his presidency by deploying military, logistical, and intelligence assistance and tremendous arms sales. The administration had asserted that this aid was essential to counter Iranian influence in the area and regarded Houthi rebels in Yemen as an Iranian proxy threatening regional security and U.S. allies. (Ibish, H, 2018, p41)

Nevertheless, such aid was more and more condemned by human rights organizations and the US Congress for the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the war, including famine, epidemic outbreaks of disease, and deaths among civilians. Congress approved in 2019 a reduction of US military aid to the coalition in Yemen, but Trump vetoed it, citing that Saudi Arabia remains a key ally in the war against terrorism and resisting Iran.

The killing of Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 triggered a global backlash, particularly after the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had authorized the operation. (Simone van Slooten, 2019, p 31).

Despite these disclosures, President Trump adopted a diplomatic stance, not wishing to directly place the blame on the Crown Prince and stressing that it was essential to maintain economic and military ties with the Kingdom. In a public declaration, he said, "The Crown Prince may have known about it, and he may not have... In any case, we will not abandon an important strategic partner". These statements provoked outrage among U.S. political elites, whose prominent leaders called for stringent sanctions and punishment for the perpetrators. The Trump administration, however, continued its trajectory of action, viewing continued

cooperation with Riyadh as essential to the national security of the United States, especially with tensions between Iran. (Simone van Slooten, 2019, p 42-56)

The Trump administration's policy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia was clearly informed by strategic and economic concerns rather than human rights concerns. Washington decided to uphold its long-standing friendship with the Kingdom through extreme crises, exhibiting pragmatic handling of international affairs in this era.

3.3. Balancing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) rivalries (e.g., Qatar blockade):

The Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC, is a six-state Arab regional organization of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. The council was formed in 1981 to increase economic, political, and security cooperation among its member states. The relations between some of the member states have however been marked by tension and competition that have impacted the unity and stability of the council. Such GCC rivalries have their origins in a variety of factors including political loyalties, rivalry over regional power, divergent foreign policy stances, and divergent economic and developmental agendas of the involved states. One of the most dramatic incidents of these rivalries was the blockade of Qatar in June 2017.

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt blockaded Qatar diplomatically and economically, blaming it for being pro-terrorist outfits and inciting close ties with Iran to which Qatar protested strongly. The measures included closing the land frontier, blocking flights, and severing diplomatic relations. This crisis severely rocked the GCC, severely challenging the solidarity of the council and that of both Qatar's and the blockading countries' economies. Yet Qatar successfully adapted by diversifying its foreign alliances and encouraging greater self-sufficiency. (Samuel Ramani, 2021, p 15).

Various efforts were initiated to cool down tensions between GCC members, including Kuwait and US mediation and intra-GCC dialogue processes. There was a reconciliation agreement at the Al-Ula summit in Saudi Arabia in January 2021 that resulted in the blockade being dropped and relations being normalized. This accord proved the ability of the GCC to restore balance in intra-state relations during deep-rooted disagreements, an indication that member states had attained a shared perception that constant divergences undermined their long-term strategic interests and regional security.

The experience of the Qatar blockade shows that brokering Gulf Cooperation Council rivalries is vexed with complexity in an atmosphere of negotiation, dialogue, and political dexterity. Albeit a history of issues in Gulf relations, the council is a critical platform to pursue regional integration and stability, provided there is a promotion of a spirit of cooperation and disagreements are settled through proper mechanisms. (Samuel Ramani, 2021, p 17).

4. Military Interventions and Withdrawals :

There have been significant policy shifts in the United States' Middle Eastern military intervention policy, most significantly in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, from more forceful military action to sudden withdrawals in recent years. There have been dramatic events that affected the balance of power in the region and the future of security and stability within these countries. The US decision to release some of its regional allies, the Syrian Kurds, for instance, and reduce its troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, had implications on the political as well as the military spectrum as much as it was playing a role in reshuffling alliances and solidifying other regional and global actors. Thus, it becomes necessary to study the impact of such withdrawals and interventions so that the regional dynamics of stability and security can be comprehensively understood.

