

US FOREIGN POLICY GOALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST BETWEEN 2011 AND 2021

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Abstract: Since the end of World War II, the United States' interests in the Middle East have intensified rapidly, and this presence continues today in response to a variety of economic and security concerns. Following the 2011 Arab uprisings and the Iraqi regime change, US foreign policy has pursued several transformative agendas against some of its traditional allies, apparently contradicting Washington's long-standing defence of the regional status quo. This has caused levels of uncertainty among regional players about what to expect from the United States. The present study highlights the US foreign policy goals in the Middle East between 2011 and 2021, which includes upholding US military bases in the Gulf countries, supporting client-states and other friendly states, providing support and protection to Israel's sovereignty, maintaining strategic access to oil in the Gulf countries, and battling Islamic movements and terrorist groups (such as Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)). In addition, the study also focuses on other crucial aspects that might affect the United States and their regional allies' interests in the regime. To explore US foreign policy decisions and actions between the years 2011 and 2021, data was collected through structured interviews and online secondary data sources. The data was reviewed and analysed to look at the socio-political, historical, and economic factors at work in the Middle East. The theoretical analysis uses a descriptive approach as to how the changes in the period after 2011 have influenced American foreign policy in the Middle East. The findings illustrate that terrorism, civil wars, and instability in the Middle East have had significant influence on the United States' economic, national security, and diplomatic interests in the region. Maintaining strong ties with allies and comprehending the nature of conflicts is critical to attaining the US foreign policy objectives

in the Middle East. This research study serves as a reference guide for scholars, policy analysts, and practitioners by examining to what extent the relationship between the US and the Middle East has changed.

Keywords: US foreign policy; Middle East; policy goals; Israel's sovereignty

Introduction

The Middle East has been a focal point of US foreign policy since World War II, increasing in importance due to global, geographical, and political influences in the region. Many cultural relations exist between the region and the West, stretching back to the Middle Ages and extending into modern history through the efforts of Western missionaries and their educational activities. The Middle East is made up of parts of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Natural resources, such as oil and water, abound in the region. The term 'Middle East' is relatively new. The name first appeared in a series of articles in *The Times* in 1902. After WWII, the word 'Middle East' gained widespread acceptance, especially among academic institutions and government agencies (Al Sarhan, 2017).

The continuing disputes and turmoil in the Middle East do not diminish its geostrategic importance. According to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the importance of the Middle East depends on four key factors. First, despite the United States' efforts to modernize its energy industry, world and global market equilibrium will remain reliant on Middle Eastern oil. Many analysts and commentators have also claimed that the turmoil in the Middle East threatens oil supply as well as the economic system of the countries that depend on it, including many European nations (Chomsky, 2005; Harvey, 2010). Second, due to its proximity to Europe, the unrest in the Middle East presents a direct and present danger to most European countries, jeopardizing global peace and prosperity. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Syrian crisis, which have resulted in massive refugee waves to Europe, are only two recent examples of such challenges. Third, the importance of the area stems from the strategic relationship between Israel and the United States, as well as the need to sustain the sole Franco-American/Western ally of the region. Finally, Blair claims that the historical evolution of the Middle East will most likely determine the global fate

of radical Islam, which is expansionist in nature and opposes all forms of political and religious systems. The regional defeat of radical Islamic groups could lead to their global defeat and the preservation of the existing international political structure (Prifti, 2017).

Since the end of World War II, the United States' interests in the Middle East have intensified rapidly, and this presence continues today in response to a variety of economic and security concerns. US foreign policy goals include upholding US military bases in the Gulf countries, supporting client-states and other friendly states, providing support and protection to Israel's sovereignty, maintaining strategic access to oil in the Gulf countries, and battling Islamic movements and terrorist groups (such as Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)), and many other aspects that might affect the United States and their regional allies' interests (Al- Sarhan, 2017).

