

The Changing Security Environment in the Middle East and the Role of the U.S. – Japan Cooperation



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JIME Center, the Institute of Energy Economics, Japan



About JIME Center

JIME Center was originally established in September 1974 as the Japanese Institute of Middle Eastern Economies (JIME) and made a fresh start on April 2005 as a unit of the Institute of Energy Economics, Japan (IEEJ).

The Center is the leading research institute in Japan specializing in the research of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region from a broad set of perspectives including politics, economy, society, security and energy security. Researchers are highly skilled professionals with considerable experience in the region. The Center also accepts qualified personnel from supporting member companies and works in cooperation with other research institutes in Japan and around the world. The JIME Center is dedicated to providing timely and unique in-depth analyses of the ever-changing developments in the region to both Japanese public and private sector. Through these activities, the Center aims to contribute to the further development of Japan's economy.

Acknowledgments

The Middle East is vital for Japan from the perspectives of energy security, safety of Japanese citizens and business, and enhancement of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiatives. However, there are limited opportunities for researchers of the Middle East studies and energy policy to discuss the U.S.-Japan alliance and their threat perceptions regarding the volatile political and security situation in the Middle East. In this project, experts from Japan and the U.S. exchanged their perspectives on the current Middle Eastern situation and energy policies. Through roundtables, discussions and interviews, Japanese experts deepened their knowledge of the U.S. diplomacy, security and energy policies, exchanged opinions with the U.S. counterparts, and expanded their networks in Washington D.C.

In this report, various experts were analyzing the history and current trends of the Middle East and energy policies of the U.S. and Japan, and political and security situation in the Middle East.

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『中東の安全保障環境の変化と日米協力の可能性』序文

日本にとって中東地域の政治情勢は、エネルギー安全保障や日系企業・邦人の活動と安全、「自由で開かれたインド・太平洋」構想の普及といった観点からきわめて重要である一方で、米国の中東政策とエネルギー政策がどのように展開され、日本の諸政策にどのような影響を与えるかという問いに関する議論はほとんどなされてこなかった。また、中東情勢に関する日米の戦略や脅威認識について、中東地域やエネルギーを専門とする研究者が議論する機会も限られてきた。

このような背景から、本事業では日米の中東・エネルギー専門家による共同研究を通じて、中東地域における政治・安全保障環境の変化が日米両国に与える影響を分析し、日米間での対中東政策の共鳴や差異が生じる要因、そして中東における日米協力の可能性について検討した。また、中東の専門家からもフィードバックを得た。本報告書『中東の安全保障環境の変化と日米協力の可能性』はその成果として、10人の専門家が日米の対中東・エネルギー政策の歴史的経緯と現状、中東情勢の変化について論じたものである。本事業は国際交流基金日米センターの助成によって行われた。

本事業には戦略国際問題研究所（Center for Strategic and International Studies: CSIS）から多大なるご協力を頂いた。中東部のジョン・オルターマン氏、エネルギー部のアンドリュー・スタンレー氏、ジェイン・ナカノ氏、国際安全保障部のヒジャブ・シャー氏、メリッサ・ダルトン氏に感謝申し上げる。特に、ナカノ氏には事業の計画立案から進行に至るまで、多くの建設的なアドバイスを頂いた。

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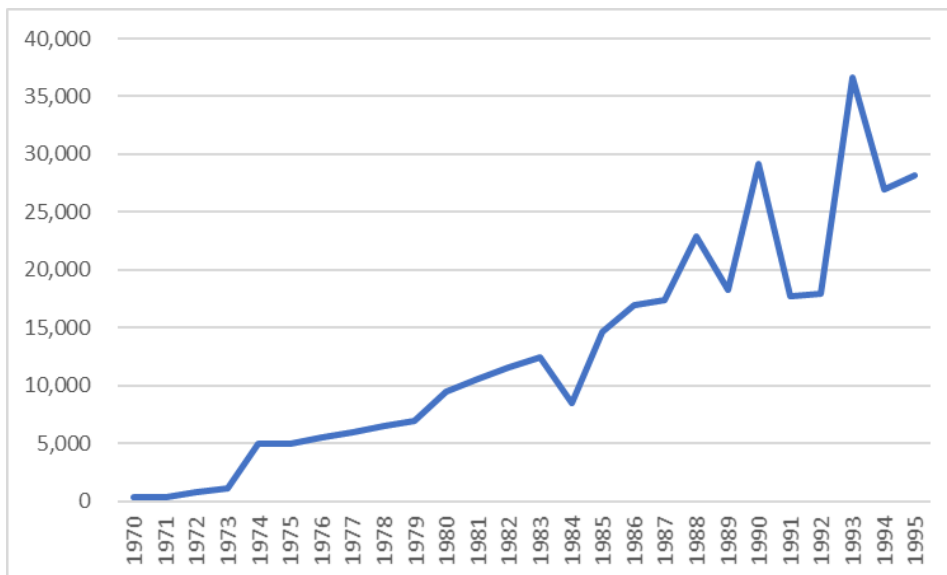
1. Changes in Japan's Policy toward the Palestine Question and Japan-U.S. Relations

TATEYAMA Ryoji

Introduction

Figure 1 shows Japan's contribution in cash to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) from 1970 to 1995. While it shows that Japan's contribution continued to grow, it indicates that there were at least three turning points for the said period, namely 1973–1974, the late 1980s, and 1993.

Figure 1: Japan's contribution in cash to UNRWA 1970-1995 (US \$ 1,000)



Made by the author

The first turning point 1973–1994 was the period of the first oil crisis caused by the oil strategy adopted by the Organization of Arab Oil Producing Countries (OAPEC) on the occasion of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Following this, Japan's contribution soared more than fourteen times from US\$350,000 in 1971 to US\$5 million in 1974.

The second turning point during the late 1980's corresponded to the period of Japan's bubble economy. Because of rapid economic growth, Japan sought international political roles commensurate with its "economic power." This period was also the time when Japan began to expand its relations with Israel because of the growing trade friction with the U.S.A.

The third tuning point was brought about by the Middle East peace process, which was launched in the fall of 1991 and was accelerated by the Oslo peace accord in September 1993. Japan became one of the leading donors to support the peace process by providing financial and technical assistance to the Palestinians. Japan's positive engagement seemed to reflect the trauma that Japan suffered during the Gulf crisis and war.

In this chapter, I trace Japan's responses to the Palestine question, focusing on these three turning points. By doing so, I explore how Japan's response in each turning point was heavily influenced by its relations with Washington.

1. The first oil crisis and Japan's new pro-Arab policy

The first oil crisis in 1973 was a reminder for Japan to seriously consider its relations with the Middle East, particularly its policy toward Palestine. As the volume of crude oil imports from the Middle East accounted for more than 80% of Japan's total volume of crude oil imports in the early 1970s,¹ Japan was well aware of the importance of the Middle East for its economy. At the time, however, Japan took oil flow supply for granted through international oil majors, and it felt no need to appease the Arab political cause.² Therefore, Japan took a non-committal policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestine question until the early 1970s.

However, the oil strategy adopted by the OAPEC forced Japan to shift its position on the Palestine question, moving from its non-committal policy to being an explicit proponent of Arab claims. The Japanese government issued its first statement after the eruption of the 1973 war, which merely called for establishing a just and lasting peace based on the UN Security Council Resolution 242 without referring to the national right of the Palestinians. As the Arab side strengthened its oil strategy, Japan issued its second statement on November 6, 1973, stating with strong language that Japan was vehemently opposed to acquisition of any territories by use of force and expressed its support for the UN resolutions that recognized equality and self-determination of the Palestinians. Even so, Japan was not categorized as a "friendly country" by the OAPEC and Japan was strongly concerned that oil supplies from OAPEC member states might be further reduced.

Japan faced a fundamental dilemma. On the one hand, it was an absolute priority for Japan to secure oil supplies because prices began to soar up and economic stagnation seemed inevitable. Furthermore, some consumer products, such as kerosene and toilet paper, disappeared from the market and Japanese society fell into panic. On the other hand, however, Japan had to take into consideration Washington's strong demand not to yield to the pressure exerted by the Arab side.

¹ Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, *Japan's Energy White Paper*, 2012, HTML edition <https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/about/whitepaper/2012html/2-1-3.html>, accessed on December 26, 2019.

² Kunio Katakura and Motoko Katakura, *Japan and the Middle East*, The Middle East institute of Japan, 1991, p.66.

On November 22, 1973, Japan issued its third statement under the name of the cabinet secretary, which made significant concessions to Arab positions. It stated that Japan “consistently hoped that a just and lasting peace in the Middle East will be achieved through the prompt and complete implementation of Security Council Resolution 242,” and expressed Japan’s support for the “United Nations General Assembly Resolution concerning the rights of the Palestinian people for self-determination.”³ The statement then called for achieving a peace settlement by adhering to the following principles:

- (1) The inadmissibility of acquisition and occupation of any territory by the use of force;
- (2) The withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the territories occupied in the 1967 war
- (3) The respect for the integrity and security of the territories of all countries in the area and the need for guarantees to that end; and
- (4) The recognition of and respect for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations in bringing about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Despite its non-committal policy, during the early 1970s, Japan began to take a more supportive position towards the Palestine question. For instance, the joint communique between Japan and Saudi Arabia in May 1971 on the occasion of the visit of King Faisal to Japan stated: “problem of Palestine should be solved on the basis of rightfulness and justice,” and “the people concerned should be entitle to their lawful rights.”⁴ This communique was regarded as an important step taken by Japan toward “the recognition of the legitimate rights on the Palestinian people and not solely in terms of a ‘refugee problem’.”⁵

Even so, the statement by the cabinet secretary was epoch-making because the second principle explicitly demanded that Israel withdraw from *all the territories* occupied in the 1967 war. Japan had supported Security Council Resolution 242 and instated that a peace settlement of the Arab- Israeli conflict and the Palestine question should be based on Resolution 242. The resolution, however, does not specify the extent to which Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories.

Furthermore, in the last paragraph, the statement deplored “Israel’s continued occupation of Arab territories,” and declared that Japan “will continue to observe the situation in the Middle East with grave concern and, depending on future developments, may have to reconsider its policy towards Israel.” The expression of “to reconsider its policy towards Israel” was very strong as a diplomatic statement because it could be interpreted that Japan might severe diplomatic relations with Israel.

³ “Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary, November 22, 1973,” in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, *Chutou Funsou Kanren Shiryoushu (Collection of Documents on the Middle East conflict)*, March 1975, p.55.

⁴ “Japan-Saudi Arabia Joint Communique, May 25, 1971,” in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, *op. cit.*, p.53.

⁵ Kunio Katakura and Motoko Katakura, *op. cit.*, p.68.

In response to the statement, Israel strongly condemned Japan of “yielding to the pressure of our enemies and to their threats against the industry and economy of Japan.”⁶ Japan’s new policy, however, did not significantly affect the relations between Tokyo and Washington, because Japan repeatedly explained its difficulties to and consulted with the U.S. government on its plan of issuing a declaration in order to gain an understanding, at least tacit, from Washington.

For instance, one week before the announcement of the declaration, Kakuei Tanaka, Prime Minister of Japan, had a long discussion with Henry A. Kissinger, U.S. Secretary of State, who visited Japan to mobilize Japan’s support for U.S. mediation efforts to achieve a truce. During the discussion, Tanaka strongly stressed the importance of oil imported from Arab oil producing countries, and argued that Japan would be obliged to issue a statement which would support Arab’s position unless the U.S.A. would guarantee oil supply. At the same time, Tanaka reassured that an issuance of a statement would not undermine the friendship between the two countries.⁷ In addition, to Japan’s diplomatic efforts, Washington needed Japan’s support and involvement in Kissinger’s plan for a multilateral cooperation initiative among oil-consuming countries.⁸

After the 1973 war, Japan took further steps towards pro-Arab stance. In 1977 the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) opened its office in Tokyo, and in 1981 Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the PLO, made his first visit to Japan. Japan’s contribution to UNRWA continued to increase since 1974. Nevertheless, Japan continued to be very cautious that Japan’s pro-Arab policy did not create any frictions with Washington. Japan did not give a diplomatic status to the PLO office, and Arafat’s first visit was considered as a private visit because he was invited not by the Japanese government, but by the Japan-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship League.

2. The 1980s: Japan’s new approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestine question

Owing to its pro-Arab policy, Japan kept its diplomatic relations with Israel to a minimum since 1973, and there were no mutual visits of political leaders. Additionally, economic and trade relations between the two countries were very weak. In the mid-1980s, however, Japan began to adopt a new policy of expanding relations with Israel. In 1985, Yitzhak Shamir visited Japan for the first time as Israel’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, although his visit was designated as a working visit, not as an official one. In response, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Sosuke Uno officially visited Israel in

⁶ “Statement of the Government of Israel,” November 25, 1973, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, *op. cit.*, pp.55-56.

⁷ Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation: Secretary’s Call on Prime Minister,” November 15, 1973, Subject-Numeric File, 197073 under file designation “POL ***JAPAN-US”.

⁸ Mana Ikegami, “Japanese Diplomacy during the First Oil Crisis: Between the Arab Countries and the United States,” *International Relations*, Vol.177, October 2014, p.151-152 (in Japanese).

1988, which was followed by an official visit to Japan by Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Arens in 1989.

In addition, the Japan-Israeli Parliamentary League was established in 1984, and reciprocal visits were made in 1987 by delegations of the Israeli Industrialists' Association and of Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation. While the total trade between the two remained in the range of US\$ 3 million in the first half of the 1980s, it began to increase in the second half, and reached US\$ 1.1 billion in 1988.

Why did Japan expand its relations with Israel in the 1980s? One of the reasons was that the rate of Japan's dependence on crude oil imported from the Middle East decreased from about 85% in the early 1970s to less than 70% in the late 1980s due to energy saving efforts by Japan and the oversupply in the international oil market.

More importantly, the two issues, the growing Japan-U.S. economic friction and the Arab-boycott, combined and put great pressure on Japan. The economic friction already emerged in the 1970s, but it became serious since the late 1970s when Japan enjoyed a large surplus in both trade and current accounts while the U.S.A. suffered a deficit in both accounts. Against this background, criticism of Japan grew in the U.S.A., particularly in Congress. The U.S. complaints over the economic friction intensified the criticism that Japan enjoyed security by its "free-ride" on the U.S.A. Moreover, these arguments were linked to the criticism that Japan obeyed to the Arab boycott uncritically and impeded the free economic system by its unfair trade practice.

For instance, a commentary in the New York Times strongly condemned Japanese trading companies for adhering to the Arab boycott, and argued that American lawmakers should "test the Japanese attitude toward free trade, toward economic morality and toward Israel." It further argued that "the Japanese government should be asked to issue a public statement condemning the Arab boycott and to encouraging Japanese firms to open trade links with Israel."⁹ The U.S. government also raised the boycott issue with the Japanese government multiple times in addition to the protests by American Jewish organizations.¹⁰ In order to alleviate such criticism, Japan shifted its policy toward Israel and expanded its relations. Indeed, Japan's new initiatives toward Israel in the 1980s resulted in positive evaluation and led "to a belief that the Japanese government has adopted a more even-handed approach to the Middle East."¹¹

In the 1980s, while Japan tried to normalize its relations with Israel, it also expanded its assistance for Palestinian refugees through the UNRWA by providing technical assistance through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in addition to its assistance in cash and kind (mainly food). Japan also began to consider possibility of providing assistance to Palestinians living in the West Bank

⁹ William M Stern, "Japan's Free-Trade Charade," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1987.

¹⁰ Jennifer Golub, *Japanese Attitudes toward Jews*, The American Jewish Committee, August 1991, p.13.

¹¹ Golub, *op.cit.*, p. iii.

and the Gaza Strip in the mid-1980s, which resulted in creating the Japan-Palestine Development Fund in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1988. According to UNDP, Japan has so far contributed \$270 million to the fund for promoting human development and security in the occupied territories, such as building schools, hospitals, and sewage systems.¹²

Japan's efforts in normalizing relations with Israel while expanding its assistance for Palestinians indicates its attempt to balance the Arabs and Israel. Japan's new approach in the 1980's, however, was facilitated by another factor. Because of its rapid economic development during these years, a new argument emerged that Japan should take some initiative in international politics as a "political power" commensurate with its "economic power." During the Iran-Iraqi war, Japan initiated a shuttle diplomacy between Tehran and Baghdad to try to mediate the two countries. Although Japan's initiative on the Iran-Iraqi war brought about no positive results, it was Japan's first endeavor to play a political role in the international arena. Japan's expansion of its engagement with both Israel and the Palestinians was also an indication of its desire to play a larger role in the Middle East.

3. The Middle East peace process in the 1990s and Japan

The Gulf Crisis and War in 1990 and 1991 were an ordeal for Japan. Although Japan had tried to become an important player in the international political arena since the middle of the 1980s, the Government of Japan and the Japanese society were deeply confused about how to respond to the Gulf crisis and war.

On the one hand, Japan was under strong pressure from Washington, which urged Japan to play a further role beyond its traditional "check diplomacy." Japan was particularly troubled by the demand of the Bush administration, which called for military cooperation, such as dispatching minesweepers and transport planes of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF), warning of the danger of increased congressional anger over Japan's "free ride" on security provided by the U.S.A.¹³

On the other hand, many Japanese politicians and people perceived that Japan should contribute though non-military measures in line with its pacifist constitution. In order to provide a legal framework to dispatch personnel and equipment of the SDF, the Japanese government submitted a bill to the Diet, which would enable Japan to send SDF units as part of the UN peace keeping operations. The real situation and the war preparation in the Gulf, however, were far removed from UN peacekeeping operations, and further, there was no consensus over the bill even in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. In deep confusion, the government was forced to withdraw the bill only three weeks after its submission. Although Japan eventually provided US\$ 13 billion in total, its

¹² UNDP, *UNDP-Japan partnership for a better future*, <http://www.undp.or.jp/english/partnerships.shtml>, accessed on December 31, 2019.