4.1. Withdrawal from Syria: Abandonment of Kurdish allies and implications for regional security:

The developments in the Syrian crisis accelerated suddenly after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced on December 12, 2018, an imminent military campaign east of the Euphrates against Kurdish militia positions allied with the American forces in the region since 2015. There was no doubt about Erdoğan's seriousness, followed by press reports indicating the arrival of large military reinforcements at the Syrian border, with approximately thirty thousand Turkish soldiers and Free Syrian Army fighters preparing to participate in the operation. On December 15, 2018, US President Donald Trump had a phone call with Erdoğan concerning the anticipated Turkish military campaign. Reports leaked after this call suggested that Trump persuaded Erdoğan to delay the Turkish operation. (Sarah Dadouch, 2019, p 36)

However, the surprise came early on December 20, when Trump tweeted his decision to withdraw US military forces from Syria within 100 days. It was widely believed in both Washington and Ankara that Erdoğan, rather than being convinced to delay the operation, was the one who convinced Trump to withdraw US forces from Syria. Whatever the case, it soon became clear that Trump had made his decision without sufficient consultation with the US Department of Defense, senior commanders of the Central Command responsible for operations in Syria, or the Foreign Relations, Security, and Defense committees of Congress. Consequently, Defense Secretary General James Mattis resigned in protest over the disagreement with the President, and Trump's sudden withdrawal decision was met with a storm of opposition and condemnation from senior members of both the Senate and House, as well as security and defense circles in Washington.

On the evening of December 21, 2018, after a second phone call between Trump and Erdoğan within a few days, Ankara confirmed the postponement of the military operation east of the Euphrates, but "not indefinitely."

It is estimated that over two thousand US soldiers are deployed in eastern and northeastern Syria, mostly special forces and military trainers, stationed at several sites near Hasakah, Qamishli, and Ain al-Arab, including three air bases. US forces are also positioned at several sites on the Syrian side of the Jordanian border and in the Syrian desert. These forces are heavily armed and supported by active and intense air cover, cooperating with thousands of Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria or smaller groups of Syrian opposition fighters in southern Syria.

The US military presence in Syria, primarily aimed at targeting ISIS rather than the Syrian regime or pro-regime Shiite militias, began in 2015. The rapid advance of ISIS in several Iraqi provinces in the summer of 2014 and its territorial expansion in Syria forced the Obama administration to re-engage militarily in the Middle East. However, the US chose to avoid confrontation with ISIS, instead relying on local allies, limiting its role to training, planning, logistical and air support, and military intervention only when necessary.

In Iraq, US allies included the Iraqi army and Popular Mobilisation Forces, while in Syria, the US found an ally in the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) affiliated with the Democratic Union Party. The Kurdish militias gained US attention during the battle of Ain al-Arab in the summer of 2015. However, Turkey accused the Democratic Union Party and all its affiliates of being an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), designated a terrorist organisation, which has been fighting the Turkish state since the mid-1980s. Thus, the US relationship with the Kurdish party became a source of tension between Washington and Ankara. Additionally, US deployment in Syria without UN authorisation or invitation from the Syrian government drew objections from Damascus and Moscow, especially after Russia became a key player through direct military intervention since late September 2015. (Liz Sly, Sarah Dadouch & Asser Khattab, 2019, pp. 312-41).

The Obama administration did not plan to topple the Syrian regime or counterbalance Russian involvement; its focus was on fighting ISIS alone. However, under Trump's presidency, parts of the administration, especially the Departments of Defence and State, began viewing the US military presence in Syria as a tool to confront Iran. Trump adopted a strategy to curb Iranian influence in the Middle East, leading officials to see Syria as a battleground against Iran and to prevent Iran from securing a safe supply route from Kermanshah through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. These officials openly linked the US withdrawal decision to forcing an Iranian military exit from Syria.