The present study highlights the US foreign policy goals in the Middle East between 2011 and 2021. The Middle East goals of the US are grouped into four categories: combating terrorism, maintaining regional stability, preventing Iranian expansion, and maintaining the balance of power. Iran, the Islamic State, and al-Qaida all pose real threats to these interests at times, but it is believed that these are overestimated, and that many US interests in the region are unlikely to be challenged. The problems of the allies, on the other hand, are more pressing, and the Arab Spring and continuing civil wars have brought all of these to the fore. The US solution to these issues has yielded a number of advantages, including deterring and weakening enemies, as well as reassuring allies efficiently. It has, however, exacerbated internal problems and fuelled anti-Americanism at times (Byman and Moller, 2016).

Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and investigates the phenomenon of US foreign policy decisions and actions between the years 2011 and 2021. The data was collected through structured interviews, published research articles, review journals and other available online resources like Wall Street Journal & Al Jazeera news. The data was analysed to look at the socio-political, historical, and economic factors at work in the Middle East. The data was theoretically analyzed on the

basis of socio-political, historical, and economic factors at work in the Middle East. A descriptive approach, focusing on answering questions relating to “what changes after the year 2011 influenced the US foreign policy in the Middle East up until the present day” was employed for the study. The year 2011 was a turning point and is considered important for comparative study for two reasons. The Arab Spring, a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several largely Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Bahrain began in the spring of 2011. In addition, the brutality of the Assad administration in reaction to protests in 2011 triggered a civil war that lasted more than seven years and was further worsened by the advent of ISIS in 2014. The study then examines changes in US policy along by categorizing US foreign policy goals in the Middle East. Based on the literature (Shukri, 2017), the analysis focuses on the following strategic goals: combating terrorism, regional stability, preventing Iranian expansion, and maintaining the balance of power. The study provides a comprehensive picture of the changing role of the US in the Middle East and the trends expected in the near future.

Categorizing US Foreign Policy Goals in the Middle East

In the following paragraphs, changes in the US Middle East policy are examined in the light of the strategic goals of the US.

Combating Terrorism

The United States declared counterterrorism a top priority in its Middle East policy after the 9/11 attacks. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen have gained international acclaim for their anti-terrorism cooperation, and the US has bolstered ties with historically ignored countries, such as Algeria. The administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have had a strong effect on Saudi Arabia and other stable Gulf countries. Both the Bush and the Obama administrations pushed for a ban on financing terrorism and supporting jihadist movements (Rudner, 2004).

To combat terrorism around the world, the Bush administration adopted a National Strategy for Combating Terrorism in February 2003. The far-reaching plan included methodologies to crush fear-based oppressors

and their gatherings, decline terrorists sponsorship, help, and safe house, diminish the social and financial conditions that terrorists misuse, and ensure US individuals' and public safety at home and abroad (National strategy for combating terrorism, 2003). The US invaded Iraq on 19 March, 2003, and overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime. The Iraqi government was accused by the Bush administration of violating human rights, possessing weapons of mass destruction, and harbouring terrorist leaders. Furthermore, US officials said that the Iraqi regime posed a threat to the security and stability of the entire Middle East region (Desoli, 2015).

The United States formed a global alliance to battle ISIS and terrorism in August-September 2014. The United States and various countries, including a few Arab nations (Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), directed air strikes against ISIS focuses in Syria on 23 September, 2014, determined to undercut "the assailant gathering's capacity to request, train, and resupply its warriors" (Fantz & Pearson, 2015).

The US gains access to vital information through joint efforts, local services use their agents and resources to track and destroy terrorists at home, and it gains physical access to executing drone strikes in some situations, such as Yemen. The Saudis were instrumental in foiling an AQAP plot to bomb a US airliner in 2010, and a joint US-Saudi operation against the group in 2011 foiled similar plots (Dreazen, 2012).

Hamas and Hezbollah are two well-known militant groups that also play an important political role in Middle East. Both are hostile to the United States, although unlike Al-Qa'ida, neither is planning operations against Americans. While the fight against terrorism frequently contributes to the development of democracy. In reality, as the case of the Hamas and Hezbollah shows, by cooperating with partners to combat terrorism, the US is bolstering its intelligence agencies, which is frequently the least democratic aspect of an autocratic administration (Mueller and Stewart, 2012).