¹³ Courtney Purrington and A.K., "Tokyo's Policy Responses during the Gulf Crisis," *Asian Security*, Vol. XXXI, No.4, April 1991, pp.308-309.

response was criticized as “too little, too late” by the U.S.A. and other powers because its financial contribution was made in stages. The experience during the Gulf crisis and war left a harsh trauma in Japan and affected its approach to major issues in the international community.

In that sense, the Middle East peace process, which began with the Madrid International Peace Conference in the fall of 1991, provided Japan an ideal opportunity to actively engage in an internationally important political development without worrying about obstacles that had restricted its behaviors in the international arena. First, the process was a peace-building attempt with no military aspect, and Japan could actively contribute to it only through non-military measures. Second, the process itself was initiated by the U.S.A., and Washington expected Japan to make a positive financial contribution. Therefore, Japan did not need to worry about balancing Washington and the Arab world as it did until the end of the 1980s.

Third, the peace process placed importance on the multilateral approach to provide a forum for discussion of cross-border, regionwide issues.¹⁴ For this purpose, five working groups were established on arms control and regional security, regional economic development, water resources, environment, and refugees, in parallel with the bilateral peace talks. As a country with constitutional limitations on the use of force and scarce natural resources, Japan has pursued multilateral diplomacy in various fronts to develop broader relations with as many countries as possible. In this regard, active participation in the multilateral tracks in the peace process offered Japan a good chance to expand relations with all parties concerned in the Middle East. Indeed, Japan played an important role as a chair of the environment working group, and a vicechair of the three working groups, namely regional economic development, water resources, and refugees. The first meeting of the environment working group was held in Tokyo.

The Oslo peace accord of 1993 between Israel and the PLO further expanded Japan’s engagement in the peace process. At the first donor meeting in Washington in October 1993, Japan pledged US\$ 2 billion for the next two years, the third largest contribution after the EU and the U.S. Since then, Japan has provided significant financial and technical assistance for the Palestinians both through direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority and through UN agencies, particularly UNRWA. Japan also increased its involvement in the Middle East peace process at the political level, as Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama made the first visit as a Japanese prime minister to Israel and Palestine in September 1995.

Simultaneously, Japan increased its assistance to other concerned parties, namely Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. For instance, Japan was the largest ODA (Official Development Assistance) provider for Jordan for three consecutive years from 1995 to 1997 among member states of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).¹⁵

¹⁴ Joshua Ruebner, *Middle East: The Multilateral Peace Talks*, Congressional Research Service, August 17, 2000, p.1.

¹⁵ https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/jisseki/kuni/j_99/g4-13.htm, accessed on January 2, 2020.

In 1996 Japan also dispatched a contingent of the Ground SDF to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights. At the time in Japan, there were strong concerns about sending SDF forces to UN peacekeeping operations. Therefore, its mission was limited only to the rear and secondary tasks, mainly transportation. Even so, dispatching SDF units to the front line between Israel and Syria indicated a change in Japanese public opinion over Japan's response to overseas conflicts, as shown by the results of the opinion surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office regarding Japan's participation in UN peace keeping operations. According to the 1993 survey, only 15.5% of respondents supported Japan's more positive participation and 8.6% disagreed with participation.¹⁶ However, the results of the survey in 1997, one year after dispatching SDF contingents, were more supportive: the support for more positive participation increased to 25.5%, and the disagreement declined to 3.3%.¹⁷

Conclusion

Japan began its engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestine question since the 1970s, and the Middle East peace process in the 1990s provided Japan with an unprecedented opportunity to expand its role in the international arena commensurate with its economic power and to ease criticism often raised by Washington. It is difficult to say, however, that Japan played a political role in facilitating and promoting the peace process in the 1990s.

Japan's failure in the political front cannot be solely attributed to Japan's diplomatic weakness. The U.S.A. has been a dominant actor in the peace process because of its special relations with Israel. Apart from Japan, other actors, including European powers and Russia, have been regarded as secondary actors.

Furthermore, the peace process itself lost its momentum and achieved little progress even in the late 1990s. The failure of the process is caused by many factors, such as mutual distrust, Jewish settlement activities, the cycle of violence, the factional rivalry between Fatah and Hamas, and so on. The most decisive factor, however, is structural asymmetry embedded in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. Structural asymmetry arises when there is a strong imbalance in status between the parties.¹⁸ Indeed, Israel continues to be the occupying power and a state actor with sovereignty. On the other hand, the Palestinians have remained as the occupied and a non-state actor with only limited autonomy granted by the Oslo accord. As a natural consequence, Israel has been able to maintain a strong authority over all aspects, including territorial issues, settlement activities, security arrangements, movement of people and goods, water resources, and others. In addition, the

¹⁶ <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h06/H06-10-06-08.html>, accessed on January 17, 2020.

¹⁷ <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h09/gaikou-h9.html>, accessed on January 17, 2020.

¹⁸ Giorgio Gallo and Arturo Marzano, "The Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case," *Journal of Conflict Studies*, Vol.29, April 2009, p.34.

international community has hardly intervened in the process because issues relating to a final status have been supposed to be directly negotiated between the two parties.

As a result, the peace process appears to have lost its way over a long impasse. To make matters worse, the Trump administration has broken the very foundation for achieving peace based on a two-state solution. As discussed previously, Japan has provided the Palestinians with financial and technical cooperation on the assumption that its engagement in the peace process could not only support progress toward achieving peace but also enhance its relations with and gain positive evaluation from Washington. If this assumption is no longer valid, the next question should be how to justify Japan's continuing contribution to the peace process.

2. Japan's Controversial Participation in the Iraq War

YOSHIOKA Akiko

Although Japan and the United States have not always shared the same visions about the Middle East, the war on Iraq in 2003 was a case in which both countries agreed on the policy and cooperated in the field. The Koizumi administration was swift to announce its support to the United States when it opened war against Iraq in March 2003, and within a few months, the Japanese parliament enacted a bill to dispatch the Self Defense Force (SDF) abroad outside the UN peacekeeping operations. Japan actively worked for grand aid and loan assistance for Iraq for humanitarian support and rehabilitating dilapidated infrastructures as well. The Japanese government took these proactive approaches to avoid repeating their diplomatic defeat in the Gulf War in 1991. The shift of national security perspectives in Japan in the 1990s made these swift approaches possible. However, both Japan and the Middle East faced some problems. Domestically, the fact that Japan joined the war, despite the lack of support from the UN Security Council, was very controversial. In the Middle East, the SDF forces, while closely cooperating with the U.S. army and other coalition forces, practiced utmost caution not to be viewed as part of occupation forces because of anti-American feelings among the population.

In this chapter, after a brief overview of the change in Japan's national security policy in the post-Gulf War period, I would like to focus on the background of Japan's decision to support the war on Iraq, especially shedding light on the discrepancy between the Japan-U.S. alliance and the norm of international cooperation. Subsequently, I will analyze the SDF deployment to Iraq by looking at the competing interests between supporting the U.S. as an ally and the fact that the support was not necessarily welcomed domestically and regionally.

1. Shift of Japan's national security policy in post-Gulf war era

The Gulf War in 1991 was the turning point for Japan's national security perception. Japan had never faced serious national security incidents during the Cold-War era and had pursued an "economy-first, lightly armed" policy. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Japan was asked to take joint actions by the United States; however, the government and parliament were thrown into extreme chaos because they had never expected Japan's possible military actions abroad. Moreover, the government had to negotiate the release of more than two hundred Japanese hostages with the Iraqi government. Finally, the hostages were safely released, and Japan decided to join the economic sanctions against Iraq based on the UNSCR 661 in August 1990 but refused to send the SDF to Iraq. Japan announced 1-billion-dollar financial assistance to the coalition forces in August with an additional 1 billion in October and 2 billion dollars for three neighboring countries' economic assistance. Including the 9

billion dollars added to the coalition forces in January 1991, Japan's total economic assistance reached as high as 13 billion dollars. However, since Japan missed the right timing, it was undervalued as "too little, too late" and Japan's approach to the Gulf War was remembered as a diplomatic defeat in Japanese political circles.

In the 1990s, the national security circumstances around Japan altered, with the nuclear arms crisis and abduction cases in North Korea and the rise of military tensions in the Taiwan Strait, which led to the redefinition of the Japan-U.S. security framework. Japan's public opinion became more conscious of the national and domestic securities followed by those incidents in Asian neighbors and terrorism by the Aum Supreme Truth cult, which killed more than a dozen people in Japan in the 1990s.

When the U.S. started the war in Afghanistan in 2001 after the 9.11 terror attack, Japan cooperated with the United States relatively smoothly following these changes in the 1990s. Since military technology had dramatically progressed in the United States in the previous decade, the U.S. government did not need to rely on other countries' help in terms of combat itself [Iokibe 2004; Okamoto 2004: 174]. The allies were asked to offer what was affordable for them; thus, Japan sent the Maritime Self-Defense Force to the Indian Ocean to refuel U.S. naval vessels and dedicated to economic reconstruction after the war. This role allotment was appreciated in both countries and repeated in the war on Iraq two years later. However, compared with the Afghanistan War, which was unanimously supported in the UN Security Council, Japan's participation in the Iraq War was significantly controversial legally.

2. Legal justification for supporting the Iraq War

The Iraq War shed light on the differences between the U.S. and Japan regarding the legality of war. As the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld mentioned in his memoir, although the UN Security Council resolution was considered useful diplomatically and politically, it was not vitally necessary for any military campaigns; the U.S.-led coalition under either Republican or Democrat administration was engaged in military activities since the 1948 Berlin Airlift [Rumsfeld 2011].

However, in Japan, the United Nations is regarded as far more significant, and it was viewed as the only authority that provides legal justification for military actions. When Japan adopted a proactive peace policy in the 1990s, a policy to actively contribute to maintaining and restoring peace in the world based on international cooperation, public support was nurtured on the premise that SDF would participate in operations abroad with a clear mandate of the UN Security Council resolution or direct request from foreign governments, such as disaster rehabilitation assistance. There was a huge gap in perception between the U.S. and Japan regarding the importance of the UN endorsing war. The so-called "Bush doctrine," which did not exclude preemptive war as a defense against an immediate threat, was not well regarded in Japanese public opinion.

However, the Japanese government had no option but to support the U.S. decision to start the war against Iraq. Since Japan was facing a threat from neighboring Asian countries and it did not belong to any practical regional security system, the alliance with the United States was absolutely essential for Japan's national security [Iokibe 2004]. Immediately after the war began, Prime Minister Koizumi announced Japan's understanding and support. Foreign Minister Kawaguchi admitted that it was not ideal situation for Japan that international cooperation with the UN mandate and the Japan-U.S. alliance overlapped each other, and Japan had to ultimately choose the alliance with the United States. Japan could not afford to jeopardize the alliance. In other words, Japan supported the war for the sake of its own national security and not because it shared the American philosophy of war for freedom against terror or expanding democracy [Yanagisawa 2013: 50]. The situation was largely the same with other countries that supported the war.

Both the United States and Japan defended the legality of the war, claiming that UNSCR 678 in 1990, which authorized the use of all necessary means to member countries against Iraq following the invasion to Kuwait, was revived because Iraq did not comply with UNSCR 687 in 1991 that ordered Iraq to demolish WMDs and accept unconditional inspections. This arguable logical composition allegedly came from Japan because it was Japan and not the U.S., who urgently needed legal basis to join the war [Yanagisawa 2013: 67].

After the war, the absence of WMDs in Iraq unhinged the cause of war and its legal backing. Japan maintained its support for the war and defended the position insisting that there was sufficient reason to suspect Iraq's possession of WMDs and that the onus of proof lay with Iraq. Theoretically, Japan could have admitted making a decision based on wrong information and asked the United States to verify and explain the information it had provided. However, this stance could have led to the exposition and verification of other issues, such as the short-term port call of nuclear-armed American warships at Japanese ports against Japan's stated nuclear policy [Yanagisawa 2013: 99-102]. Japan could not afford to open a Pandora's box.

Japan's firm endorsement of the war and active participation in post-war reconstruction, including the dispatch of SDF, were appreciated in the United States, particularly because the war did not receive widespread global support. In the United States, the coalition of the willing, in which Japan played an important role, complemented the legitimacy of the war. Therefore, the war on Iraq was a successful example of cooperation between the two countries. However, in Japan, discrepancies between the U.N.-led international cooperation scheme and the U.S.-led coalition of willing caused a serious legal dilemma. In addition, Japan had to deal with anti-American feelings in Iraq and the Arab world where Japan traditionally maintained amicable relations, especially for energy security.

3. Post-war reconstruction and SDF dispatch

Even though Japan solidly supported the war and joined the coalition of willing, there was no option to participate in combat activities, nor was it requested by the U.S. Japan's involvement was focused on the post-war reconstruction phase. The Security Council resolution of 1483, adopted in May 2003, appealed to member states to assist Iraq people in their efforts to rebuild their country and to contribute to conditions of stability and security in Iraq. With this Security Council resolution, Japan's commitment to the war was relieved of the dilemma between international cooperation and the Japan-U.S. alliance. It was quite important for Japan to have a clear legal framework for accelerating economic assistance to Iraq and gathering momentum to dispatch SDF.

Regarding the reconstruction assistance to Iraq, Japan announced a contribution of 5 billion dollars (\$1.5 billion as grant assistance and \$3.5 billion as yen loans) as the Official Development Assistance for Iraq at the Madrid Donor Conference in October 2003. Second to the U.S., this was the largest contribution announced at the conference. The Japanese government explained the significance of the assistance given to Iraq from three perspectives: (1) the development of Iraq as a peaceful and democratic state was important for peace and stability in the region; (2) Japan obtained nearly 90% of its oil from the Middle East, including Iraq; and (3) the reconstruction of Iraq was an important aspect of the ongoing peace-building effort, which was considered a top priority issue in Japan's development policy.

Japan used to have a strong economic presence in Iraq from the late 1970s through the 1980s. Following the oil shocks in the 1970s, the Japanese government stepped up efforts to craft closer relations with the Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, and many Japanese companies moved into the Iraqi market, which fostered a strong affinity toward Japan in Iraqi society. The situation changed significantly in the 1990s when Iraq was under severe UN economic sanctions, and the Japan-Iraq relationship became alienated economically and politically. The change of Iraqi regime by the war in 2003 turned out a fresh start to Japan-Iraq relations.

Compared with economic assistance, the dispatch of SDF, the other pillar of Japan's post-war activities, was intended more to support the United States rather than Iraq itself. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage made quiet enquiries about deployment of SDF, mentioning "boots on the ground" to the Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Yamazaki in January 2003. Behind the scenes, the Cabinet Secretariat had begun to consider SDF dispatch to Iraq since the fall of 2002 and the chief Cabinet secretary formally requested drawing up a new bill in May 2003. In the same month, UNSCR 1483 was ratified. The special legislation for Japan's aid in the reconstruction of postwar Iraq (the special Iraq bill), which set out procedures for SDF dispatch to Iraq, was approved by the Cabinet in June and enacted by the Diet by July.

Following the 9.11 attack, Japan had begun to link foreign policy and national security policy together more organically. As a result, the Cabinet Secretariat took the lead on the new Iraq bill, rather than

the foreign ministry or defense agency. This smooth and prompt enactment of a new law reflected the firm intention of the Prime Minister's Office and leaders of the ruling parties to send a timely message of dispatching SDF [Shinoda 2006: 110-111; Yanagisawa 2013: 91-93]. In addition, all three secretary generals of the ruling parties shared the memory of “diplomatic defeat” at the Gulf War in 1991 and were determined not to repeat the same mistake. With the new Iraq special bill, Japan was able to show its presence in the U.S..

The special Iraq bill made it possible to send SDF to Iraq only with the consent of the Coalitional Provisional Authority, unlike the existing PKO cooperation law, which was premised on cease-fire agreement and consent from the host country. The 600-member Ground Self-Defense Force contingent was deployed in Samawah city in southern Iraq for two and a half years from February 2004 through July 2006 and was engaged in humanitarian assistance, such as distribution of drinking water, medical assistance, and rehabilitation and maintenance of public facilities. In addition, the Air Self-Defense Force was in charge of the transportation of relief goods and materials for the coalition forces for five years from 2004 through 2008. The special Iraq bill was extended once in 2007 for two years and expired in July 2009.

In Iraq, SDF paid very careful attention not to be viewed as “an occupation force” for the sake of its own safety. When the advance troop was dispatched in 2003, it was legally a part of the Coalition Provisional Authority and not of coalition forces. When CPA was dissolved in mid-2004, SDF had no choice but to join the framework of coalition forces since it was not realistic to conclude a status of forces agreement with the Iraqi interim government. The SDF maintained close relations with coalition forces and exchanged information with them; however, it tried to differentiate itself from American or other coalition members. SDF picked different combat uniform colors from other coalition forces and displayed Japanese flags prominently on their vehicles. Although SDF was entitled to use funds for coalition forces, primarily the confiscated property of the old Iraqi regime or Iraqi oil revenue, it did not use it [Sato 2007: 206-211]. Iraq was the first instance of SDF being deployed in a volatile security area, and Japan’s public opinion was divided into two. SDF was extremely nervous, and exercised caution to not cause any security incidents in Iraq. Therefore, it actively utilized Pro-Japanese sentiments in Iraq, where anti-occupation or anti-American feelings were dominant.