Conversely, Trump showed little enthusiasm for maintaining a US military presence in Syria, consistent with his campaign promises to withdraw from Afghanistan and Syria. For Trump, Syria was not a core area of US influence, and whatever happens there should be left to regional powers. In April 2018, Trump declared the defeat of ISIS and his intention to withdraw US troops from Syria. However, pressure from within his administration, especially the Pentagon, convinced him to postpone the withdrawal indefinitely, citing ongoing operations against ISIS and the need to counter Iranian influence. Now, Trump appears to have announced the withdrawal without sufficient consultations with other administration sectors, likely because the Pentagon would oppose such a move. This unilateral and personal decision led to Mattis's resignation and widespread opposition in Congress, as well as surprise among US European allies, especially the French, who maintain forces in Syria alongside the US. Israel, which fears increased Iranian and Hezbollah influence in Syria, also expressed dissatisfaction, though muted due to close US-Israel ties under Trump.

Russia welcomed the US withdrawal, having consistently opposed the US military presence in Syria as illegitimate. The US exit paves the way for Russia to strengthen Assad's control and create a political atmosphere conducive to a final resolution of the Syrian crisis. Turkey's priorities in Syria shifted significantly since late 2015 and early 2016. Initially,

Turkey's priority was to overthrow Assad by supporting the Syrian opposition. By late 2015, though uncomfortable with the US backing Kurdish militias, Turkey did not consider this a serious threat, expecting the US-Kurdish alliance to be limited and temporary. However, as US arms supplies to the Kurdish militias increased, and plans were announced to train tens of thousands of Kurdish fighters, coupled with Kurdish declarations of establishing an autonomous region, Ankara perceived a serious threat across the border. (Ben Hubbard, Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt & Patrick Kingsley, 2019, p 56)

The failure of the US to enforce the agreement for Kurdish withdrawal from Manbij after liberating it from ISIS in the summer of 2016 marked the start of US-Turkish tensions in Syria.

Turkey views the Democratic Union Party and the YPG as extensions of the PKK, and thus a direct threat to its national security. Turkey launched "Euphrates Shield" in the summer of 2016 against ISIS and Kurdish militias west of the Euphrates, and in early 2018, it launched "Olive Branch" to expel Kurdish militias from Afrin. Turkey avoided military clashes with US forces stationed in Manbij to protect the Kurdish militias but continuously pressured the US, resulting in an agreement for Kurdish withdrawal from Manbij and the transfer of control to residents. However, despite progress, the US's reluctance delayed the agreement's completion.

The increasing Kurdish control east of the Euphrates and the growing Kurdish armament heightened the threat perception for Turkey, in which, according to Turkish and US press sources, the first Trump-Erdogan call following Turkey's announcement of the operation east of the Euphrates included general talk about a US withdrawal from Syria. Erdogan likely meant withdrawal from the US-Kurdish alliance, but Trump, who consistently favoured complete withdrawal, believed Turkey could handle the remaining ISIS threat east of the

Euphrates. The sudden US withdrawal announcement also surprised Ankara. Erdoğan cautiously welcomed the decision but expressed his surprise and the Turkish leadership's lack of time to assess its implications. Erdoğan agreed to postpone the Turkish military operation at Trump's request, likely to allow US forces to withdraw.

Turkey's main concern is whether the withdrawal will be total or partial, whether the US will reclaim weapons supplied to the Kurds, and how the US will prevent chaos in the Kurdish-controlled areas, including protecting the Arab majority and handling thousands of ISIS prisoners. Turkey must negotiate with Washington to coordinate the withdrawal and time the Turkish operation properly. (Annie Karni, Lara Jakes & Patrick Kingsley, 2019, p26)

Diplomatically, Turkey must also work intensively to persuade Russia and Iran to approve the Turkish operation east of the Euphrates, to avoid clashes with Syrian regime forces and prevent escalation into direct conflict. Furthermore, the Kurdish party's relationship with Assad's regime has been ambiguous, avoiding conflict while maintaining security cooperation in Hasakah and Qamishli. Kurdish forces may hand over some areas to Assad, especially those deep inside Syria away from the border, which could confront Turkish forces with both Kurdish militias and Syrian regime troops.