The lack of major recent assaults by Al-Qa'ida also demonstrates the vulnerability of the group. The question in this debate is whether the vulnerability of al-Qa'ida is due in part to a persistent US counterterrorism

program or it is largely unaffected by US intervention. It also depends on whether al-Qa'ida affiliate groups are considered part of the central movement and therefore a danger to US interests, or merely local organizations only posing a tangential threat (Byman, 2012).

ISIL, a new jihadist organization that regards the Kurds as ideological opponents as well as enemies for control of territory and resources, attacked Syrian Kurds heavily in the first six months of 2014. The YPG, the military wing of the PYD, began forcefully defending Kurdish towns and villages for the first time, and it appeared to be a more effective actor on the ground than their Iraqi Kurdish counterparts, the Peshmergas (Gunes et al., 2015). The militarization of the Syrian Kurdish struggle has undoubtedly shaped a new dynamic in the region as a result of the Syrian war. The city of Kobani was attacked for the second time by ISIL on 13 September, 2014; this onslaught signalled the end of the Kurdish presence in the region for the jihadists. The YPG was put in a difficult situation after losing a dozen villages in the early days of the battle (Desoli, 2015).

The development of ISIL was one of the key forces altering the Middle East political map, but the Kurds swiftly benefited from the Siege of Kobani owing to an international coalition. Indeed, the US launched air strikes against the jihadists for the first time, resulting in widespread media coverage of the Kobani battle and the Kurdish cause in general. Furthermore, it demonstrated to the rest of the world the fruitful cooperation between the US and the PYD/YPG, which continued despite Turkey's opposition. The Kurds were able to not only defeat ISIL but also take control of the majority of Syria's border with Turkey, thanks to US assistance. The US, the PYD/YPG, the Peshmergas, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) worked together in Kobani to show worldwide support for the Kurdish cause. The PYD's standing as an official US partner has been elevated as a result of its achievements over ISIL on the battlefield, enhancing the legitimacy of the YPG (Plakoudas, 2017).

To summarize this element of US policy in the Middle East, following the September 11 attacks, the United States has become increasingly involved in the fight against terrorism. The US has strengthened its counterterrorism strategies with long-time allies like Egypt and Jordan and has pushed for stronger connections with previously overlooked

or unfriendly regimes such as Yemen and Libya. Of course, the most dramatic example is the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which sparked an insurgency and led to a US presence in the country until the end of 2011. Then, just as US forces were leaving Iraq, the Arab Spring shocked the region, overthrowing long-time US allies in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, and sparking civil wars in a number of nations, including Syria. Despite the Obama administration's opposition to a large-scale US military engagement in the region, it initiated air attacks against Islamic State militants in Iraq in 2014 and increased its attempts to collaborate with regional allies and local partners to combat the group (Byman and Moller, 2016).

The United States' post-9/11 democracy development policy, which was predicated on the ideal that it can curb terrorism, was likewise faulty for a variety of reasons. It associated Western interests with Middle East democratization, and as a result, it instrumentalized democracy in a way that eroded faith in both the notion and the practice of democracy. As a result, once it became evident that democratization was no longer benefiting Western interests, democratic support dwindled. The first and most significant lesson of the post-9/11 period is that we must promote democracy for its own sake as well as on the basis of international standards and universal values. The United States policy during Obama's presidential term showed strong conflicts between the commitment to help existing US allies and popular forces that jeopardize to sweep them away – as evident during the Arab spring revolutions of 2011, in particular – the shift away from explicitly linking democracy with US security has been positive. In conclusion, President Obama made efforts to put the United States' house in order before advocating for democracy in other regions, although this admittedly came with mixed results (Dalacoura, 2012).