These tactics and the dedicated reconstruction activities of the SDF were ultimately effective. Throughout their Iraq mission, none of the SDF members were killed, nor did the SDF kill any Iraqis. According to the public opinion surveys in Iraq, which were conducted four times between 2004 and 2006 by Kyodo News of Japan and the al-Samawah newspaper of Iraq jointly, the SDF obtained around 70% –80% support throughout the research period, and approximately the same number of respondents answered that the SDF helped Samawah become prosperous.

Still, SDF faced criticism, especially from the Arab world. Some Arab intellectuals argued that sending troops would damage Japan’s historically positive image in the Middle East. Although the Japanese

government explained the legal aspect of deployment based on UNSCR 1483, the political reality fueled the perception in the Arab world that it was only the U.S. allies that sent troops. This type of anti-American feelings has been one of the obstacles for Japan-U.S. cooperation in the Middle East.

On the domestic front, the SDF deployment to Iraq was eventually received positively. Although the special Iraq bill was enacted in a very controversial atmosphere, according to a public survey by the Cabinet Office conducted in September and October 2006, 71.5% of respondents positively evaluated the SDF mission, whereas 22.6% had a negative answer. Another public survey conducted by a major newspaper indicated a similar tendency. It should be noted that positive outcomes likely appeared because no causality was recorded. It is not certain if the Koizumi administration would have survived if any of the SDF members had lost their lives.

4. Conclusion

Iraq became a successful example of Japan–U.S. cooperation in the Middle East. There was no option for Japan not to support the United States when the war began, even though it was devious in legality, given national security circumstances around Japan. The firm stance supporting the war and prompt decision to send SDF to Iraq helped strengthen Japan-U.S. ties. The shift in national security stances among Japanese political circles in the 1990s enabled swift SDF dispatch to Iraq. However, it was deemed a successful mission only because there were fortunately no casualties among SDF members. The Japanese government avoided deepening discussions on how much risk it would accept precisely for the sake of the Japan-U.S. alliance. National debates are necessary in this regard.

The fact that U.S. military action was not supported by UN resolution and the anti-American feelings in the Middle East were obstacles for the Japan-U.S. alliance. It is probable that these issues will resurface again in the future, considering the persistent conflict of national interests among UN security council permanent members and the strong pro-Israeli policy of the United States. As seen in the case of the Iraq War, Japan explored ways to overcome these difficulties and discovered measures to resolve challenges. These efforts will be repeated in the future to strengthen Japan-U.S. relations, defend existing positions in the Middle East, and obtain internal consent from the public simultaneously.

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3. Turkey, Japan and Sanctions on Iran

KAKIZAKI Masaki

Introduction

Japan and Turkey are security partners of the United States in East Asia and the Middle East, respectively, but they have both been caught between Iran and the United States in recent years. While Tokyo and Ankara seek to secure and expand their economic ties with Tehran, primarily for energy sources, they also need to determine an appropriate response to Washington's request to join its attempt to squeeze Iran's economy through sanctions against its energy and financial sectors. In particular, America's unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), posed a major challenge for the two Washington's allies; they had to find a way to delicately balance Iran and the United States.

Turkey's relations with Iran are far more complicated than Japan-Iran relations. While Japan-Iran relations can be distilled into only one factor—stable imports of Iranian oil, Turkey–Iran relations are multi-faceted and consist of not only economic but also political and geostrategic factors. Furthermore, Turkey's relations have a greater impact on the stability and security of the region than Japan-Iran relations because Turkey shares borders with Iran and it has ambitions for greater influence in the Middle East, while Japan has been a cautious actor outside of the region. However, for both countries the U.S. is a crucial factor in their policies toward Iran. Both Turkey and Japan have made persistent efforts to improve their relations with Tehran, but their attempts have been periodically constrained by the U.S. administration, whose approaches to Iran have not always been compatible with Japan and Turkey's policies.

As a small contribution to the project Changing Security Environment in the Middle East and the Possibility of U.S.-Japan Cooperation, this essay analyzes how the United States has played an intervening factor in the relationship between Ankara and Tehran. It demonstrates that Turkey is unlikely to give up its own Iran policy despite the U.S. pressure.

1. Turkey's Iran Policy under the AKP Government

The relationship between Turkey and Iran has gone through a number of ups and downs. The 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in the overthrow of the pro-Western Shah Pahlavi regime and the establishment of a new Islamic republic. This upheaval in Iranian politics negatively affected Iran's ties with Turkey, which was a cornerstone of America's Cold War strategy in the region. In the last two decades, however, Turkey and Iran have deepened their relations and moved toward deeper cooperation in both the political and economic domains. This trend can be seen in Turkey's diplomatic

efforts to de-escalate tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear program, Iran's cooperation with Turkey to contain Kurdish separatism, and the expansion of economic ties between the countries.

Turkey, under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalınma Partisi: AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has adopted a pragmatic approach to Iran for years. Although Turkey's relations with Iran have not been peaceful since 2002 when the AKP came to power, Turkish leaders have managed to compartmentalize its relations with Iran by putting their differences aside and emphasizing cooperation between them in areas where the interests of both countries converged.¹⁹ The year 2010 was of particular importance in Turkey–Iran relations. In August that year, Iran was removed from Turkey's national security policy document, known as the Red Book, which lists perceived internal and external threats to the country. Considering that Iran was mentioned as the greatest threat to Turkey's secular model of government in the 2005 edition of the document, the new edition clearly showed how the AKP government altered Turkey's approach to Tehran at a time when the tension between Iran and the international community was heightened over Iran's nuclear program.

As a resource-poor country, Turkey's policymakers have considered energy security as one of the most important priorities of the government. This is particularly true for the AKP government because the party's popularity in the 2000s was largely based on popular approval of its economic policies that succeeded in achieving rapid economic growth and distributing national wealth throughout the country. Iran plays an important role in this context as the main supplier of both crude oil and natural gas, which has been indispensable for satisfying the growing energy needs of Turkey's expanding domestic market of 80 million people. Therefore, the AKP government has attempted to de-escalate tensions between Iran and the international community for regional stability, which is vital to the smooth import of Iranian oil and gas. As Iran has become an increasingly important partner of Turkey for its economy, Turkey has also gained strategic weight in the Iranian economy because it is an indispensable country that connects U.S. sanction-stricken Iran to the international market.

Turkey-Iran relations driven by bilateral energy trade have not developed as smoothly as Ankara expected, largely because Turkey's interests in expanding its economic relations with Iran are not reconcilable with America's sanctions against Iran. Turkey considers sanctions against Iran unnecessary and harmful for the stability of the region, and argues that Turkey is the country that is always most negatively hit by U.S. sanctions because of its proximity to and deepening economic relations with Iran. Thus, one of the most important elements of Turkey's Iran policy in recent years has been to prevent the United States from pushing Iran into a corner and to approach Iran's nuclear issue through diplomacy rather than coercion.

¹⁹ Bayram Sinkaya, "Iran and Turkey Relations After the Nuclear Deal: A Case for Compartmentalization," *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 8(1), 2016, pp. 80–100.

2. The Tehran Agreement

As the tension between Iran and the United States escalated in the 2000s over Iran's nuclear program, Turkey became involved in this issue as a mediator, to help find a diplomatic solution to the crisis. In May 2010, Turkey's Erdogan, together with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, made an unannounced visit to Tehran and signed a fuel-swap deal with their Iranian counterpart, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Under the terms of the accord, known as the 2010 Tehran Agreement, Iran agreed to transfer 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for 120 kilograms of enriched fuels to be used for a medical research reactor.

The nuclear swap deal was welcomed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which praised it as a diplomatic breakthrough achieved by Turkey and Brazil to peacefully settle Iran's nuclear problem. The United States and Israel, however, considered the agreement insufficient to stop Iran from creating a nuclear bomb. In fact, the Tehran accord was only designed to address the issue of Iran's fuels for medical research, and it did not include any clause that would prevent Tehran from continuing uranium enrichment to 20 percent, which is considered a critical step in accelerating the accumulation of fuel for weapons.²⁰ Thus, one month after the signing of the Tehran accord, the UN Security Council voted to impose new economic sanctions against Iran, rejecting the nuclear swap deal. Turkey and Brazil, non-permanent members of the UN Security Council in 2009-2010, voted against sanctions despite Obama's call to abstain rather than oppose, arguing that UN sanctions would be ineffective and tightening sanctions would only send Iran over the edge.

Turkey's attempt to play the role of mediator between Iran and the international community was never an altruistic act; it was at least partly driven by Turkey's ambition to develop nuclear technology for civilian purposes. Dependent on energy imports from foreign countries such as Iran and Russia, Turkey had already invested a significant amount of resources in the construction of nuclear power plants in order to reduce its dependence on oil and gas and diversify energy resources. Ankara worried that the stalemate between Iran and the United States over the former's nuclear program would negatively affect Turkey's nuclear project. For instance, in Ankara's view, it was plausible that the United States and other nuclear weapons countries would take advantage of Iran's nuclear program to deny non-nuclear countries' right to develop peaceful nuclear technology for the generation of electricity. Turkey repeatedly argued that all signatory states, including Iran, in the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, are allowed to build and operate nuclear power plants and develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Turkish leaders perceived that the escalation of U.S.-Iran relations over the latter's nuclear program was detrimental to its national interests and ambitions to develop nuclear technology for the production of electricity.

²⁰ Gönül Tol, "The Turkey-Brazil-Iran Nuclear Deal: Another Missed Opportunity?" *The Middle East Institute*, May 24, 2010.

3. The Obama Administration and Turkey's Iran Policy

In 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama signed an executive order authorizing the imposition of new sanctions against the financial and energy sectors of Iran. In response, Turkey grudgingly announced that Ankara would reduce imports of oil from Iran by a tenth.²¹ This was a tough decision for Turkey, which was importing about 200,000 barrels of oil each day from Iran. Turkey, instead, began negotiations with Saudi Arabia and Libya for purchases of oil, and also agreed with Iran to set up a new financial scheme in which it would pay for Iran's oil and gas exports in Turkish lira rather than dollars or euros and Iran would be allowed to use these lira to buy billions worth of gold inside Turkey. Iran could ship gold to third countries such as the United Arab Emirates to exchange with foreign currencies. The United States saw this swap as a sign that Turkey was evading U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Turkey was granted limited exemptions by the Obama administration between 2012 and 2015 for its firms and state-owned Halkbank to conduct business with Iran. In retrospect, it seemed that Halkbank had trespassed a line drawn by Washington by engaging in dubious economic transactions with Iran, evading U.S. sanctions through front companies. In March 2017, an executive at Halkbank, Mehmet Hakan Atilla, was arrested in the United States for allegedly helping Iran bypass U.S. sanctions through a complicated financial scheme based on Halkbank. He was later found guilty of five counts related to conspiracy and bank fraud.²² It is not clear whether or how the Turkish government was involved in this scheme, but this case suggests a discord with Washington, despite the fact that Turkey had bowed to pressure from the U.S. to reduce its oil imports from Iran.

When the JCPOA was finally signed with Iran and the West in 2015, there were two competing reactions in Turkey. On one hand, many observers praised the deal, arguing that the lifting of sanctions on Iran would pave the way for an increase in bilateral trade and investment between Ankara and Iran. On the other, people cautioned that a sanction-free Iran would rise as a regional power in the region and become a formidable rival of Turkey again. Nevertheless, Turkey officially welcomed the deal and began to buy oil from Iran. In fact, Turkey's oil imports from Iran surged 142 percent in the first half of 2017 compared to the same period last year.²³ Iran also announced the intention to significantly increase its gas exports to Turkey when Erdogan visited Tehran in October 2017.

²¹ Seda Sezer, "Turkey to Cut Iran Oil Imports, Bows to U.S. Pressure," *Reuters*, March 30, 2012.

²² "Turkish Banker Found Guilty in Iran Sanctions Case Allegedly Tied to Erdoğan," *The Guardian*, January 3, 2018.

²³ "Iran Becomes Turkey's Biggest Crude Oil Exporter, Signals More Gas Sales," *Hürriyet Daily News*, October 4, 2017.

4. The Trump Administration and Turkey

Donald Trump assumed the U.S. presidency in January 2017, and his administration posed a new challenge to Turkey's attempt to increase energy trade with Iran because it was clear that Trump was going to undo the deal once he was sworn in as president. Expecting that President Trump would reintroduce sanctions against Iran by unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA, Turkish officials made it clear that Turkey would not honor U.S. sanctions and continue to buy Iranian oil and gas. In October 2017, Turkey and Iran officially agreed to trade in their local currencies to lower the cost of currency conversion and facilitate bilateral transactions among traders.²⁴ Turkey's Erdogan explained that the purpose of this deal was to increase the trade volume between Turkey and Iran to \$30 billion from the current 10 billion.

On May 8, 2018, the United States withdrew from the JCPOA, and President Trump announced the introduction of new sanctions against Tehran. In response, Turkey's Foreign Ministry issued a statement that criticized Trump's decision, describing it as an "unfortunate step."²⁵ President Erdogan told CNN International that the U.S. would be one to lose from its decision to abandon the agreement, warning that Trump's unilateral move will produce new crises and impact the world.²⁶ He also reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to stand with Tehran, which, he maintained, did not violate the agreement.

At the same time, the Turkish government sent a delegation to Washington to discuss the sanction issue with American officials, hoping that Turkey would be granted a waiver on U.S. oil sanctions against Iran. When Washington reinstated all U.S. sanctions on Iran that had been removed under the JCPOA in November 2018, it exempted eight countries from sanctions. Turkey was included in this set of selected countries. In April 2019, however, Washington decided to end these exemptions for countries buying Iranian oil, and a set of waivers that had allowed selected countries including Turkey and Japan expired in May. Accordingly, Turkey stopped importing crude oil from Iran and began to buy oil from Iraq, Russia, and Kazakhstan. The Turkish government, however, still maintained that it did not consider U.S. sanctions against Iran as the right policy, reiterating its position that the imposition of new sanctions on Iran would disturb regional stability and harm Iranian people. The U.S. decision not to extend waivers to important buyers of Iranian oil was a blow to Ankara because Turkey and Iran had signed a deal to launch a special payment mechanism including oil transactions to enable the growth of bilateral trade just a few days before the U.S. announcement of its new campaign to punish Tehran financially.

²⁴ "Turkey-Iran Central Banks Agree to Trade in Local Currencies – Turkish PM," *Reuters*, October 19, 2017.

²⁵ "Turkey: US Decision on Iran Deal 'Unfortunate Step,'" *Anadolu Agency*, May 9, 2018.

²⁶ "US Will Lose from Decision to Withdraw from Iran Nuclear Deal: Erdoğan," *Anadolu Agency*, May 9, 2018.

5. Conclusion

Turkey-Iran relations have been resilient despite the U.S.-led sanctions imposed against Iran under the Obama and Trump Administration. It is unlikely that Turkey and Iran will become strategic allies in the region and work together against the United States since their regional ambitions are inherently irreconcilable and they have diverging interests in the region. Both governments, nevertheless, seem to be determined to save and strengthen their economic ties. The Trump administration is now turning to Saudi Arabia and Israel as regional partners to redefine the geopolitical orientation of the Middle East, while U.S.-Turkey relations are strained for a number of reasons. This development further pushes Turkey toward Iran. Iran criticized the U.S. sanctions against Turkey following the detention of a U.S. pastor, Andrew Brunson, and Turkey condemned Washington for its Iran policy in 2018. Turkey refused to join a U.S.-led international summit in Warsaw, Poland to contain Iran's influence in the Middle East because, according to Turkish foreign minister, participating in a "meeting that targets one country is out of question."²⁷

The recent history of Turkey-Iran relations indicates that both countries are determined to deepen their economic and business relations with the other under the shadow of U.S. sanctions against Iran. Ankara and Tehran agreed that it is possible to increase the current trade exchange from \$9.5 billion to \$30 billion, the target set by the two countries. Because their economies are complementary to each other, the trend of deeper cooperation between Turkey and Iran based on their diplomatic pragmatism will remain the same for the coming years regardless of the pressure from Washington and despite the differences between their geopolitical orientations in the Middle East.

²⁷ Serkan Demirtaş, "Turkey not to attend US-led Anti-Iran Summit," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 13, 2019.

Between Energy Security and the Fear of Abandonment:

4. the U.S.-Japan Relations and Iran Sanctions

KOBAYASHI Yoshikazu

Introduction

This chapter reviews the U.S. sanction policies on Iran and its effect on the U.S.-Japan relationships. The chapter first overviews the U.S. sanctions on Iran and its impact on Japan with a particular focus on its oil sector, and then examines how Japan has responded to the U.S. pressures to suspend economic transactions with Iran and concludes with policy implications for Japan. The major arguments of this chapter are: 1) facing the dilemma between the “fear of abandonment” and its deep-rooted energy security concern, Japan has maintained “passive cooperation”, or complying the U.S. sanction but not proactively pressuring Iran by itself; 2) taking advantage of its unique position that has amicable relationships with both the Trump administration and Iran, Japan should play a bona fide facilitator between the United States and Iran.