The US withdrawal clears the way for Turkey to launch its military operation east of the Euphrates without risking confrontation with US forces closely allied with Kurdish militias. The withdrawal is expected to cause a split among Arab factions within the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), weakening the Kurdish-dominated core.

Strategically, the US exit benefits Russia and Iran, the main backers of Assad. With US forces gone, Turkey will be the sole adversarial force with a military presence inside Syria, controlling territory. This shift may complicate negotiations between Turkey and Russia/Iran over Syria's future and embolden Assad and his allies to demand Turkish troop withdrawal.

The regime's first step, possibly with Russian approval, might be to push opposition fighters out of Idlib regardless of Turkish monitoring posts.

The biggest lesson of the US withdrawal is for the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Union Party and its mother party, the PKK. Under US protection, the party pursued repressive policies against dissenting Kurdish forces and Arabs, forcibly displacing tens of thousands to engineer a Kurdish demographic majority in the autonomous region. Now, the US is turning its back on its Kurdish partners, leaving them vulnerable to Turkish forces or Assad's troops. Just as the US and Iran's Shah abandoned the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq in the 1970s, the US is abandoning the Syrian Kurds. (AFP, & Reuters, 2019, p 12)

4.2. Reducing U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan:

Consequences for regional stability:

In recent years, the United States has shown a clear trend towards reducing its military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, after decades of costly military interventions both in human and financial terms. This shift was driven by a combination of political, economic, and security factors that prompted Washington to reassess its strategies in the Middle East and South Asia, aiming to redirect resources and lessen the burdens associated with prolonged wars.

The reasons behind the U.S. withdrawal are mainly attributed to the heavy human and financial costs incurred during the Iraq and Afghanistan operations. Thousands of American soldiers lost their lives, in addition to massive expenditures that failed to achieve the desired political stability in these two countries. Despite some tactical military successes, internal conflicts persisted in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the emergence of terrorist groups such as ISIS and the Taliban, making the goal of stability elusive. Furthermore, domestic pressure in the United States played a significant role, as public opinion called for redirecting resources towards domestic priorities instead of foreign wars. Additionally, global geopolitical changes

pushed the U.S. to focus on competing with international powers like China and Russia, thereby reducing the priority of military interventions in the Middle East and South Asia. (C. Todd Lopez, (website), June 5, 2023)

The consequences of the reduction in U.S. military presence led to a security vacuum in Iraq and Afghanistan, which allowed local and regional powers to expand their influence. In Iraq, Iranian influence increased through militias supported by Tehran, exacerbating sectarian and political tensions and complicating the political landscape. In Afghanistan, the Taliban regained control over vast areas, including the capital Kabul, plunging the country back into instability and raising international concerns about human rights, especially women's rights. Terrorist groups like ISIS also exploited weakened security forces to carry out attacks and increase violence, further burdening the local population and hindering efforts towards development and peace. Local governments in both countries faced enormous challenges in enforcing security and achieving stability due to weak institutions and insufficient international support. Moreover, the U.S. withdrawal reshaped international alliances, as countries such as Iran, Turkey, and Russia sought to fill the political and security void, increasing geopolitical complexity and escalating regional tensions.

The reduction of the U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan marks a significant turning point in international politics and carries profound implications for regional stability. Although this withdrawal reflects a trend towards reducing direct military interventions, the resulting security and political vacuum requires effective management through strengthening local institutions, building strong governmental capacities, and enhancing international and regional cooperation to address the growing security and political challenges. Without these measures, the risk of sliding into further conflicts and instability remains, threatening the peace and security of the people in the entire region. (Albert B. Wolf, 2020, pp 94–100)

5. Arab-Israeli Normalisation:

Relations between some Arab countries and Israel have undergone significant changes over recent decades, embodied in what is known as the "Arab-Israeli normalization." This term refers to the establishment of diplomatic, economic, and security ties between Israel and several Arab states after many years of conflict and mutual non-recognition. Normalisation is a sensitive and controversial topic, with opinions among people and political leaders varying widely. For some, it represents a step toward peace and regional stability, while others view it as a concession on national rights and just causes for the Palestinian people. In this introduction, we will take a look at the background of this development and its various dimensions.