Regional stability

The United States has a long history in the Middle East, and from the end of the Cold War, its influence has only increased. The oil fields of the Middle East, as well as other communist-leaning governments, acted as a chessboard between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the 1990s, the US expanded its military presence in the region in order to keep Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Iran's clerical rule in check.

Washington, on the other hand, was involved and sustained in its efforts to achieve peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, although this was largely unsuccessful (Byman and Moller, 2016).

With the end of the Cold War and the crumbling of the Soviet Union, another American period started in the Middle East. Shockingly, it started with a fight. After Iraq attacked oil-rich Kuwait toward the beginning of August 1990, the US fought back rapidly by entering an American-driven military union and applying tension on Iraq to pull out. Over seven years after the fact, in December 1998, the US dispatched a four-day besieging effort to debilitate Iraq's capacity to create and utilize weapons of mass destruction and empower it to maintain UN Security Council Resolutions. After the 9/11 terrorist assault in the US and charges that Afghanistan had reinforced the fear-based oppressors who committed the assault, the United States' next huge presence in the district was an attack on Afghanistan. After two years, the United States participated in the most troublesome conflict of the twenty-first century up until now: the attack of Iraq in 2003. The Iraq War did not end US impact or contribution in the Middle East. Instead, the war ushered in a new era of US Middle East foreign policy, with direct military action against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, as well as diplomatic cooperation with Iran and other regional powers (Brands, 2016).

While many blamed the Iraq War on President Bush's neoconservative policies, others hoped that his replacement, Barack Obama, would take an alternative approach to the region. As a presidential candidate Obama announced that the Obama Doctrine would be "as doctrinaire" as the Bush Doctrine, resulting in the controversial principles of unilateralism and prosecutorial immunity. He ran on a platform of "mutual peace" and "shared prosperity" with other countries. He also vowed to put an end to fear-based politics and change the mindset that has swept the United States into countless conflicts and wars around the world (Ackerman, 2008).

Obama started to emphasize the need for a new period of foreign policy against the Middle East and the Muslim world during his early days as President. As part of this goal, the President travelled to Turkey for the first time, one of the most powerful states in the region and a long-time US ally. In a speech to Egyptian representatives and women shortly

after leaving Turkey, President Obama vowed a “New Beginning” in US foreign policy toward the region (Holzman, 2009). Given this divide, it is reasonable to ask if President Obama’s foreign policy is a continuation or a deviation from that of President Bush. Indeed, the more one studies US foreign policy, the more precise and detailed one’s understanding of foreign policy trends and behaviours as they affect change and consistency in the field over time becomes, as the result of the ever changing foreign policy. (Collinson, 2014).

In May 2018 President Donald Trump announced withdrawal from JCPOA, while a few weeks earlier, he had authorized airstrikes against Syrian regime positions in response to a suspected chemical weapons attack on civilians in the Ghouta region near Damascus. Although this might just have been the latest in a long line of chemical weapons attacks (US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley estimated at least 50 previous incidents), it was the first time the US government took such action during the eight-year Syrian conflict. While President Obama proclaimed the use of chemical weapons to be a “red line” that would prompt immediate US intervention in 2012, the US had previously refused to act on this threat, only to do so this time. This strategy hampered any sense of predictability in US foreign policy, as it did in the case of the Iranian nuclear deal, where the US reacted differently to similar incidents over the span of a few months (Quero & Dessì, 2019).

Preventing Iranian Expansion

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of Islamic republics in Central Asia, the events of September 11, 2001, and the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq have all had a significant impact on the Middle East. These events occurred in the area surrounding Iran, leading to a tightening of the US blockade of the country, which included the establishment of US military bases in Central Asia and the deployment of American fleets in the Gulf region, where Iran is largely isolated from the rest of the world (Habashneh, 2008).