1. Overview of the U.S. sanction on Iran

The United States has imposed economic sanctions on Iran since 1979 when its embassy in Tehran was occupied by student riots and embassy’s staffs and their families were caught as hostages for more than 400 days. While the initial sanctions were lifted in 1981 after the hostages were released, the United States re-imposed sanction on Iran in 1984 accusing that Iran was supporting terrorism in Middle East. Since then, the items of imposed sanction have been consistently strengthened from export embargo of arms-related products, opposition to the financial assistance from international financial institutions, to complete restriction of economic transactions with the United States. The United States aimed to block investments in the Iranian energy sector by foreign companies by providing Iran Libya Sanctions Act in 1996; but this attempt failed due to the fierce repercussions from Europe. After the Iran’s clandestine nuclear program was revealed in 2002, the United States initially sought to put pressures on Iran with multilateral sanctions by the United Nations Security Council. The United States, however, found that the U.N. sanctions were not rigorous enough to compel Iran to abandon its nuclear program and started to strengthen its own unilateral sanctions.

The primary sanction instrument currently used by the United States is financial sanction. The United States restricted the so-called U-Turn transactions for the Iranian entities partially in 2006 and completely in 2008. An Iranian financial institution had been prohibited to directly access to the U.S. financial market before the 2000s by the U.S. sanction; but it could use the U.S. dollar for its external economic transactions by indirectly accessing the U.S. financial market via third-party country’s banks.

This indirect access to the U.S. financial market is called as “U-Turn transactions.” In the current financial market, all U.S. dollar transactions are cleared within the U.S. banking system even when the transaction does not involve U.S. entity (for instance, the US dollar payment from a Japanese oil refiner to an Iranian oil company). The clearing practice is called correspondent banking system and is widely adopted by the international financial industry (Committee on Payments and Market Infrastructures 2016). Because all U.S. dollar transactions are settled within the U.S. jurisdiction, the U.S. government can inhibit the dollar transactions made for the Iranian entities.

After the restriction of “U-Turn” transactions, Iran was forced to use non-U.S. dollar currencies such as euro or renminbi to settle its international economic transactions. In order to restrict the non-U.S. dollar transactions and place more pressures on Iran, the United States imposed a new sanction by prohibiting the access to the U.S. financial market of the financial institutions that accommodates such non-U.S. dollar transactions with Iran. The United States imposed this sanction for non-U.S. dollar transactions partially in 2010 and completely in 2012. Because of the significance of the U.S. financial market in the international financial industry, the loss of the access to the U.S. market is an equivalent of “death penalty” for the financial industry and thus effectively forced the industry to sever its ties with Iran. The United States effectively utilized its centrality of global financial network as a coercive instrument to third-party countries. The use of the financial network centrality for foreign policy purpose is a type of “weaponized interdependence”, or a political use of asymmetric interdependence under the globalized economy (Farrell and Newman 2019).

These financial sanctions brought an embargo effect of crude oil export from Iran due to the inability of financial settlements with Iran. Because there was a temporal exemption program in the sanction, the Iran’s oil export did not decline suddenly; but the volume was more than halved from about 2.5 million barrels per day in 2011 to 1.1 million barrels per day in 2015. The reduced oil export seriously harmed the Iranian economy whose GDP growth rate fell from 3.1% in 2011 to minus 7.7% in 2012, the first year after the non-U.S. dollar transactions. Although it was not the sole factor to change the Iran’s policies on nuclear development, the economic damage caused by the U.S. sanction urged Iran to start negotiation with the permanent member countries of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) and made the agreement of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015.

2. Impacts on Japan

Major impacts of the U.S. sanction on Iran for Japan is found in its oil sector, particularly in its oil field development project and crude oil import. First, Japan was forced to withdraw from oil field development project in Iran. As a part of its energy security policy, Japan set a numerical target to secure 30% of its crude oil import as its own equity oil. Equity oil is oil produced from the Japanese-owned or operated oil field. Japan used to have a crude oil concession in the neutral zone between

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait; but the Saudi Arabian portion of the concession expired in February 2000 despite the full supports by the Japanese government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2000). Japan therefore had to find another upstream opportunity in Middle East, and an opportunity in Iran was of critical importance for its oil supply security as a recovery shot from the loss of the equity in Saudi Arabia.

The negotiations for the oil field development officially started after the Iranian president Mohammad Khatami visited Tokyo in November 2000. The oil field is named Azadegan field and its estimated oil in place is 33 billion barrels. The field is one of the largest brown fields (discovered but not developed oil field) in Iran and thus was a valuable opportunity for Japan to make up for the lost concession in Saudi Arabia. After Japan started the negotiation, however, it faced severe pressures from the United States to reconsider the upstream project in Iran. The United States opposed Japan to engage in the field's development because the development would expand the oil production of Iran and bring additional revenues to Iran to help its objectionable activities. The Japanese government, particularly Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), which oversees the Japan's energy policy, fiercely resisted the U.S. pressures claiming that the field's development is a core energy security interest for Japan. The Japanese government could realize the agreement between Inpex, a partially state-owned Japanese oil company, and the Iranian counterpart for the field's development contract in February 2004. The United States, however, further strengthened the pressure after it toppled the Saddam Hussein regime of Iraq in 2003 and shifted its primary diplomatic focus on Iran. Under the heightened pressures from the United States, Japan was eventually forced to concede to reduce the share of the development project from 75% to 10% in October 2006, and completely withdraw from the project in October 2010.

Another impact of the U.S. sanction on Iran was found in the crude oil import from Iran. Iran used to supply about 13% of the Japan's total crude oil imports in 2005 before the United States began to strengthen its sanctions on Iran. The volume gradually fell as the U.S. pressure grew, and the sanction that completely restricts the non-dollar transactions in 2012 had a decisive effect on the Japan's import of the Iranian crude oil, which declined to just 4% of the total import. Japan could make up the lost crude oil from Iran with other Middle Eastern supplies from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate, but such replacement further concentrated Japan's oil supply source to a limited number of suppliers. After the agreement of JCPOA and the following lifting the U.S. secondary sanction, the import volume from Iran increased; but because the withdrawal of the United States from JCPOA in May 2018 and the revival of its sanction on third-party countries, Japan was once again forced to reduce its crude oil from Iran. Japan has stopped the Iranian crude oil import since June 2019.

3. The Iran sanction and U.S.-Japan relationships

U.S.-Japan relationships since the 2000s have been generally good, except for a period of the administration by Democratic Party of Japan (from 2009 to 2012), which sought to reconsider the relationships with the United States. The Iran issue is one of the very few diplomatic issues which Japan and the United States have different views. The United States prefers Japan to more proactively place pressures on Iran to change its diplomatic behaviors while Japan is cautious to antagonize one of the major oil and gas producers in the Middle East. Given the Japan's inherent fragility of energy supply that depends on import for most of its oil and gas demand, Iran is too an influential player and large energy resource holder to dismiss.

Japan and Iran had developed close economic relationships by oil trade and economic cooperation. Iran was the largest crude oil supplier to Japan in the 1970s before the revolution. After the revolution, the country's oil export to Japan declined, but Iran was still a necessary piece for Japan's stable oil supply. Iran actually rescued Japan's energy supply by supplying additional barrels when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and the oil supply from Kuwait was disrupted. Japan in return provided various economic cooperation to Iran such as the construction of hydro power plants and the development of preparation system for natural disasters.

In the early stage of the U.S. sanctions on Iran, therefore, Japan was reluctant to join the U.S. sanction efforts. Japan argued that a unilateral sanction by the United States did not have enough legitimacy and a multilateral approach that includes other economic partners of Iran, such as China, was required. Against such claims, the United States intensified its diplomatic pressures on Japan on ministerial level. In June 2006, the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Taro Aso, to join the U.S. sanction efforts to place more diplomatic pressures on Iran. The Secretary of Treasury John Snow also demanded his counterpart, the Japanese Minister of Finance, Sadakazu Tanigaki, to cooperate the United States to tighten the financial restriction against the Iranian financial institutions at Group of Eight Finance Minister Meeting (Faiola and Linzer 2006). These persistent pressures from the United States at high diplomatic level effectively raised the perceived cost for Japan to maintain the existing policy toward Iran.

Another element that affected the Japan's policy adjustment toward Iran, despite its strong need to keep the country as a major oil supply source, was "fear of abandonment" in its alliance with the United States (Snyder 1997: 181). While Japan depends on the United States for its national security, it feels a risk that the United States might deflect from the alliance with Japan. The fear of abandonment has become more acute in recent years as the level of security risks has risen. China has expanded its maritime operations in East China Sea and South China Sea; North Korea has continued its bellicose diplomacy and nuclear weapon developments; and the diplomatic relationship with South Korea has deteriorated. All of these challenges left Japan few options but to tighten the

security ties with the United States to enhance its national security. Ignoring the U.S. alert on the Iranian nuclear developments is, therefore, not a realistic option for Japan.

Facing the dilemma between energy security and the fear of abandonment, Japan has chosen to take “passive cooperation” with the United States on the Iranian issue. Japan does not challenge the U.S. sanction policy on Iran while it does not develop its own proactive sanction on Iran.

The turning point of Japan’s policy toward Iran was its withdrawal from the development project of Azadegan oil field. The development contract was regarded as a cornerstone of Japan’s oil supply security after Japan lost its concession in Saudi Arabia and had a strong demand to find an alternative equity oil supply. The consistent rise of international oil price and the active overseas operations of Chinese state-owned oil companies in the 2000s also raised a fear among the Japanese oil policy and industrial officials that the world’s oil resources would be bought out by China with limited supply left for Japan. It was therefore a bitter decision for Japan to give up the development of Azadegan oil field.

Japan has maintained relatively a low-key diplomacy toward Iran since it gave up the Azadegan field. Japan complies with the sanctions imposed by the United Nations and the United States. Unlike the European Union that imposed its own unilateral sanction on Iran, however, Japan does not impose its own unilateral sanction on Iran. Despite being invited to join the U.S.-led coalition of the willing for the security of the Strait of Hormuz (Maritime Security Initiative), Japan declined to join it and instead decided to dispatch its maritime self-defense vessels to Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, and Gulf of Aden for the purpose of research and investigation. This “passivity” reflects Japan’s dilemma and reluctance to fully cooperate with the U.S. coercive policies toward Iran.

The visit by the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Iran in June 2019, therefore, was a surprise for many of foreign policy watchers both in Japan and abroad because his visit was a rare attempt by Japan to play a proactive role in the Middle Eastern politics. Although he met both the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the President Hassan Rouhani, his visit could not bring any notable breakthrough against the current stalemate. Because the United States and Iran had no sign of policy change, it was a natural outcome that the mediation by the Prime Minister Abe did not bring a progress. Yet, it was a welcoming move that Japan, who has built amicable relationships with both of the United States and Iran, joined as another mediator between the two countries. Becoming another channel of dialogue between the United States and Iran, Japan can contribute to reduce the risk of misperception of each other’s intension and lower the risk of unintended potential military conflict between the two countries. Japan can thus act as a bona fide facilitator to ease the diplomatic tension between the two countries.

4. Conclusions

Having faced the dilemma between ensuring energy security and the fear of abandonment, Japan chose to take a passive cooperation option over the Iranian nuclear issue. Given the escalating geopolitical tension in Middle East, however, it is the time for Japan to take a little more proactive role in easing the tension, if not solving the issue.

Two actions are worth considering for such proactive involvement by Japan. The first is to encourage the United States to take a more multilateral approach toward the issue. As several studies reveal, a unilateral sanction, particularly without the involvement of the international organization, is less likely to achieve its intended objective (Morgan, Bapat, and Krustev, 2009; Drezner 2000). Japan should keep urging the United States to take a more multilateral approach to the Iranian issue to make its policy a more effective one. The second is that Japan should continue to be a channel of dialogue between the President Trump and the Iranian leadership. Prime Minister Abe is one of the few leaders who has amicable relationships with President Trump, and thus he is well placed as a serious facilitator of dialogue between the political leadership of Iran. There may be a cynical view on his capability as a mediator because he is relatively new to the diplomacy in Middle East; but, maintaining a reliable channel of dialogue is always important to avoid misunderstanding and unwanted outcome. Although it may be difficult for Japan to provide a diplomatic breakthrough to the current stalemate, Japan may still be able to work as a “coolant” by mediating the communication and facilitating the dialogue between the United States and Iran.

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5. Challenges for Japan in Integrating the Middle East and Africa into the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy/Vision

KOBAYASHI Amane

Introduction

At the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) held in Nairobi, Kenya, in August 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" strategy. This strategy aims to accelerate development in Asia and Africa and improve connectivity between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean to promote stability and prosperity throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Since the announcement, the Japanese government has been working closely with the United States, Australia, and India to design and implement the geo-strategy that seeks to connect vast areas.

However, it is still unclear how Africa, which "possess [sic] huge potential of growth,"²⁸ and the Middle East, the hub connecting Asia and Africa, would fit into the FOIP vision. The Middle East, a major supplier of crude oil and natural gas, is an important player not only for Japan, but also other countries of the Indo-Pacific, given the significance of regional energy security. There is no clear strategy on how the major powers, including Japan, will engage with the Middle East under the FOIP vision. This chapter does not go into detail about the FOIP itself, but rather analyzes the background of the strategy and the challenges for Japan in integrating the Middle East and Africa into FOIP, while focusing on energy security.

1. Concept and Background of FOIP

The FOIP is an initiative led by four countries, the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan, and extends from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean, where regional countries cooperate on economic, diplomatic, and security matters.

It is noted in Japan's *Diplomatic Bluebook 2018* that "the maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region is facing various challenges such as piracy, terrorism, proliferation of WMD, natural disasters and illegal fishing." FOIP has been designed based on this threat perception because "[m]aintaining and strengthening the Indo-Pacific region's free and open maritime order as 'international public goods' will bring stability and prosperity."²⁹

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2018*, June 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000401241.pdf>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

Furthermore, Japan emphasizes that maintaining maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region, which supports more than half the world's population, based on the rule of law is a cornerstone of the stability and prosperity of the international community. To promote the FOIP vision, Japan has been advancing a three-pronged strategy: 1) the promotion and strengthening of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc.; 2) the pursuit of economic prosperity by enhancing connectivity, including through quality infrastructure development; and 3) a commitment for peace and stability, including through assistance for capacity building on maritime law enforcement, and cooperation on disaster risk reduction and non-proliferation.³⁰

To implement and strengthen the FOIP vision, Japan has been working closely with partner countries, including the U.S., Australia, India, New Zealand, ASEAN countries, Pacific Island countries, and major European countries. Abe has long emphasized the importance of the Indo-Pacific region. He spoke about the "Confluence of the Two Seas," or the linking of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, way back in 2007 during his first term.³¹ FOIP was advocated at TICAD VI in August 2016 based on those ideas. Why is such a grand strategy needed at this point of time? Some experts suggest that the main objective of FOIP is to curb China's ongoing investment in infrastructure and maritime expansion in the region through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was formerly called the One Belt and One Road Initiative. Jimbo (2018) has pointed out other factors in the areas of 1) geopolitics and security, 2) economics, and 3) regional order.

First, the expansion of China's military and maritime presence is becoming a major security challenge for the region. This has prompted major regional actors such as Japan, the U.S., Australia, and ASEAN countries to share their security perception and has encouraged more strategic alliances among allies and partners. Second, emerging markets with high economic potential, such as India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Turkey, are growing in Asia. This has increased the necessity to build a comprehensive economic zone with enhanced connectivity between Southeast, South, and West Asia. In June 2018, Prime Minister Abe announced that the Japanese government and the private sector would invest about 5.5 trillion JPY (approximately 50 billion USD) in three years to build infrastructure in the region connecting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Third, regional players are becoming increasingly conscious of the idea that countries sharing similar values, such as support for a free and open international order, the rule of law, freedom of navigation, democracy, and human rights, should work together to maintain regional order. Jimbo emphasizes that the FOIP strategy was established due to strong concerns about emerging China's diplomatic, economic, and security competition.³²

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019*, June 2019, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2019/html/chapter1/c0102.html#sf01>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

³¹ "Confluence of the Two Seas," Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

³² Ken Jimbo, "Indo-Pacific Vision: Concepts and Challenges," *Journal of International Security*, Vol.46, No.3, pp1-11, December 2018.

The U.S. has clearly positioned China as a strategic competitor and is confronting China based on its Indo-Pacific strategy. It has been pointed out that the "emergence" of the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy was clearly linked to its deepening competition with China.³³ For example, a speech by Vice President Mike Pence in October 2018 severely criticized China's "debt diplomacy" in the Indo-Pacific region. Security and defense aspects are quite strong in the U.S.'s FOIP strategy. In June 2018, the then Secretary of Defense James Mattis renamed the U.S. Pacific Command as the "Indo-Pacific Command," and gave a comprehensive speech on the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Geographical landscape of the U.S.-Japan FOIP Strategy



Source: Nikkei Asian Review³⁴

2. FOIP and the Middle East and Africa

It was in Kenya where Prime Minister Abe advocated the FOIP strategy for the first time. Aizawa (2019) said it is evident that the Middle East and Africa are important for FOIP from the viewpoint of securing stable sea lanes.³⁵ At TICAD 7 in August 2019, leaders of Japan and African countries stated they will

³³ Hudson Institute, *Vice President Mike Pence's Remarks on the Administration's Policy Towards China*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

³⁴ Hiroyuki Akita, "US and China project 'sharp power' in the Indian Ocean," *Nikkei Asian Review*, February 20, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/US-and-China-project-sharp-power-in-the-Indian-Ocean>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

³⁵ Teruaki Aizawa, "The Philosophy and Practice of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)' decoded from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website," *From the Oceans*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.spf.org/oceans/global-data/20181116181023949.pdf>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

"take good note of the initiative of a free and open Indo-Pacific announced by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at TICAD VI in Nairobi."³⁶

Japan has stated that it will focus on "energy," "digital connectivity," and "infrastructure" as part of Japan-U.S. cooperation to promote the FOIP strategy/vision. U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo announced in a July 2018 speech that the U.S. will commit to growing sustainable and secure energy markets throughout the Indo-Pacific.³⁷

At TICAD 7, the governments of Japan and the U.S. signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) to expand U.S.-Japan energy cooperation in sub-Saharan Africa through the Japan-United States Strategic Energy Partnership (JUSEP) and to renew their commitment to reducing energy poverty and increasing access to sustainable energy in Africa. The two countries agreed in August 2016 to support Power Africa,³⁸ a U.S.-led program to increase access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa. The MOC will leverage collective investments in clean energy solutions, geothermal power, and energy efficiency, while supporting cross-border energy trade and regional power pools.