5.1. The Abraham Accords (2020): Brokering normalisation between Israel and Arab states:

The Middle East region has witnessed significant political and diplomatic transformations in recent years, most notably the signing of the so-called "Abraham Accords," agreements concluded between several Arab countries and Israel under the auspices of the United States. However, these agreements have sparked widespread controversy across political, cultural, and religious circles. While some view them as an opportunity to enhance stability and economic cooperation in the region, others consider them contrary to the historic positions regarding the Palestinian issue and an unconditional normalisation with Israel.

Since 1948, the Arab-Israeli conflict has remained one of the most prominent challenges in the Middle East, taking various forms including bloody wars, complex negotiations, and faltering diplomatic initiatives. However, the year 2020 marked a decisive turning point in the course of this relationship, following the announcement of the signing of the "Abraham Accords" between Israel and several Arab states a step described as a radical shift in the map of regional alliances and interests. (Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam. 2023, p6)

Although some Arab countries, such as Egypt (in 1978) and Jordan (in 1994), preceded this step by signing peace treaties with Israel in the 1970s and 1990s, the "Abraham Accords" differed in that they were not concluded as a result of a war with Israel, but rather within the framework of political understandings characterized by a strategic nature.

The "*Abraham Accords*," also known as the Abraham Agreements, are named after the prophet Abraham, to whom the three monotheistic religions, which include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, trace their roots. This name was chosen to impart a sense of partnership, based on religious grounds, between Israel and the Arab states, or in other words, between Jews and Muslims. The declaration of the "Abraham Accords," according to the text on the U.S. Department of State website, commits the parties to the following provisions:

- The importance of maintaining and enhancing peace in the Middle East and throughout the world, based on mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, and respect for human dignity and freedom, including freedom of religion and belief.
- A call to strengthen efforts aimed at promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue to establish a culture of peace among the three Abrahamic religions and for all humanity.
- The belief that the best way to face challenges is through cooperation and dialogue, and that developing friendly relations between countries serves the interests of lasting peace in the region and the world.
- The pursuit of instilling values of tolerance and respect for every individual, to build a world where everyone enjoys a dignified life and hope, regardless of race, religion, or nationality.
- Continuing work toward a comprehensive vision of peace, security, and prosperity in the Middle East and the world as a whole. (Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam. 2023, p20)

The Abraham Accords Institute for Peace, based in Washington, describes the signing of the accords as "a fundamental turning point like relations between Israel and Arab

countries," adding that, with strong bipartisan support in the United States, "four countries, within a short period of no more than four months between August and December 2020, began a diplomatic process to normalize bilateral relations with Israel, following the precedent set by Egypt and Jordan in taking this significant step.

The institute notes that these agreements "pave the way to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and open horizons for a future based on peace, tolerance, and equal opportunities in the Middle East and the entire world". It also sees them as "the beginning of a new regional chapter founded on a collective vision of economic prosperity, and that as commercial relations strengthen, so too will the bonds between peoples and nations."

There are other strategic reasons behind the signing of the "Abraham Accords" between some Arab countries and Israel at that particular time. Notably, these agreements contribute to supporting the ambitions of the United Arab Emirates, for example, helping it build itself as a military power, in addition to being a business hub and a prominent tourist destination, according to Jeremy Bowen, BBC's Middle East editor. (Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam. 2023, p. 25)

The United States, on its part, assisted in facilitating the agreements by pledging to provide the UAE with advanced weapons that were previously out of its reach, including the F-35 stealth fighter jets and the EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft. At the same time, Israel and the United States support both the Emirati and Bahraini sides in their concerns regarding Iran. Tehran had claimed, until 1969, that Bahrain was an inseparable part of its territory. Sunni rulers in Bahrain view some factions of the country's uneasy Shia majority as a potential fifth column loyal to Iran.