The Iranian nuclear program has been the source of a dispute between Iran and the United States (Farhani and Qamadi, 2016). According to Zoueiri and Suleiman (2018), President Obama took a new approach to

Iran, without giving up the American interests. Furthermore, Castiglioni (2013) proposed that political rather than military means should be used to convince Iran to drop its nuclear program. During Obama's presidency, Nunlist (2016) advocated for keeping open channels of contact and dialogue between the US and its antagonists, such as Iran; this could be achieved by leaving space for negotiation regarding the Iranian nuclear problem.

According to Katzman (2019), the Obama administration's Iran nuclear deal resulted in a convergence between the US and Iran, since it served both the US and Iran's national interest by decreasing the nuclear threat and enhancing economic relationships respectively. According to Abdul Fattah (2014), this agreement would put an end to the ideological war between the two countries, allowing Iran to integrate into the global system. According to Zoueiri and Suleiman (2018), these agreements serve the American interest by removing the Iranian nuclear threat, as it also serves Iran's interests by enhancing its economic relationship with the United States and allowing it to spend previously frozen funds.

Trump grew hostile to Iran during his administration (Badawi 2018) and accused it of being a corrupt dictatorship. Trump realized that confronting Iran and siding with the Gulf States would be beneficial to the United States. Similarly, Katzman (2019) argues that Trump started to challenge Iran by pulling out of the nuclear agreement and placing economic sanctions on the country because of Iran seemed unstoppable in becoming the biggest terrorist supporter in the world, as shown by its funding for the Houthis in Yemen, which it provides with money and weaponry, and its emphasis on expanding the Iranian long-range missile system.

Some remedies, such as tariffs, are prioritized in US foreign policy, while others are addressed to differing degrees. Various governments have debated the degree to which they should pursue cooperation with Iran, whether for limited reasons or to accomplish a significant change in US-Iran relations. President Trump openly encouraged dialogue with Iran's officials, as Secretary of State Pompeo said in his 21 May, 2018 speech, and the administration set detailed conditions for a significant change in US-Iran relations. Many of the requests would have ramifications for Iran's revolution and national security policies, and Iran is unlikely to

comply. A number of potential direct talks between the two countries have fallen apart. President Rouhani reported in December 2018 that the US had demanded negotiations with Iran on eight occasions in 2017 and three times in 2018, and that the US “indirectly” ordered negotiations on three occasions in 2018. Iran, he added, had declined these overtures (Mousavian, 2018).

Rouhani and other Iranian officials have stated that they would not negotiate with the Trump administration until sanctions imposed after Trump’s withdrawal from the JCPOA were lifted. To support US strategy, many governments have threatened to use military action against Iran, either indirectly or directly. Prior to the JCPOA, advocates of unilateral action against Iran said that doing so would set back Iran’s nuclear program (Rogers, 2006).

While the United States remains a significant player in the Middle East due to its alliances and military presence, a discussion of what lies ahead in terms of power transfers should not be unduly centred on the US. This is due to a number of factors. First, with Russia’s intervention in Syria in 2015, the country cemented its position as the most important external actor in the region. Secondly, under President Trump’s leadership, the US withdrew backing from the Syrian opposition and abdicated leadership in May 2017 by violating the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). These acts bolstered the perception that the US is an untrustworthy, capricious, and rash player in the region (Harrison, 2018).

Maintaining balance of power

The primary objective of the United States as a regional superpower in the Western Hemisphere is to prevent any regional hegemon or hemispheric influence from rising in other areas. The United States has been able to achieve this diplomatic objective by using the offshore balancing grand plan (Mearsheimer, 2001). Preserving international hegemony, retaining peace, helping alliances, maintaining energy supplies, preventing the proliferation of WMD, combating terrorist groups, and, more recently, democracy promotion are some of the aspects that are still essential to the US. The United States has intensified its attempts to gain or sustain world influence since the conclusion of the Cold War. The United States’ main interventions in the Middle East have focused on

bolstering regional dominance as part of a broader effort to rule the globe. The Middle East is viewed as one of the world's most insecure regions for a number of reasons, and the United States considers maintaining stability and prosperity in the Middle East to be one of its highest priorities (Shukri, 2017). The involvement of a large number of players with varying preferences aids the buck-passing strategy (i.e. no direct offensive action against the aggressor). With more players in the game, regional states are less likely to cooperate, making it easier for the US to find a regional power to counter any aggressive state. The United States has favoured buck-passing on two occasions, protecting the US military capability while weakening the military capabilities of adversarial countries, for example. The buck-passing technique can be dangerous at times because the aggressor would be able to interrupt the buck-catcher and gain enough leverage to break the power balance (Mearsheimer, 2001).