Additionally, at the special conference on Promoting Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean, participants confirmed that the West Indian Ocean, which embraces important sea lanes, is a potential growth area for the Blue Economy and an indispensable component of the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.³⁹ Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Shinichi Nakatani attended the 19th Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in November 2019, and expressed Japan's commitment as a dialogue partner in connection with the FOIP vision.

It is important to understand the geopolitical importance of the Middle East and Africa. For example, the region from the Horn of Africa to the Red Sea is a geopolitical hub facing the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The region connects transportation and logistics between Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Particularly, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, located between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Eritrea and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, is the gateway to the south of the Red Sea and an important chokepoint for global maritime and energy trade. Tensions and conflicts within the regional countries in the Horn of Africa as well as security issues related to terrorism and piracy in Somalia have had a huge impact on the stability of global logistics.

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Yokohama Declaration 2019: Advancing Africa's Development through People, Technology and Innovation*, August 30, 2019, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/pdf/yokohama_declaration_en.pdf, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

³⁷ Michael R. Pompeo, *Remarks on "America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision,"* July 30, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/remarks-on-americas-indo-pacific-economic-vision/>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

³⁸ A U.S. government-led initiative to double electricity access in sub-Saharan Africa with two goals: 1) to increase new generation capacity by 30,000 megawatts, and 2) to help create 60 million new electricity connections by 2030. More than 100 private companies, along with EU, the U.K., World Bank, African Development Bank, and other institutions, are part of this initiative.

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Kono attended the Special Conference on Promoting Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean*, August 30, 2019, https://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af1/page4e_001085.html, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

To maintain maritime security, Japan has deployed the Self Defense Forces and taken part in Combined Task Force 151 for anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. Japan supports Comoros, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and other countries of the region by providing patrol vessels and maritime security equipment and also offering training through the Japan Coast Guard in order to help tackle piracy and transnational crimes.

China's BRI, launched in 2014, is also significant, both strategically and physically, for the Middle East, where the "Belt" and "Road" meet and connect with the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Since the Middle East tour of Xi Jinping in January 2016, China has been deepening its economic, political, and security involvement with the Middle East. The background is to boost energy trade, and protect sea lanes and overseas interests in the Middle East, specifically in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Arabian Sea, as part of efforts to address China's ethnic and security risks that are intertwined with the Middle Eastern political instability. As of January 2020, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), led by China, had 17 members in the Middle East and North Africa.⁴⁰

3. FOIP and Energy Geopolitics

The Middle East and Africa are and will be crucial for Japan, particularly in terms of energy security. Since the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear accident in 2011, Japan's energy self-sufficiency rate has remained below 10%. In addition, Japan's dependence on the Middle East for crude oil supply has been higher than 80% since 1996 and is likely to remain at a high level in the future.

Many Asian countries are in the same situation. The Institute of Energy Economics, Japan (IEEJ) estimates that Asia (East Asia, ASEAN, India, etc.) will need 46 million barrel/day (b/d) of crude oil. The Middle East, which is expected to export 32 million b/d, could alone be the major supplier to Asia.⁴¹ Against this backdrop, the political and security destabilization in the Middle East will have huge impacts on energy security not only in Japan but also in broader Asia. There could be more incidents interlinking energy, terrorism, and security threats. For example, terrorists attacked a natural gas facility in the eastern Algerian town of In Amenas in 2013, when 10 Japanese workers were murdered.

From the perspective of energy geopolitics, it is necessary to consider not only the instability of oil and gas producing countries, but also the risk of supply disruption due to various factors, such as transportation route problems, large-scale natural disasters, and armed conflicts. In the Middle East and Africa, there are multiple "chokepoints" for the supply of crude oil and natural gas, including the Straits of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal. Roughly 80% of the crude oil used in Japan

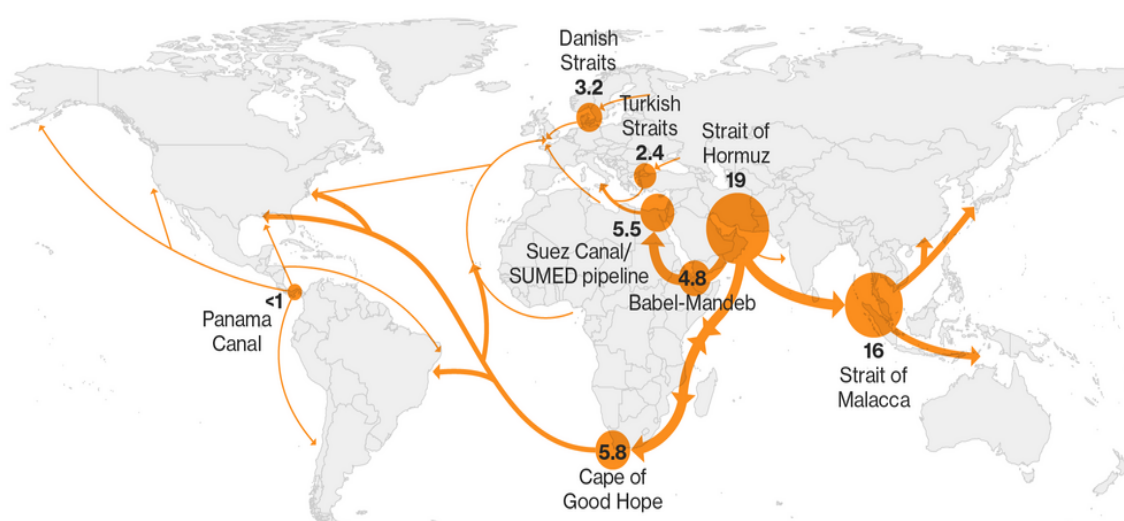
⁴⁰ Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, and the UAE.

⁴¹ IEEJ, IEEJ Outlook 2020, January 2020, <https://eneken.iej.or.jp/data/8650.pdf>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

goes through the Strait of Hormuz. Political upheavals and armed conflicts in the region increase the risk of supply disruption. These risks could increase the volatility of energy prices if the oil and gas producing countries have insufficient surplus production capacity, or if international assistance, such as the release of stockpiled reserves and reciprocity agreements, fail in the event of a supply disruption.

It is important for Japan to recognize that the U.S. is unlikely to engage with the Middle East or Africa to preserve its energy security given the rise in its energy self-sufficiency rate. Of course, the interests of the U.S. in the regions are not restricted to only energy, but cover other economic interests and alliances and partnerships. The U.S. also has military interests in the regions where it maintains bases and American troops. While not directly linked to energy security, energy companies operating in the Middle East and Africa play an important role in the U.S. economy. However, the U.S. has reduced its contribution to the stabilization of the Middle East for energy security while bearing risks and costs.

Daily transit volumes of oil through maritime chokepoints (million barrels/day)



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration. Based on 2016 data

Bloomberg

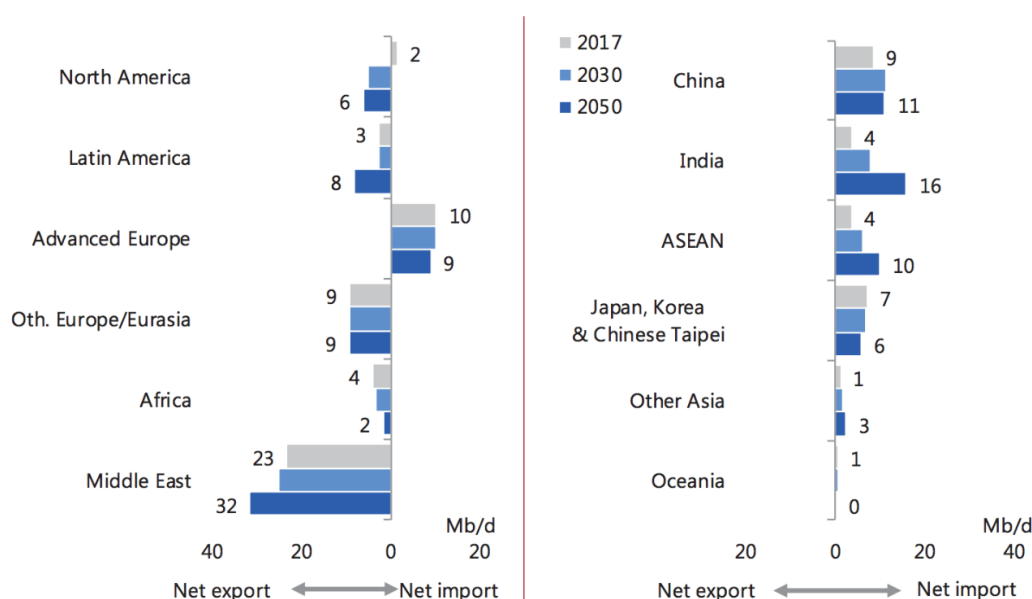
Source: Bloomberg⁴²

⁴² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-26/bab-el-mandeb-an-emerging-chokepoint-for-middle-east-oil-flows>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

The Trump administration has pledged to uphold its "America First Energy Plan" to maximize the use of domestic energy resources, reduce the country's reliance on imported energy resources, ease environmental regulations on fossil fuel production, increase employment by maximizing shale oil and gas production, and rebuild the coal industry.⁴³ The U.S. is expected to turn into a net exporter of oil and gas in 2020 and will continue to be one by 2050, due to an increase in shale production.⁴⁴ As energy security is more robust to external challenges, the U.S. will have more room for designing tough foreign policy. The Trump administration's sanctions against Iran and military confrontation clearly illustrate the link between "energy independence" and the unilateral foreign policy trend of the U.S.

Therefore, if Japan, Australia, and India try to engage with the Middle East under the FOIP strategy/vision for maintaining energy security, they may not be able to count on the U.S. for multilateral cooperation. In other words, under the U.S. retrenchment, countries in the Indo-Pacific, including Japan, need to achieve energy security by maintaining sea lanes and freedom of navigation. Paradoxically, the FOIP concept could play a large role as a multilateral cooperation framework, perhaps by working with China and BRI.

Net exports and imports of oil



Source: IEEJ⁴⁵

⁴³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-energy>; Nakano, Jane, *Energy Opportunities under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/energy-opportunities-under-free-and-open-indo-pacific-vision>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

⁴⁴ EIA, *Annual Energy Outlook 2019*.

⁴⁵ IEEJ, *IEEJ Outlook 2020*, January 2020, <https://eneken.ieej.or.jp/data/8650.pdf>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

4. Challenges in Integrating the Middle East and Africa into the FOIP Strategy

As mentioned above, the Middle East and Africa play a crucial role in the Indo-Pacific region, in terms of energy and maritime security. The following question arises: why is there little attention and reference to the Middle East and Africa in the FOIP vision? This research focuses on three factors: 1) differences in priorities and perceptions among countries; 2) unstable political and security situations; and 3) uncertainty over "shared values."

4.1. Differences in Priorities and Perceptions among the Quad

Regarding the geographical scope of the FOIP strategy/vision, the perceptions of Japan, the U.S., Australia, and India are quite different. In fact, Japan is the only country that clearly includes the Middle East and Africa in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that "Japan intends to promote peace and prosperity in the region as a whole by promoting the success of Asia, which could be called the 'leading part of the world,' throughout the Middle East and Africa through free and open Indo-Pacific, extracting the latent power of the Middle East and Africa; in other words, by improving the 'connectivity' of Asia, the Middle East and Africa."⁴⁶

Similarly, India's Prime Minister Modi, in his speech in June 2018, described the Indo-Pacific as a region extending "from the coast of Africa to the shores of the U.S.," and stated that India will work for enhanced connectivity between Southeast, South and West Asia, the Indian Ocean, and Africa.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Defense's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, published in June 2019, barely mentions the Middle East and Africa. The two regions are mentioned only in the context of China's "coercive attitude," activities of the Russian Pacific fleet, and the Global Peace Operations Initiative, while there is no mention of engagement under the FOIP strategy.⁴⁸ The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's area of responsibility (AOR) is also limited to the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean at 68 degrees east longitude, the westernmost end of the India.⁴⁹ While the U.S. Central Command and the U.S. Africa Command oversee the Middle East and Africa, respectively, there is no clear guideline on how these two commands would be integrated into the FOIP strategy.

⁴⁶Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*, June 2017, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000290287.pdf>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

⁴⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, *Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

⁴⁸ Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

⁴⁹ United States Indo-Pacific Command, *History of United States Indo-Pacific Command*, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/History/>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper defines the Indo-Pacific as "the region from the East Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean by Southeast Asia," and does not include the Middle East and Africa.⁵⁰ These differences in perception about the geographical coverage could be hindering the Quad's collaborative engagement with the Middle East and Africa under the FOIP strategy.

4.2. Political and Security Instability in the Region

An unstable security and political situation in the Middle East and Africa may hinder the progress of the FOIP vision in the region. For instance, in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been facing missile, rocket and drone attacks, allegedly from the Yemeni Houthi group, while there have also been unidentified tanker attacks around the Strait of Hormuz. U.S. and Iranian forces have shot down each other's drones. The assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in early January 2020 added uncertainty to the already volatile security environment in the region. There has been no sign of long-term de-escalation or trust building among the regional actors. Under these circumstances, extending the FOIP to the Middle East could be as challenging as beneficial, if not more.

Recently, in the Middle East and Africa, a complex and multi-layered cooperation and confrontation relationship has been formed, as the U.S. is trying to reduce its burden as a "mediator." However, this relationship is not consistent and changes rapidly depending on the interests of the regional actors. Such a volatile environment makes it difficult for Japan and other countries to engage with the Middle East and Africa in connection with the FOIP vision, as doing so could get them easily involved in the regional conflicts.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have continued their confrontation with Iran, while severing diplomatic relations with Qatar and launching a military intervention in Yemen. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional intergovernmental political and economic union, is failing. A deep-seated conflict between Egypt and Turkey is playing out across the region, while the African continent is also witnessing disputes as many countries have accelerated the establishment of military bases or pursued economic statecrafts. In the Syrian civil war, Iran, Turkey, and Israel did not hesitate to engage in military intervention. In Yemen and Libya, ongoing civil wars and the "failed statehood" created arenas of proxy wars, where foreign countries provide military and economic support to favored factions and even intervene directly sometimes. In Sudan and Algeria, the long-standing dictatorship has fallen, but the transitional political process has stagnated.

⁵⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2017) *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/file/2651/download?token=Q5CYuX29>; Tomohiko Satake, "Australia and Indo-Pacific: Searching for a new Order in a Multipolar Era," *Journal of International Security*, Vol.46, No.3, pp51-70, December 2018, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

Furthermore, the activities of *de facto* States (i.e. Somaliland, Puntland) and non-state actors complicate regional conflicts and cooperative relationships. It is necessary to see how external powers, such as the U.S., France, the U.K., Russia, China, and India, are involved in the region.

Terrorism risk is still high in the Middle East and Africa. Activities of the ISIS are widespread in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, West and Central Africa, as well as the Arabian Peninsula. In East Africa, which is viewed as an important hub for Japan's FOIP vision, the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabab and Somalia's ISIS are becoming more active, increasing the security risk to Japanese citizens and companies. At least 21 people, including foreigners, were killed in January 2019 in central Nairobi in a terrorist attack allegedly carried out by the al-Shabab. Several Japanese companies were operating in the complex that was attacked, but no Japanese victim was reported. In a statement published in August 2018, ISIS leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi declared Libya, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Tunisia, Algeria, Somalia, West Africa, and Central Africa as ISIS "territory." The fragile security environment in the Middle East and Africa is hindering the participation of private companies in economic activities as part of the FOIP strategy.