The agreements also help reduce Israel's regional isolation, as normalizing relations with Arab states is considered a significant achievement. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu adopts a strategy known since the 1920s as the "iron wall" between Israel and the Arabs, based on the idea that Israel's military superiority will ultimately force the Arabs to recognize its existence as an unavoidable reality. Moreover, the agreements help strengthen the regional alliance against Iran, which is another gain for Israel. Israelis place great hopes on the "Abraham Accords" to consolidate their future relations with Gulf countries that are geographically distant from the core of the conflict in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories. (Ahmed, Shiza, 2022, p 36)

Undoubtedly, the "Abraham Accords" represent a remarkable shift in the history of Arab-Israeli relations, opening the door to unconventional alliances in the region based on economic and security interests, largely transcending ideological and historical considerations.

5.2. Strategic implications for regional alliances and the Palestinian cause:

Observers unanimously agree that the Palestinian cause is adversely affected and declining due to the upheavals shaking the region. The post-colonial Arab state structure did not serve the Palestinian cause, despite popular support for it and the regimes' frequent backing and aid to Palestinians.

Several reasons underlie this situation, foremost among them conspiracies hatched by multiple parties, led by Israel and old and new colonial powers. These conspiracies aimed to dismantle states, divide countries, and divert the conflict as if it were a religious war between Muslims and Christians or a sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites and minorities. (Dr. Adnan Abu Amer, 2013, p. 07).

Here, we can discuss the issue by reviewing the positions of the Palestinian Authority and factions regarding the regional developments, including the required policy in light of the exposure of Palestinian groups in countries experiencing internal conflicts that threaten their security and existence. Opinions vary: do the leadership and nationalist and Islamic forces

support one side against another, or adopt a policy of neutrality, or engage in alliances that revive the Palestinian cause and place it atop the priorities of such alliances? Or do they hold all parties in any Arab country's conflict responsible and refuse to side with any party, since the Palestinian cause requires support and solidarity from Arab, regional, and international forces? Or do they combine neutrality in internal conflicts with a policy of defending fundamental principles and values, namely freedom, justice, development, democracy, independence, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms?

Benjamin Netanyahu asserts that the Israeli army will endure four difficult years, while President Obama and the international coalition need at least four years to defeat ISIS. These are challenging years ahead, amid the dismantling of existing states, the disruption of the social fabric, and the ignition of civil, regional, and sectarian wars surrounding Palestine. Maps, alliances, and power balances are shifting in a global environment where the U.S. faces great confusion after the end of the unipolar era, enhancing the role of regional powers and axes managing their affairs.

Historically, Arab developments have strongly influenced the Palestinian cause's course, which often outweighed internal factors and reflected their strengths or weaknesses on the Palestinian trajectory.

Attention must be paid to the role the Zionist enemy attempts to play now. It tries to restore its role as the "regional policeman," lost after the Gulf Wars, regaining some political lustre by serving as a gateway to the White House through influence in the U.S. Congress, a role it briefly played after Oslo and Wadi Araba, and after the Gulf War by pressuring Iraq. It is attempting this again through its military strength, political influence in the U.S., and threats of direct military intervention, possibly establishing a security belt from the Golan Heights to

the Arqoub villages, protecting some regimes from internal changes on the horizon. (Naomi Rovnick, Nell Mackenzie, and Marc Jones, 2023, p. 26).

This situation complicates the Palestinian cause, deprives it of expected Arab support, restores Israel's "policeman" role, and signals broader conflicts and new alliances.

- **Oslo Agreement:** The Palestinian self-rule framework is practically defunct; Area A, where the PA was to have full security and administrative powers, is violated freely by Israel at any time. Oslo's worst legacy is dividing Palestinians into the West Bank, Gaza, 1948 Palestinians, and diaspora, failing to unify efforts in a comprehensive program.
- **Security Coordination:** The PA's current relations with Israel rest on security coordination, prioritizing Israeli security over political progress. Threats to stop coordination relate to withheld tax revenues rather than political factors like settlement expansion or daily violations. Ironically, U.S. Secretary Kerry warns against PA collapse over tax revenue issues, ignoring that the peace process is dead, making coordination a paid service to ensure occupation security.
- **Settlements:** Netanyahu's government extended confiscation of over 430,000 dunams (from Ma'ale Adumim to Hebron and the Dead Sea), constituting 27% of the West Bank. About 75% of the West Bank is affected by land confiscation for settlements or military zones (precursors to settlements), with around half a million settlers in 144 official and 100 unofficial settlements, undermining any realistic Palestinian state.
- **Failed Reconciliation:** Palestinian reconciliation efforts have stalled, never advancing beyond talks without hope or concrete achievements. This time, excuses are exhausted; factions must face the political and methodological bases of division and agree on a serious new vision for resistance and conflict management.
- **Diaspora:** Palestinians in diaspora have historically preserved national spirit and identity through political, intellectual, and military engagement. Yet, since the PA replaced the PLO,