According to Michael Beckley (2018), power is conceptualized as a combination of military, economic, and political variables. If no power-politics event, for instance, civil war happens, the hegemon would use a dual-containment strategy to prolong the conflict and prevent the emergence of a victor. One of the best examples for avoiding the drawbacks of buck-passing is the dual-containment strategy used in the Iran-Iraq War. The geographic location of the US is the biggest reason why it has relied on the strategy of buck-passing. Generally, the larger the distance between rival great powers is and the greatest the natural barriers are that divide them, the more likely they will rely on buck-passing to control the rival. Because if the other chooses to attack first, the hegemon would in the front line control the aggressor (Toft, 2005).

Since 2003, both Saudi Arabia and Iran, the major powers of the Gulf region, have been involved in a hegemonic war over power and influence. This rivalry was exacerbated following the 2011 Arab spring and the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia's Western partners, culminating in the July 2015 JCPOA. This process of rapprochement has exacerbated Riyadh's strategic angst stemming from the US abandoning its long-time ally Hosni Mubarak of Egypt amid a parallel process of the international rehabilitation of Iran. Consequently, the US has ended the demonization of Iran under the presidency of Ahmadinejad (Fathollah-Nejad, 2017)

If the buck passing strategy fails, the US has a policy of direct juggling through diplomatic warnings, forming an alliance that opposes the aggressor, or deploying its own economic and armed forces. In specific circumstances, it will consolidate direct shuffling with the buck-passing procedure to keep away from a clear clash with the attacker (Prifti, 2017).

A shift in America's Middle East policy has been long overdue. While massive military participation in the region may have looked like the correct response in the aftermath of the horrific events of September 11, later years have demonstrated that America cannot transform the region by force. Neither the US operations nor significant military deployments have improved the stability of the region or the security of the United States. Instead, American intervention in the Middle East has far too often resulted in the exact opposite. Continued hegemony in the region is unlikely to provide better results in the future. Instead, a more hands-off approach to managing US strategic interests could be more effective. It is past time for the US military to leave the Middle East stage in substantial numbers (Ashford, 2018).

Conclusion

For most of the twentieth century, even well into the twenty-first, the United States has had multinational aspirations and a global footprint. By using diplomatic, economic, and military power to further its national interests, the United States has become a key player in the Middle East. The Middle East has been a focal point of US foreign policy since World War II, after which it has increased in importance due to global, geographical, and political influences. The year 2011 was a turning point in history, influencing US foreign policy in the Middle East. The Arab Spring is a phenomena that has spread across the Middle East. It has challenged the political power of present regimes in many Middle Eastern states in one way or another; it has also dominated internal political debate in countries where the Arab Spring has not gained pace. A quick glance at the changes in the Arab world's political map reveals that the region's political variety has grown dramatically. Until the Arab Spring, the majority of the distinctions between Middle Eastern political systems could be found in the degree to which they were autocratic. However, there are two significant types of states now: authoritarian systems and transitional systems, as well as stable

versus unstable systems (Beck & Huser, 2012). The Iraqi-Syrian border remains one of the most geopolitically volatile places in the Middle East, notwithstanding the fall of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. Various Kurdish entities and parties have progressively affected the dynamics across the northern section of this border in recent years. During the Syrian crisis, the Kurds appeared to be a crucial partner for the US and, even more importantly, a secular bulwark in the fight against the Islamist factions of the anti-Assad opposition. The United States, as is well known, does not officially favour the establishment of a Kurdish state. In reality, however, the US strategy is uncertain and ambiguous. Due to its previous participation in Iraq, where the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was viewed as a threat to Iraq's unity, Washington was initially hesitant to engage the Syrian Kurds, particularly the PYD/YPG forces. The Obama administration's reluctance to engage on the Kurdish problem largely stemmed from its desire to end the Syrian crisis. As the civil conflict erupted, the US was forced to adopt a firmer stance on the Syrian Kurdish aspirations. As a result, the US has never stated a foreign policy toward the Kurds, who live in four different countries.