4.3. Uncertainty over "Shared Values"

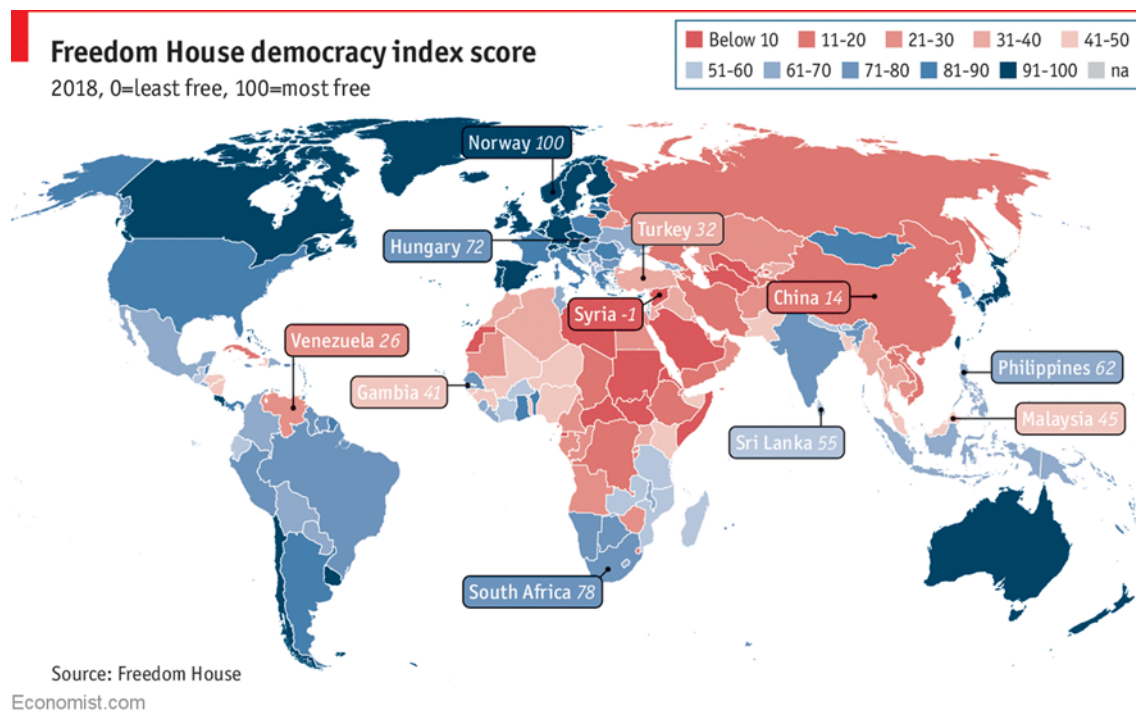
Under the FOIP concept, the Quad countries are pushing for not only economic development and geopolitical strategies, but also fundamental principles, such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation, democracy, and human rights. However, the extent to which these values could be accepted and shared throughout the Indo-Pacific is unclear. This question is especially relevant for the Middle East and Africa as many countries in the region are regarded as non-democratic or authoritarian.

In other words, how can Japan and the U.S. advocate liberal democracy or a "free and open" policy while promoting the FOIP strategy/vision in the Middle East and Africa? Too much pressure to accept and share U.S.-led values could make some countries averse to the idea. Instead, cooperation with China or Russia, which are increasing their presence in the region, could look more attractive for governments in the Middle East and Africa, as they tend not to emphasize liberal democracy or human rights.

The Japanese government recognizes the challenge of promoting "shared values" and the importance of softening the tone. The *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017* states that "Japan will provide nation-building support in the area of development as well as politics and governance, in a way that respects the ownership of African countries, and not by forcing on or intervening in them."⁵¹ However, it is not clear whether the U.S. and Australia would act as flexibly as Japan in terms of "shared values," and there could be a perception gap between the Quad countries.

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*, p27, 2017.

Freedom House democracy index (2018)



Source: Economist⁵²

5. Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the role of the Middle East and Africa in the FOIP strategy, and points out that the regions are not yet connected to the "Indo-Pacific Region" due to differences in the priorities and perceptions of major powers, unstable political and security situations, and uncertainty over "shared values." While these regions are considered important for Japan's FOIP landscape, it remains unclear how Japan would/could engage with them, in collaboration with the U.S. India, and Australia. This chapter points out that the Middle East has a crucial role to play in terms of energy supply to the Indo-Pacific region, particularly Asia, and that the FOIP could play a significant role in achieving energy security.

Finally, it is necessary to clarify what should/could/will be done under the FOIP vision. The FOIP ambitiously encompasses multiple policies and initiatives, as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks. However, if the vision ends up "doing anything" without strategic prioritization, there would be no economic, diplomatic, or security achievements. It is necessary to clarify how to engage (or disengage) with certain countries, what resources should be dedicated, and

⁵² Economist, *After decades of triumph, democracy is losing ground*, June 14 2018, <https://www.economist.com/international/2018/06/14/after-decades-of-triumph-democracy-is-losing-ground>, last accessed on February 15, 2020.

what achievements could be obtained in the longer term. “Alignment maps” are required for the major powers of FOIP, particularly the Quad members, to share the strategy/vision.

6. U.S. Defense Policy in the Middle East Post 9/11

Hijab Shah and Melissa Dalton

Introduction

The focus of U.S. defense policy in the Middle East has evolved from an extensive focus on counterterrorism to a broader frame of deterrence and competition. However, underlying U.S. interests have been consistent across the last 19 years: deterring aggression, countering terrorism, ensuring the free flow of oil, gas, and commerce to global markets, and promoting the security of allies and partners. Looking ahead, U.S. allies can expect the United States to shift its priorities and resourcing in the region due to geopolitical and domestic dynamics.

1. The War on Terror

1.1. U.S. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

President George W. Bush declared a “War on Terror” on September 21, 2001, commencing with the campaign in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.⁵³ Although the Taliban were swiftly driven out of Kabul, they maintained and even expanded strongholds across the country, from which they continued to hit U.S. and coalition troops. Nineteen years later, the United States remains embroiled in Afghanistan, making the conflict the longest in U.S. history. Over the course of the war, 2,400 U.S. military personnel and 147,000 Afghans—31,000 of those being civilians—have been killed.⁵⁴ Since 2001, the war in Afghanistan has cost the United States over \$2 trillion.⁵⁵

Despite continued U.S. support to the government in Kabul, the Afghan government maintains control over only a third of the country; half of Afghanistan remains contested between the government and the Taliban, and the remaining 17 percent is under the Taliban’s complete control.⁵⁶

⁵³ “Text of George Bush’s Speech,” The Guardian, September 21, 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13>.

⁵⁴ Mann, Christopher T. “U.S. War Costs, Casualties, and Personnel Levels Since 9/11.” Congressional Research Service, April 18, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF11182.pdf>; <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45122.pdf>; “Afghan Civilians.” Afghan Civilians | Costs of War. Brown University: Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. Accessed January 21, 2020. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>.

⁵⁵ Sarah Almukhtar and Rod Nordland, “What Did the U.S. Get for \$2 Trillion in Afghanistan?,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/09/world/middleeast/afghanistan-war-cost.html>, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/09/world/middleeast/afghanistan-war-cost.html>.

⁵⁶ “Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan.” FDDs Long War Journal. Accessed January 16, 2020. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan>; “Afghan Civilians.” Afghan Civilians | Costs of War. Brown University: Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. Accessed January 21, 2020. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>.

In a bid to bring the war to a conclusion, the U.S. government began peace talks with the Taliban, but these on-again, off-again negotiations have yet to yield an agreement that all parties agree on. As the peace talks continue, so do hostilities—the past few months have seen a spike in Taliban violence and a corresponding rise in U.S. military offensives, both sides presumably attempting to gain the upper hand at the negotiating table while simultaneously ensuring the other party remains committed to finding a settlement.⁵⁷

The second of the U.S. “forever wars” was launched in Iraq on March 20, 2003, after the controversial claims by the Bush administration that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.⁵⁸ Although the U.S.-led coalition handily defeated the Iraqi military and overthrew President Saddam Hussain’s government, the country soon fell into chaos and violence. The United States had to contend with flourishing insurgent and terrorist groups, while simultaneously attempting to reform a functioning government in Baghdad. The U.S. government lost over 5,000 military personnel in Iraq, while an estimated hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed—exact numbers and the breakdown between combatants and civilians remain unknown.⁵⁹ The war has cost the U.S. government nearly \$2 trillion.⁶⁰

Despite President Barack Obama declaring the war over in October 2011 and withdrawing the bulk of U.S. forces from Iraq, the country continues to be mired in conflict and violence and the United States, consequently, maintains a presence in the country to support counter terrorism operations and to train, advise, and assist the Iraqi security forces. Seventeen years after the war first began, Iraq has witnessed intense sectarian and insurgent violence, poor governance from the government in Baghdad, the rise and fall of the Islamic State (ISIS), and now, the violent suppression of protestors leading to at least 500 civilian deaths since October 2019.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Taliban’s Continued Attacks Show Limits of U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan,” The New York Times, February 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/world/asia/afghanistan-violence-taliban.html>.

⁵⁸ David E. Sanger and John F. Burns, “THREATS AND RESPONSES: THE WHITE HOUSE; BUSH ORDERS START OF WAR ON IRAQ; MISSILES APPARENTLY MISS HUSSEIN,” The New York Times, March 20, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/20/world/threats-responses-white-house-bush-orders-start-war-iraq-missiles-apparently.html>.

⁵⁹ Phillip Bump, “15 Years after the Iraq War Began, the Death Toll Is Still Murky,” The Washington Post, March 20, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/03/20/15-years-after-it-began-the-death-toll-from-the-iraq-war-is-still-murky/>; “Iraq Body Count,” accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/>; “Iraqi Civilians.” *Iraqi Civilians | Costs of War*, Brown University: Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/iraqi>.

⁶⁰ Kenneth R. Rosen, “U.S. Taxpayers Each Spent More Than \$8,000 on Iraq War, For \$2 Trillion Total,” Newsweek, February 5, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/iraq-war-cost-taxpayers-2-trillion-1485784>.

⁶¹ “In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency,” International Crisis Group, February 15, 2006, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/their-own-words-reading-iraqi-insurgency>; “Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State,” Wilson Center, October 28, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>; Aziz El Yaakoubi and Nadine Awadallah, “Violence Escalates in Iraq as Government Pushes to End Protests - Reuters,” January 27, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-protests/violence-escalates-in-iraq-as-government-pushes-to-end-protests-idUSKBN1ZQ0XP>.

1.2. The Evolution of U.S. Strategy

In response to geopolitical shifts in the Asia Pacific and in Europe, the United States has sought to recalibrate its strategic priorities and alignment of defense resourcing to focus on those theaters (discussed below). However, ongoing operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and requirements to deter Iran have made this transition difficult.

Meanwhile, the post-9/11 “forever wars” have cost the United States heavily in time, blood, and treasure. Seeing a lack of clear victory in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. public has pressured the government to bring the wars to an end and bring troops home. According to Pew polls, 59 percent of Americans did not think the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting, with 62 percent feeling the same way about the war in Iraq.⁶²

This domestic displeasure with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has led the U.S. government to shift its strategy in those two theaters. In order to accomplish the dual goals of lightening the budgetary load and limiting U.S. casualties, the United States has shifted from having a heavy, involved, on-the-ground troop presence in both countries to a “light footprint” approach in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶³ Conventional U.S. military brigades have been replaced by smaller special operations units—often operating in support of local military personnel—and there is increased reliance on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over manned fighter jets.⁶⁴ In accordance with the U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS), the United States is shifting to an emphasis on working “by, with, and through” local partners, focusing on training and equipping the Afghan and Iraqi military and police services to take over security provision in both countries.⁶⁵ Today, an estimated 6,000 troops are deployed in Iraq, while 14,000 are deployed in Afghanistan.⁶⁶

⁶² Kevin Baron, “Do Americans Really Want to End ‘Forever Wars?’ Survey Says...,” *Defense One*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2019/09/do-americans-really-want-end-forever-wars-survey-says/159760/>; J. Baxter Oliphant, “Iraq War Still Divides Americans 15 Years after It Began,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), March 19, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/19/iraq-war-continues-to-divide-u-s-public-15-years-after-it-began/>; Ruth Igielnik and Kim Parker, “Majorities of U.S. Veterans, Public Say the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Were Not Worth Fighting,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), July 10, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/10/majorities-of-u-s-veterans-public-say-the-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan-were-not-worth-fighting/>.

⁶³ Brad Stapleton, “The Problem with the Light Footprint: Shifting Tactics in Lieu of Strategy” (Cato Institute, June 7, 2016), <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/problem-light-footprint-shifting-tactics-lieu-strategy>.

⁶⁴ Stapleton; Edward Helmore, “US Air Force Prepares Drones to End Era of Fighter Pilots,” *The Guardian*, August 22, 2009, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/22/us-air-force-drones-pilots-afghanistan>.

⁶⁵ Diana I. Dalphonse, Chris Townsend, and Matthew W. Weaver, “Shifting Landscape: The Evolution of By, With, and Through,” *Real Clear Defense*, August 1, 2018, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/08/01/shifting_landscape_the_evolution_of_by_with_and_through_113676.html; “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Miriam Berger, “Where U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Visualized,” *Washington Post*, January 4,

The U.S. desire to end the “forever wars” in Afghanistan and Iraq does, however, conflict with two other strategic priorities: maintaining pressure on extremist groups, while simultaneously countering regional influence from competitors like Russia, China, and Iran.⁶⁷ Both of these priority areas require the United States to maintain a deterrent presence in the Middle East and South Asia, with a troop presence of over 67,000 across the Middle East and South Asia.⁶⁸ This necessity inevitably contradicts the light footprint approach, particularly when other tools of national power (e.g., diplomacy and foreign aid) are de-funded and de-prioritized in recent years.

1.3. Gaps and Weaknesses in the War on Terror Strategy

The U.S. strategy in the War on Terror has had significant flaws, one being the underutilization of its non-military tools: diplomacy, development, trade, and information. These “soft power” tools could have significantly complemented the military effort in Afghanistan and Iraq, used to buttress U.S. gains and make them more sustainable in the long run. Although the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) played a role in Afghanistan and Iraq, the vast majority of funding and resourcing for the Afghanistan and Iraq wars was reserved for the military. Efforts to galvanize interagency cooperation were fraught and suffered from lack of organization and clarity, and ultimately, it was easy to defer to the military with its in-built command structures and presence on the ground.

In addition to underutilizing non-military tools, U.S. strategy also overburdened the military, often forcing it to take on roles beyond its call of duty. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military contributed heavily to provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), with the goal of improving, “increasing the host nation’s capacity to govern; enhancing economic viability; and strengthening local governments’ ability to deliver public services, such as security and health care.”⁶⁹ The U.S. military played an outsize role in the execution of stabilization and governance projects with lofty objectives that frequently did not reflect local demands or realities, and were often far outside military expertise.⁷⁰

2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/where-us-troops-are-in-the-middle-east-and-could-now-be-a-target-visualized/2020/01/04/1a6233ee-2f3c-11ea-9b60-817cc18cf173_story.html.

⁶⁷ “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America.”

⁶⁸ Berger, “Where U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Visualized.”

⁶⁹ “Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq” (Government Accountability Office, October 1, 2008), <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0986r.pdf>.

⁷⁰ “Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq”; Hijab Shah and Melissa Dalton, “Stabilization in Syria: Lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 9, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/stabilization-syria-lessons-afghanistan-and-iraq>.

The overextension of the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF)—the formal Congressional consent that allowed the Bush administration to launch the war in Afghanistan—has been another significant flaw in the U.S. approach.⁷¹ The AUMF was intended to directly target those who “planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons.”⁷² Although this authority was certainly applicable to the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, it has since been extended and used as justification for military operations in other countries, to include Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Kenya, and Niger.⁷³ In addition, the 2002 AUMF, which originally authorized the U.S. intervention in Iraq, was used in January 2020 used to justify the U.S. targeted killing of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani in Iraq.

2. Terrorism and Counterterrorism

2.1. The Rise of Terrorist Groups Post 9/11

Although al-Qaeda suffered early setbacks in the war in Afghanistan, it saw its ranks swell in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion. The U.S. military’s attention was divided between two military fronts, which allowed al-Qaeda room to breathe and regroup in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the ongoing Iraqi Sunni insurgency against the United States intensified, and the insurgents, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, eventually joined hands with al-Qaeda in 2004.⁷⁴ The survival of al-Qaeda’s core leadership, the proliferation of its ideology, and the burgeoning narrative of standing up to the oppressor resulted in the rise of several al-Qaeda affiliates throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa. Some of these rising groups were official al-Qaeda offshoots—for instance, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).⁷⁵ Others were affiliates, with varying level of interaction and collaboration with

⁷¹ Ken Gude and Kate Martin, “Preventing Endless War Requires Real Congressional Oversight—Not New War Authority,” Center for American Progress, December 14, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/12/14/464265/preventing-endless-war-requires-real-congressional-oversight-not-new-war-authority/>.

⁷² “Authorization for Use of Military Force 2001,” Lawfare, October 22, 2012, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/authorization-use-military-force-2001>.

⁷³ “Considerations for a New Authorization for the Use of Military Force” (Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law, University of Pennsylvania, April 20, 2018), <https://www.law.upenn.edu/live/files/7911-aumf-policy-note-final20-april-2018pdf>.

⁷⁴ Seth G. Jones, “Will Al Qaeda Make a Comeback?,” August 7, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/08/will-al-qaeda-make-a-comeback.html>.

⁷⁵ “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),” National Counterterrorism Center, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/aqap.html>; “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),” National Counterterrorism Center, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/aqim.html>; “Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS): The Nucleus of Jihad in South Asia,” *The Soufan Center* (blog), January 2019, <https://thesoufancenter.org/research/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-aqis-the-nucleus-of-jihad-in-south-asia/>.

al-Qaeda's core leadership— for instance, Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, Tehreek-e-Taliban in Pakistan, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Boko Haram in Nigeria.⁷⁶

In 2014, however, al-Qaeda's Iraqi offshoot decided to split off, rebrand itself as the Islamic State, and declare a Caliphate in swaths of Iraq and Syria.⁷⁷ The rise of the Islamic State was meteoric, with many former al-Qaeda members and peripheral affiliates swearing fealty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader and self-proclaimed Caliph of the Islamic State.⁷⁸ Between 20,000 and 30,000 individuals, mostly from the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, made their way to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State as foreign fighters.⁷⁹ Many of these foreign fighters returned to their home countries to launch small-scale but high-visibility attacks, such as the Charlie Hebdo shootings in 2015, the Brussels bombings in 2016, and the London Bridge attack in 2017.⁸⁰

2.2. U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and with the alarming rise of terrorist groups over the past two decades, counterterrorism became the top security priority for the United States.⁸¹

In order to tackle the increased threat from terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their affiliates, the U.S. military expanded its special operations and increased the deployment of special operations forces (SOF) to combat the threat as well as support and train local partners to do so.⁸² Although special forces constitute only 2 percent of the U.S. military, they have been tasked with taking on significant counterterrorism combat and training missions, putting a strain on resources and personnel capacity.⁸³ Although the United States is hoping for a return on its investment in training and equipping local partner SOF units, while seeking to leverage the assistance of allies—the United

⁷⁶ "Nusra Front," accessed February 7, 2020, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/al_nusrah_front.html; "Tehreek-E-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)," National Counterterrorism Center, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/ttp.html>; "Al-Shabaab," accessed February 7, 2020, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/al_shabaab.html; "Boko Haram," National Counterterrorism Center, accessed February 7, 2020, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/boko_haram.html.