their role diminished, leading to a loss of unified national identity. (Dr. Adnan Abu Amer, 2013, p08)

Regional upheavals over the past four years have pushed the Palestinian cause down the Arab agenda, allowing Israel to deepen its domination. Continued occupation, land confiscation, ongoing division, and overt U.S. bias leave little room for a viable Palestinian state. Internal crises in Arab countries divert attention from the Palestinian issue, with regimes seeking to shed their "burden," often framing it as a Palestinian problem to be resolved internally.

The persistent Palestinian division also weakens the cause. The leadership clings to the illusion that negotiations remain the only option, despite continuous failures. Attempts at reconciliation are blocked by the factions "Fatah" and " Hamas" amid a lack of genuine political will. Israel benefits most, continuing settlement expansion, land confiscation, Judaization of Jerusalem, house demolitions, and human rights violations with near impunity, ignoring international law and protections. (Dr. Adnan Abu Amer, 2013, p18).

Numerous local, regional, and international reasons explain the decline in attention to the Palestinian cause, alongside the near absence of international accountability for Israeli violations. Israel is gradually freeing itself from constraints on settlement growth, Jerusalem's Judaization, and land seizures, imposing facts on the ground that become untouchable realities. Despite Israeli intransigence, the PA has not halted negotiations, which inadvertently serve the occupation by legitimising ongoing demands and delaying international intervention. The primary factor remains internal Palestinian conditions. Had there been national unity, rejection of Oslo, and adherence to rights, the cause would not have declined.

Regionally, internal conflicts in many Arab states have diverted attention from Palestine, diminishing its priority in Arab consciousness. The Palestinian cause's destiny

depends on ending Zionist racist settler-colonialism and restoring Palestinians' full presence on their land in all dimensions, material and spiritual. Palestine's essence is a national liberation struggle against occupation and cultural erasure. The seeming intractability is more a failure of management and planning than a lack of reality-based solutions.

The cornerstone of achieving national liberation lies in uncompromising management of the struggle without conceding collective and national rights. Palestinians have shed blood and sweat demonstrating deep-rooted determination and struggle traditions since the British Mandate and the Nakba, through armed revolts, steadfastness, revolution, and intifadas.

Therefore, Palestinian national struggle methods must be renewed to better represent the humanistic and legitimate dimensions of liberation, making Palestinian identity a unifying symbol for all supporters of Arab and Islamic Jerusalem, not merely Palestinians themselves. (Daniele Bianchi, 2023, p 25).

The moral dimension mandates exposing Zionist racism and exclusion, criminalizing these practices politically and legally internationally, ultimately stripping Israel of its legitimacy entirely. Without this, liberation with Jerusalem intact and culturally Arab and Islamic is impossible.

Conclusion:

The Israel-Palestinian conflict continues to be a central impetus for the Middle East's geopolitical landscape, its difficulties exacerbated by historical injustices, external interventions, and changing regional alliances. The Trump administration's policies, including the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the defunding of UNRWA, and the "Deal of the Century," prioritized Israeli interests over Palestinian rights and further consolidated the occupation and destroyed prospects for a two-state solution. The Abraham Accords, while they advanced normalization between Israel and several Arab nations, marginalize the Palestinian