The United States' foreign policy toward the Middle East has been ambiguous toward the dominant international powers for the past four decades. Rather than stabilize the region, the US foreign policy has created a mechanism that allows the US to remain an intrusive external force. As a result, the US military and diplomatic activity in the area has worked against both its own national interests and a stable international power balance. The United States' constructive interaction with Iran has shown that a pragmatic approach to dispute resolution without partisan attachment is not only possible, although it may also signal a shift in US foreign policy in the region. A break from permanent attachment to or estrangement from respective countries in the region, according to Paul Pillar, may allow an offshore balancing strategy (Prifti, 2005). Using US leverage to stifle ethnic ambitions and progress is akin to pitting one side against the other in a competition. A more realistic US foreign policy, one that manages to change the balance from afar rather than defend its own interests in regional crises, could well drive the country toward a power-balanced arrangement (Kaussler & Hastedt, 2017).

Preserving international hegemony, retaining peace, helping alliances, maintaining energy supplies, combating terrorist groups, and, more recently, democracy promotion are some of the aspects that are still essential to the US. This research concludes that three out of four investigated factor – combating terrorism, regional stability, preventing Iranian expansion and maintaining balance of power – have changed post-2011. While the United States remains a significant player in the Middle East due to its alliances and military presence, a discussion of what lies ahead in terms of power transfers should not be unduly centred on the US. This is due to a number of factors. First, with Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015, the country has cemented its position as a relevant external actor in the region. Secondly, under President Donald Trump's leadership, the US withdrew backing from the Syrian opposition and abdicated leadership in May 2017 by violating the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). These acts bolstered the perception that the US is an untrustworthy actor in the region (Harrison, 2018).

It's only fair to acknowledge that the invasions and subsequent occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq occupied most of the United States' attention and resources in the decade following 9/11. These battles were more about counterinsurgency than counterterrorism, and there was little appetite or funding for a strong global soft power campaign to combat extremism. The Arab Spring of 2011 presented another window of opportunity for the US to capitalize on public movements in a more meaningful way. But, once again, a political-military view on the stability and danger concerns arising from individual nations, particularly Libya and Syria, affected us. Extremist groups, on the other hand, took advantage of chances created by the movement in formerly autocratic regimes. They sparked divides and made inroads into the consequent sects (London, 2020).

The United States has intensified its attempts to gain or sustain world influence since the conclusion of the Cold War. The United States' main interventions in the Middle East have focused on bolstering regional dominance as part of a broader effort to rule the globe. The Middle East is viewed as one of the world's most insecure regions for a number of reasons. The United States considers maintaining stability and prosperity in the Middle East to be one of their highest priorities. Combating terrorist groups in the Middle East has been one of the

most critical foundations of US strategy in the twenty-first century, especially since September 11, when as a result of the terrorist attack, the Bush administration announced a “global war on terror” (Shukri, 2017).

Hence, the findings of the study illustrate that terrorism, civil wars, and instability in the Middle East have had a significant influence on the United States’ economic, national security, and diplomatic interests in the region. Maintaining strong ties with allies and comprehending the nature of conflicts are critical to attaining US foreign policy objectives in the Middle East.

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Endnotes

- 1 Based on the geographic boundaries, the Middle East is also known as the Near East or Southwest Asia. In academia, the Middle East refers to the Arab states of Asia, the Arab states of North Africa, Israel, and the non-Arab states of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey (see Figure 1) (Surratt, 2000).