⁷⁷ Jones, "Will Al Qaeda Make a Comeback?"

⁷⁸ Define "Caliph", cite.

⁷⁹ "Foreign Fighters In Iraq And Syria -- Where Do They Come From?," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-is-isis-isil-infographic/26584940.html>.

⁸⁰ "2015 Charlie Hebdo Attacks Fast Facts," CNN World, December 20, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/europe/2015-paris-terror-attacks-fast-facts/index.html>; "Brussels Explosions: What We Know," *BBC News*, April 9, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35869985>; "London Bridge Attack: What Happened," *BBC News*, May 3, 2019, sec. London, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-40147164>.

⁸¹ Robert Malley and Jon Finer, "The Long Shadow of 9/11," *Foreign Affairs*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/long-shadow-911>.

⁸² Nick Turse, "Special Operations Forces Continue to Expand Across the World—Without Congressional Oversight," July 17, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/special-operations-forces-continue-expand-across-world-without-congressional-oversight/>.

⁸³ Kristen Hajduk, "Special Operations Forces: Let SOF Be SOF," *Defense360*, December 21, 2016, <https://defense360.csis.org/special-operations-forces-let-sof-be-sof/>.

Kingdom, France, and Australia, for example—in taking over special operations combat and training missions, U.S. SOF remains in very high demand.⁸⁴

At the height of counterterrorism operations in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility—constituting the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of South Asia— 80 percent of all U.S. SOF was deployed into the region.⁸⁵ In 2019, that number dropped to 62 percent, with CENTCOM still accounting for a majority of SOF deployments worldwide in support of combat and training missions against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Houthis in Yemen.⁸⁶ Some of that shift can be accounted for a rise in SOF activity in U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) region, “blurring the lines between assistance and combat” in the effort to counter groups such as al-Shabaab in East Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa, and the Islamic State in the Sahel.⁸⁷

U.S. counterterrorism efforts also included the steady expansion of the drone warfare program, particularly under the Obama administration. Between 2008 and 2016, the United States launched roughly 560 drone strikes, largely in Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, comparing to just 57 under the Bush administration.⁸⁸ The drone program came under scrutiny from the international community, decrying significant civilian casualties and questioning the legality of “signature strikes”—the controversial targeting of men in war zones that seemed of military age, without fully knowing their identities or intentions towards the United States.⁸⁹ Under the Trump administration, drone strikes have increased, targeting parameters have become more permissive and prior requirements to report casualties outside warzones have been limited.⁹⁰ Since the Bush administration, drone strikes have killed somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000 people, including a reportedly sizable proportion of civilians, although the exact numbers remain elusive due to the lack of clarity around targeting data.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Chad Pillai, “Shifting Fires: Optimizing Special Operations for Today and Tomorrow’s Fight,” War on the Rocks, October 19, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/shifting-fires-optimizing-special-operations-for-today-and-tomorrows-fight/>.

⁸⁵ Nick Turse, “More U.S. Commandos Are Fighting Invisible Wars in the Middle East,” *The Intercept* (blog), September 25, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/25/special-operations-command-military-middle-east/>.

⁸⁶ Turse.

⁸⁷ Nick Turse, “Exclusive: The U.S. Has More Military Operations in Africa than the Middle East,” *Vice* (blog), December 12, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/a3my38/exclusive-the-us-has-more-military-operations-in-africa-than-the-middle-east.

⁸⁸ Helen Warrell, “From Desert Storm to Soleimani: How US Drone Warfare Has Evolved,” *Financial Times*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/6346dd78-322d-11ea-9703-eea0cae3f0de>.

⁸⁹ Dan De Luce and Paul McLeary, “Obama’s Most Dangerous Drone Tactic Is Here to Stay,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed February 7, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/05/obamas-most-dangerous-drone-tactic-is-here-to-stay/>.

⁹⁰ Charlie Savage, “Trump Revokes Obama-Era Rule on Disclosing Civilian Casualties From U.S. Airstrikes Outside War Zones,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/06/us/politics/trump-civilian-casualties-rule-revoked.html>.

⁹¹ “America’s Counterterrorism Wars,” *New America*, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/americas-counterterrorism-wars/>.

2.3. Weaknesses and Gaps in U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy

Despite U.S. counterterrorism efforts against Salafi-Jihadist groups, the threats have not just persisted, but indeed, have proliferated over time. This is largely due to the fact that the United States has employed its military as the main weapon in the counterterrorism fight, but the main battleground is an ideological one, where military might has little impact. Where the United States has attempted to fight the ideological battle—namely, through counter-messaging and counter-narrative initiatives—it has largely failed to accomplish any significant progress.⁹² The Salafi-Jihadist narrative is rooted deep in generational struggle and historic grievances—the Israel-Palestine conflict, the presence of occupying troops within Muslim-majority countries, the David-versus-Goliath struggle against the might of the West, the call for a united Muslim *ummah*—which these groups are able to leverage very effectively to increase recruitment and inspire resilience.

This narrative extends against regional partners who are trained and supported in counterterrorism efforts by the United States. This is partly due to the negative association with the United States and being seen as traitors, and partly due to the partners' ham-fisted actions that play into extremist narratives. In Iraq, for example, the U.S.-backed government in Baghdad uses terrorism as a frame for domestic opposition, sending U.S.-trained Iraqi military and Counter-Terrorism Service forces to shut down protests, resulting in "excessive force" against protestors and the deaths of at least 319 Iraqis.⁹³ U.S. accountability mechanisms for security partners are difficult to enforce in the best of circumstances, thus even less so in active conflict environments. Yet, partners' heavy-handedness can significantly exacerbate conflict and fuel recruitment narratives. This is especially worrying in the case of Iraq as the Islamic State is reportedly regrouping within the country.⁹⁴

U.S. counterinsurgency efforts are also impeded by its adversary's lack of rules of engagement. Because groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State ostensibly operate outside the bounds of the Law of Armed Conflict, counterterrorism operations are thus highly risky.⁹⁵ In urban warfare scenarios such as Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, counterterrorism operations are especially challenging—there are much higher risks to civilians.⁹⁶ If one side in the conflict has no regard for proportionality,

⁹² Eric Rosand and Emily Winterbotham, "Do Counter-Narratives Actually Reduce Violent Extremism?," *Brookings Institute* (blog), March 20, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/03/20/do-counter-narratives-actually-reduce-violent-extremism/>.

⁹³ "Iraqi PM Sends Counter-Terror Force To Put Down Street Protests," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iraq-mahdi-elite-antiterror-forces-break-up-protests-iran-militias/30238406.html>; Hind Hassan, "As Protests Continue in Baghdad and Iraq, the Media Can't Afford to Normalize Violence," *The Washington Post*, November 13, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/11/13/hundreds-iraqis-have-been-killed-medias-silence-is-deafening/>.

⁹⁴ Eric Schmitt, Alissa J. Rubin, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "ISIS Is Regaining Strength in Iraq and Syria," *The New York Times*, August 20, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/us/politics/isis-iraq-syria.html>.

⁹⁵ "Using Law to Fight Terror," Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law, University of Pennsylvania, October 2016, <https://www.law.upenn.edu/institutes/cerl/conferences/usinglawtofightterror/>.

⁹⁶ Sahr Muhammedally, "Lessons From Mosul: How to Reduce Civilian Harm in Urban Warfare," *Just Security*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.justsecurity.org/43382/lessons-mosul-reduce-civilian-harm-urban-warfare/>.

no qualms about using human shields, and no hesitation in employing mass-casualty tactics, then the other side not only faces a higher than normal risk to itself by engaging its adversary, but by doing so also exacerbates conditions for the high likelihood of civilian casualties.⁹⁷

3. Strategic Competition in the Middle East

3.1. Russia, China, and Iran

Drawing from the 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy, the U.S. emphasis on “strategic competition” in the Middle East yields a focus on three main rivals jostling for a higher share of influence in the region: Russia, China, and Iran. Russia has been heavily involved in the Syrian crisis since the immediate aftermath of the 2013 chemical weapons attack in the suburbs of Ghouta⁹⁸ As the international community built up pressure and called for action against President Bashar al-Assad, Russia negotiated and helped execute a framework with the United States, the United Nations, and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons whereby Syria would turn over its chemical weapons for destruction in exchange for no military action against the Assad regime.⁹⁹ Since then, Russia has firmly entrenched its position as President Assad’s primary international supporter, sending its military to intervene in the Syrian civil war on behalf of the Assad regime and challenging the international community’s condemnation of President Assad on numerous occasions.¹⁰⁰ Outside of Syria, Russia has been engaging in energy and arms sales diplomacy with other Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Iraq, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.¹⁰¹ Russian consolidation of influence in the Middle East is troubling to U.S. interests, particularly when it provides alternatives—that don’t come with human rights provisions, for instance—to longstanding U.S. relations in the region.¹⁰²

China has also been challenging U.S. influence in the region, albeit much more quietly. Although China has shown some regional opposition to the United States by joining Russian vetoes in the UN Security Council and deepening ties with the Assad regime in Syria, it has mostly made inroads by other means.¹⁰³ Using its “portfolio of investments” instead of military or political activity as leverage, the

⁹⁷ Muhammedally.

⁹⁸ “Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012-2019,” Arms Control Association, March 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>.

⁹⁹ Ellen Barry, “Russia, Praised for Scrapping Chemical Weapons, Now Under Watchdog’s Gaze,” The New York Times, March 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/20/world/europe/russia-chemical-weapons-novichok.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, “Understanding Russia’s Intervention in Syria:,” RAND Corporation, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3180.html.

¹⁰¹ Christine Wormuth, “Russia and China in the Middle East: Implications for the United States in an Era of Strategic Competition,” Product Page, 2019, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT511.html>.

¹⁰² Wormuth.

¹⁰³ “Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012-2019”; Alice Suh and Nabih Bulos, “China Deepens Ties to Middle East as Trump Downsizes U.S. Role,” Los Angeles Times, December 17, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-12-17/china-pivots-to-middle-east-as-trump-downsizes-u-s-role>.

Chinese government has increased its reach throughout the Middle East.¹⁰⁴ Similar to Russia, Chinese investments do not carry the same accountability standards as investments with the United States would, and are thus presumably more attractive to a region with overwhelmingly autocratic governance systems. China serves as Saudi Arabia and the UAE's largest global trading partner, and has invested significantly in the energy infrastructure in both countries.¹⁰⁵ It has also invested billions of dollars in infrastructure construction projects—largely in support of its Belt and Road Initiative—in Egypt and Israel.¹⁰⁶ Importantly, China is the largest importer of Saudi as well as Iranian oil, which grants it significant economic leverage in the region, and also cements its role as a non-aligned power player in the Middle East.¹⁰⁷

Although Iran is not a “strategic competitor” on the same scale of Russia and China, its alliance—to varying degrees—with the two challengers, and its own substantive and ever-increasing influence across the Middle East makes it a serious power player and threat to U.S. presence in the region. Acknowledging its conventional military inferiority to that of the United States and to U.S. regional partnerships with Israel and Saudi Arabia, Iran has opted instead to operate and increase its influence using unconventional “gray zone” tools.¹⁰⁸ In particular, Iranian support and use of proxy forces have posed a challenge to U.S. and Saudi regional interests. Iran has, through its powerful paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), provided resources and training to Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and various militias in Iraq and Syria.¹⁰⁹ These groups have gone on to consolidate significant power in the region, furthering Iranian regional influence, while continuing to pose a direct threat to the United States—Iran's proxies are thought to be responsible for the deaths of as many as 600 U.S. troops in Iraq.¹¹⁰ Iranian proxies have also been accused of targeting U.S. regional partners such as Saudi Arabia—for instance, attacking major oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais in 2019.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Jon Alterman, “China's Middle East Model,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 23, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-middle-east-model>.

¹⁰⁵ Alterman.

¹⁰⁶ Wormuth, “Russia and China in the Middle East.”

¹⁰⁷ Wormuth.

¹⁰⁸ Kathleen Hicks et al., “By Other Means Part I: Campaigning in the Gray Zone,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 8, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/other-means-part-i-campaigning-gray-zone>.

¹⁰⁹ Seth G. Jones, “Containing Tehran: Understanding Iran's Power and Exploiting Its Vulnerabilities,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/containing-tehran-understanding-irans-power-and-exploiting-its-vulnerabilities>.

¹¹⁰ Kyle Rempfer, “Iran Killed More US Troops in Iraq than Previously Known, Pentagon Says,” *Military Times*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/04/iran-killed-more-us-troops-in-iraq-than-previously-known-pentagon-says/>.

¹¹¹ Andrew J. Stanley and Frank A. Verrastro, “Attack on Saudi Oil Infrastructure: We May Have Dodged a Bullet, at Least for Now...,” September 18, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/attack-saudi-oil-infrastructure-we-may-have-dodged-bullet-least-now>.

3.2. U.S. Efforts to Deter and Compete in the Middle East

A major priority for the United States in its effort to counter strategic competition from Russia, China, and Iran is to establish deterrence against regional aggression and secure and attract allies and partners. Currently, the U.S. approach relies heavily on defense posture in the region; this will grow increasingly difficult to sustain over time if the United States wishes to fulfill its other global priorities. Practically, the U.S. deterrent force posture includes major military bases in countries such as Kuwait and Qatar, the requisite administrative and logistical support, pre-positioned equipment and weapons in case of contingencies, and significant troop presence—around an estimated 53,000 throughout the Middle East.¹¹² This force posture also includes the presence of a U.S. Navy carrier strike group in the North Arabian Sea, and a Marine Corps amphibious ready group in the Gulf of Oman.¹¹³

In response to competitors' efforts to increase their influence in the Middle East, the United States is doubling down on relations with its traditional regional partners, particularly with the Gulf states. In May 2019, President Trump bypassed a Congressional review process and overruled objections around human rights violations and concerns around civilian casualties to greenlight \$8 billion worth of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan.¹¹⁴ The United States also deployed an additional 3,000 troops to Saudi Arabia in May 2019 to assist in enhancing Saudi defense capabilities.¹¹⁵ Actions of this nature also serve to reassure—to varying degrees of success—Middle Eastern partners of continued U.S. support amidst earlier steps taken to draw down the U.S. military presence in Syria and Iraq, and increased tensions around incidents such as the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Embassy in Turkey.¹¹⁶

In order to counter Iranian coercive activities against U.S. interests in the Middle East, the Trump administration launched a “maximum pressure” campaign against the government in Tehran, in an attempt to force Iran back to the negotiating table to deal with its ballistic weapons program in addition to the tenets of the now-functionally defunct Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).¹¹⁷ While the campaign started out as additional economic sanctions targeting the Iranian economy, it

¹¹² Berger, “Where U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Visualized.”

¹¹³ “USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker: Feb. 3, 2020,” *USNI News* (blog), February 3, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/02/03/usni-news-fleet-and-marine-tracker-feb-3-2020>.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Zengerle, “Defying Congress, Trump Sets \$8 Billion-plus in Weapons Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE,” *Reuters*, May 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-arms-idUSKCN1SU25R>.

¹¹⁵ Idrees Ali, “Pentagon Chief Visits Saudi Arabia as Tensions Simmer with Iran,” *Reuters*, October 21, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-idUSKBN1X01O7>.

¹¹⁶ Ali.

¹¹⁷ Carol Morello, “Trump’s Turn to Military against Iran Shows Limits of Economic ‘maximum Pressure,’” *The Washington Post*, January 4, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administrations-maximum-pressure-campaign-against-iran-enters-a-new-military-phase/2020/01/04/fe237c5a-2f32-11ea-be79-83e793dbcaef_story.html; Babak Dehghanpisheh, “Soleimani Was Iran’s Celebrity Soldier, Spearhead in Middle East,” *Reuters*, January 3, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-security-soleimani-newsmaker-idUSKBN1Z20C4>.

took on a kinetic dimension with the targeting and killing of IRGC commander Major General Qassem Soleimani in January 2020.¹¹⁸ The U.S. justification behind the strike on Soleimani was to prevent “imminent threats” of Iranian attacks U.S. interests in the region, particularly by IRGC-supported proxy forces.¹¹⁹

3.3. Weaknesses and Gaps in U.S. Deterrence and Competition Strategy

Despite efforts to improve its relationships in Middle East, the United States’ evolving ties in the region are a weak spot in its strategic competition strategy. Despite President Trump’s efforts to bypass Congressional concerns, bipartisan Congressional leadership are skeptical of continued ties with partners such as Saudi Arabia, particularly in the aftermath of the Khashoggi murder and the high instances of civilian casualties in Yemen. Other allies and partners are distancing themselves from the United States, acting out of self-interest to gain influence in the region as opportunities arise. Turkey, for instance, have taken a more active role in the Syrian conflict by launching a military operation that would threaten Syrian Kurdish opposition groups formerly supported by the United States.¹²⁰ Turkey has also purchased the Russian S-400 missile defense system, a controversial move that drew the ire of Turkey’s NATO partners, and raised the threat of U.S. sanctions against Ankara.¹²¹

Without the ability to rely on regional partners, the United States will struggle to deter its competitors. An overreliance on regional partners to take on the security burden in the Middle East could, however, create a moral hazard. As highlighted by President Trump’s decision to overrule Congressional imperatives in his efforts to bolster the U.S.-Saudi relationship, U.S. dependency on its partners can lead to the sidelining of serious human rights concerns, allowing the partners to go unpunished for actions against international humanitarian norms standards for the sake of security.¹²²

Another issue relevant to international standards with an impact on U.S. strategic considerations is the reality that competitors such as Russia, China, and Iran can very easily choose not to abide by humanitarian standards and norms such as the Laws of Armed Conflict.¹²³ Russia, for instance, has

¹¹⁸ Dehghanpisheh, “Soleimani Was Iran’s Celebrity Soldier, Spearhead in Middle East.”