question, prioritizing economic and security agendas over justice. Meanwhile, US actions, such as the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, escalated tensions with Iran, rendering regional stability more complex. The absence of a united Arab and Islamic front, along with Palestinian fragmentation, has reduced the resistance to Israeli policy and prolonged the Palestinians' suffering, which has been marked by forced displacements, massacres, and systemic human rights violations. As global public opinion changes, with growing protests against Israeli policy and Western patronage, an end to the conflict rests on Palestinian reunification, global accountability, and a rejection of policies enabling continued occupation. The path ahead necessitates a renewed commitment to Palestinian self-determination, the right of return, and a regional settlement that prioritizes justice and stability over geopolitical expediency.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Donald Trump's administration (2017–2021) was a turning point in the direction of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. It was a period that was remarkably different from the diplomatic traditions inherited by previous administrations, and where there was the acceptance of a unipolar approach that was anchored on pursuing instant American interests, generally prioritizing economic and military transactions over the values and principles America has always espoused in its global discourse.

The study confirmed that Trump's policy in the Middle East was not circumstantial or random but was rather based on a particular ideological vision in the form of the "America First" doctrine. It was also shaped by internal political forces and the pull of powerful lobbying groups, particularly those with pro-Israel agendas. This vision was articulated by assertive steps such as the American withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, the announcement of Jerusalem being the capital of Israel, the reduction of funds to UN-related organizations operating among Palestinians, and open support for the Arab-Israeli normalization process.

By implication, it is evident that this policy reshaped the geography of regional alignments, disturbing some of the tried-and-true pillars of American foreign policy, such as loyalty to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute or maintenance of a balance in regional tension management. In addition, it placed more emphasis on the leverage of some of the regional powers, i.e., Israel, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, over others. It also provided an opportunity for competing global powers such as Russia and China to increase their influence in the void left by the changing role of the U.S.

Therefore, the current research concludes that Trump's policy not only led to short-term alterations but also assisted in cementing new patterns of American engagement within the region. This calls on regional and international actors to revise their strategies according to

the alterations. At the same time, the future course for this policy remains contingent upon the desires of future U.S. administrations and the ability of future U.S. administrations to reassert balance in their Middle Eastern engagements.

Overall, this study lays the groundwork for additional research that can examine the extent to which the shifts have endured since the Biden presidency, or survey the impact of Trump's policies on Middle Eastern nations' internal politics themselves, not merely within the realm of global relations, but in how these changes impact global trends influencing regional stability.

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude analyse la politique étrangère de l'administration du président Donald Trump à l'égard du Moyen-Orient de 2017 à 2021, en examinant son rôle et la mesure dans laquelle elle a redéfini l'équilibre des pouvoirs et les alliances régionales. Cette recherche repose sur l'affirmation que l'approche adoptée par l'administration Trump, fondée sur le slogan « America First », a contribué de manière significative à des changements fondamentaux dans la manière dont les États-Unis traitent des questions clés telles que la question nucléaire iranienne, le conflit palestino-israélien et les relations avec les pays du Conseil de coopération du Golfe (CCG). L'étude adopte une approche analytique pour comprendre les différentes dimensions de ces transformations et leurs motivations politiques et idéologiques en analysant les décisions cruciales prises par l'administration américaine à l'époque. Elle cherche également à évaluer les répercussions géopolitiques variées de ces politiques sur les acteurs régionaux et internationaux, ainsi que leur impact sur la nature des interactions stratégiques au sein de la région. Les résultats de l'étude indiquent que la politique de Trump ne s'est pas limitée à une pratique temporaire, mais a constitué une nouvelle orientation stratégique caractérisée par un pragmatisme et un parti pris en faveur de certains alliés spécifiques jugés dignes par les États-Unis, entraînant une redéfinition du réseau des alliances régionales et l'affaiblissement de certains piliers de la politique étrangère américaine traditionnelle au Moyen-Orient. La conclusion de cette recherche est que la poursuite future de ces politiques par les administrations américaines à venir et leurs effets à long terme sur la stabilité régionale devraient faire l'objet d'une investigation approfondie.

Mots-clés : Donald Trump, politique étrangère des États-Unis, Moyen-Orient, conflit arabo-israélien, Iran