¹¹⁹ Zachary B. Wolf and Veronica Stracqualursi, “The Evolving US Justification for Killing Iran’s Top General,” CNN, January 8, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/07/politics/qasem-soleimani-reasons-justifications/index.html>.

¹²⁰ “Amid US-Turkey Tensions, Trump Lauds Relationship with Erdogan,” November 13, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/turkey-tensions-trump-lauds-relationship-erdogan-191113205802182.html>.

¹²¹ “Turkey to Test Russian S-400 Systems despite U.S. Pressure: Media,” *Reuters*, November 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-idUSKBN1XZ0U1>.

¹²² Emma Ashford, “Unbalanced: Rethinking America’s Commitment to the Middle East,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2018, 127–48.

¹²³ “The Geneva Conventions and Their Additional Protocols,” Topic, International Committee of the Red Cross, July 28, 2014, <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions>; David M. Crane, “Russia’s Snub of Geneva Convention Protocol Sets Dangerous Precedent,” Text, TheHill, October 20, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/466531-russias-snub-of-geneva-convention-protocol-sets-dangerous-precedent>.

bombed civilians in Syria with near impunity since 2015, and in October 2019, revoked its adherence to a critical Geneva Convention protocol on the victims of war crimes.¹²⁴ Russia also has no qualms about providing weapons and assistance to partners in the Middle East who have previously committed human rights abuses, or may utilize incoming resources to do so.¹²⁵ This not only goes against U.S. principles, but as authoritarian competitors expand their influence, they may offer partnerships and investments unlimited by human rights or governance concerns.

4. Implications for U.S.-Japan Cooperation

Japan's energy requirements are the driving factor behind its interests in the Middle East. Over 87 percent of Japan's oil is imported from the Middle East, and rising demand is likely to see that relationship grow.¹²⁶ As conflict dynamics and U.S. strategy evolve in the region, they will have implications for Japan and U.S.-Japan cooperation.

Japan has enjoyed largely positive relations across the board in the Middle East, which has been particularly important as tensions rise with Iran. In 2019, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the first Japanese leader to visit Iran since 1978, and soon after, President Hassan Rouhani reciprocated with a visit to Japan.¹²⁷ Since then, President Abe has since played a critical diplomatic role with Iran, mediating tensions between Tehran and Washington on issues ranging from the integrity of the JCPOA to the killing of General Soleimani.¹²⁸ If the United States and Japan are able to cooperate behind the scenes to dial down tensions with Iran, Japanese diplomacy may, where others have failed, have the potential to tackle other regional issues such as instability in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

In addition to cooperating on diplomatic efforts, the United States and Japan may also have ways to work together on humanitarian and development assistance to the Middle East. Japan is a significant global aid donor, and has provided over \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance to Syrian IDPs and refugees since 2011, and has provided over \$7 billion in grants and loans for reconstruction efforts in Iraq.¹²⁹ Japan has also undertaken development projects in the region, ranging from technical

¹²⁴ "Russia's Putin Revokes Geneva Convention Protocol on War Crimes Victims," *Reuters*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-warcrimes-convention-idUSKBN1WW2IN>.

¹²⁵ Wormuth, "Russia and China in the Middle East."

¹²⁶ Loftur Thorarinsson, "A Review of the Evolution of the Japanese Oil Industry, Oil Policy and Its Relationship with the Middle East," *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies* (blog), February 2018, <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/review-evolution-japanese-oil-industry-oil-policy-relationship-middle-east/>.

¹²⁷ Garrett Nada and Alex Yacoubian, "Iran and Japan Struggle Over Ties and Trade," U.S. Institute for Peace, December 20, 2019, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/dec/17/iran-and-japan-struggle-over-ties-and-trade>.

¹²⁸ "Japan's Abe Warns Conflict with Iran Affects Entire World," *Al Jazeera*, January 12, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/japan-abe-warns-conflict-iran-impacts-entire-world-200113040403286.html>; Ben Dooley and Farnaz Fassihi, "In Japan, Iran's President May Be Seeking a Line to the U.S.," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/world/asia/japan-iran-rouhani-abe.html>.

¹²⁹ "Japan's Assistance to the Middle East and North Africa Region" (Embassy of Japan in the U.S., November 2015), <https://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000110964.pdf>.

cooperation and training to grant-based assistance.¹³⁰ If the security environment improves in countries such as Iraq and Syria, there may be an opportunity for Japan to play a role in stabilization and development alongside the United States—and importantly, as a counterbalance to Chinese influence.

Although Japan cannot engage in the Middle East military to the extent that the United States is able, its recent deployment of 270 Self-Defense Force personnel to guard Japanese ships in the Middle East could have implications for cooperation with the United States. Japan markedly did not join the U.S.-led coalition to protect merchant ships in the region against Iranian aggression.¹³¹ Its presence in the regional waters does, however, accomplish two goals: it allows Japan to maintain credibility with Iran, while simultaneously contributing to the region's maritime security, even without formally entering into the U.S. coalition. It also can collect information and intelligence data as part of the deployment, which could potentially prove to be of importance in the future.

Given shared U.S. and Japanese interests in ensuring the free flow of commerce to global markets and reducing the drivers of instability, whether from terrorism, regional aggression, or poor governance, there is ample scope for close bilateral coordination and collaboration. If the United States seeks to realize its strategic goals of rebalancing its priorities and resourcing to other region, it must plan and execute its approach in close coordination with allies to mitigate risks and to ensure that this shift occurs responsibly.

¹³⁰ "White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017: Middle East and North Africa" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2017), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000406645.pdf>.

¹³¹ "Iran's Rouhani Welcomes Japan Opt-out of U.S.-Led Naval Mission in Gulf," *Reuters*, December 21, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-iran-rouhani-idUSKBN1YP0E0>.

7. The Evolution of U.S. Energy Policy in the Middle East: Prices, Production, and Populism

Andrew J. Stanley

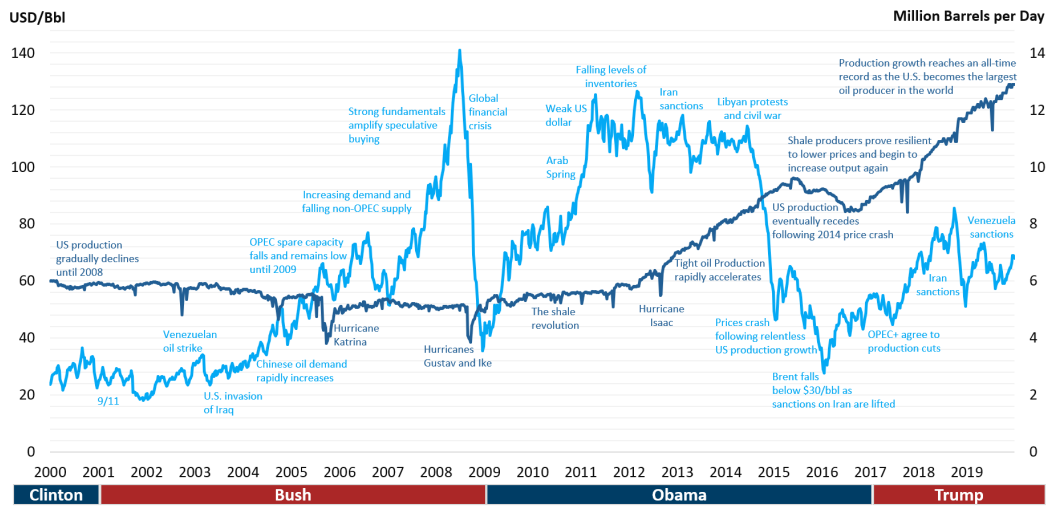
Introduction

U.S. energy policy in the Middle East is evolving for several reasons. First, the current state of the oil market, with prices at relative lows to the historical highs seen between 2010-2014, driven as result of production growth in the United States, has made the current administration more comfortable with taking on decisions that diminish the availability of global supply. Second, the cyclical nature of the market may be changing, not only as a result of the innovations of quick cycle shale oil, which reacts far more quickly to prices than conventional sources of supply, but also because the apparent increase in the negative correlation between price and demand. Finally, the overall foreign and security policies of the Trump administration, the transactional behavior it has exhibited in its various dealings to date, and its unilateral approach has had knock on effects for its energy policy in the region. These factors combined has made the current administration far less sensitive to taking on actions that risks causing supply disruptions and has in fact seen it remove in excess of two million barrels per day (mb/d) from the market through its sanction's regime on Iran and Venezuela.

1. Prices and Production

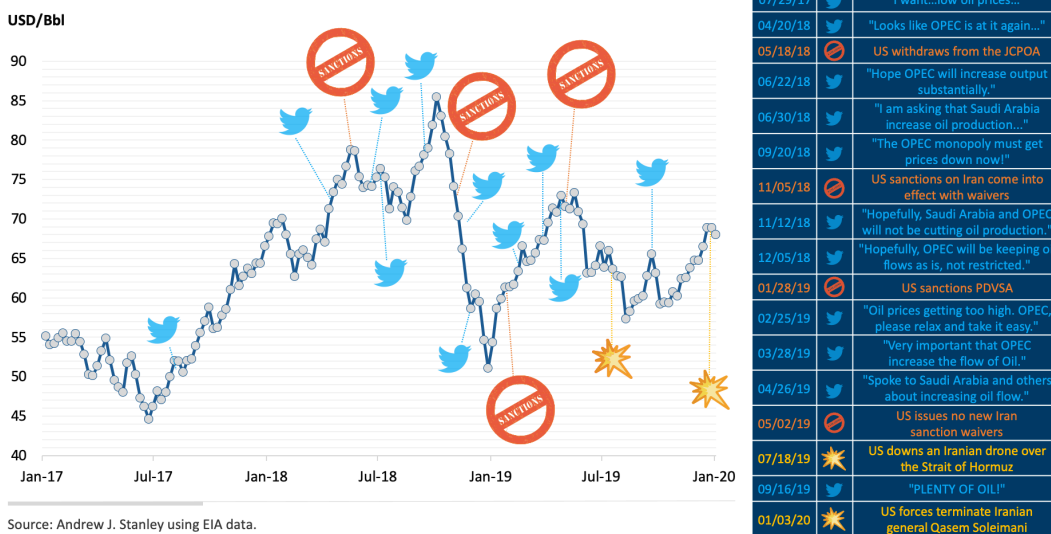
The Trump administration, just as much as any previous administration, remains highly sensitive to rising domestic gasoline prices. However, the behavior and risk appetite of the current administration to make decisions that could have large impacts on middle East oil production, global supply, and in turn global prices, is much higher than previous administrations for several reasons. Prices and domestic production are two of the most prominent factors to have caused a change in behavior to that of previous administrations. The Trump administration has found itself in a scenario where not only are oil prices relatively low, but U.S. production is booming.

Oil prices and U.S. crude oil production timeline

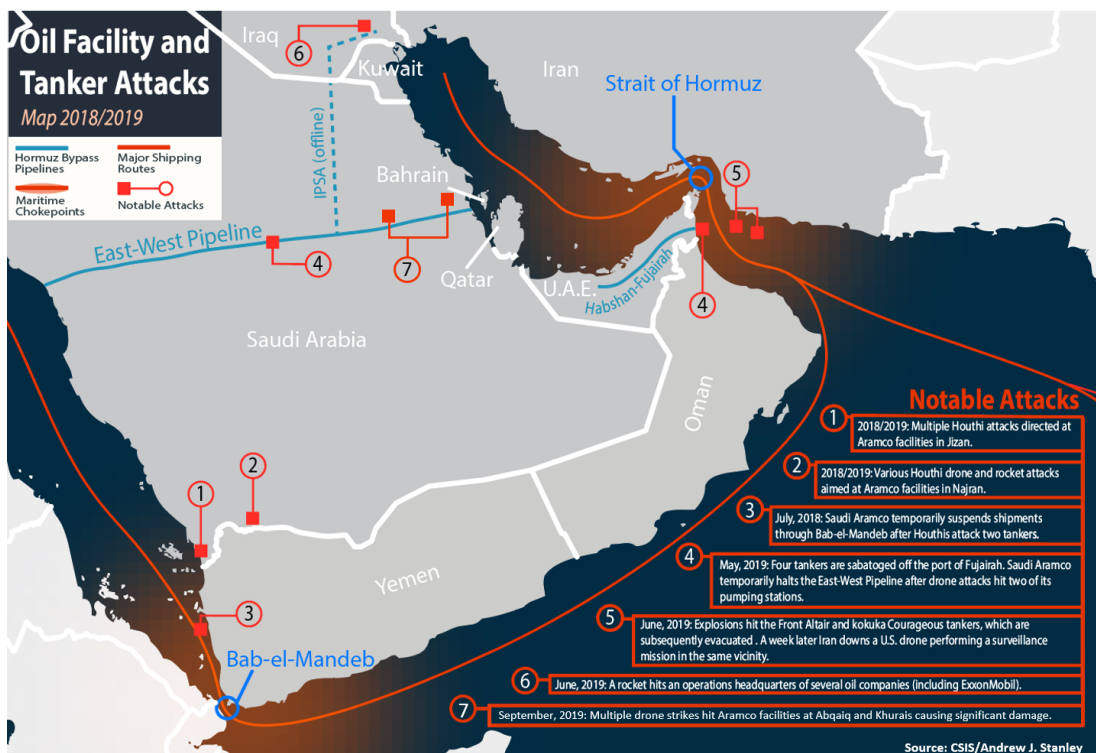


While the Bush and Obama administrations certainly made decisions, which significantly affected global oil prices including invading Iraq and instating sanctions on Iran, both appeared to have less of a propensity to interfere in the market and to take actions that would risk pushing prices higher than the current government. The Trump administration through its various ongoing trade negotiations, bilateral and multilateral engagements, and interactions with foreign governments has exhibited very transactional type behavior. “Deal making” is the modus operandi, where issues, which would traditionally have been kept separate will regularly be drawn together to come to a negotiated outcome. For example, this administration in the lead up to re-instating sanctions on Iran attempted and appeared to successfully get Saudi Arabia to increase production to help avoid any shortfall in the market and prevent a spike in prices.

Daily Brent price during Trump's presidency



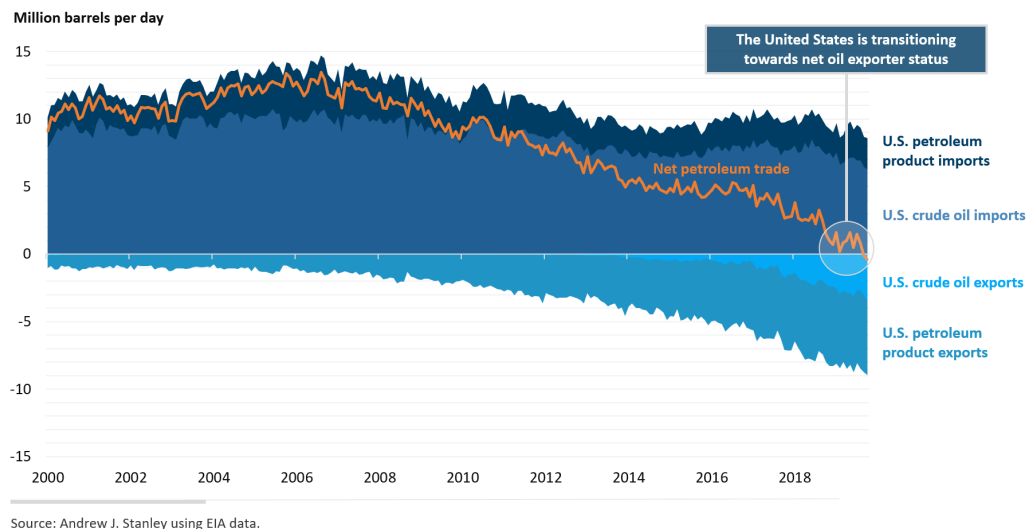
While the first year of Trump's presidency was a very quiet one with regards to the oil market, as prices remained relatively low for most of the year, as they rose into 2018 and as its sanction's activities ramped up, the President's involvement in the market began to increase. Since 2018 President Trump has tweeted either about oil or OPEC [at least 15 times](#), often directly calling out the organization or Saudi Arabia to increase production levels. During that time, the President has issued [sanctions](#) on two major oil producers, which has removed in excess of 2 million b/d from the global market. Its policy on Iran has also led to a dramatic increase in tensions in the region, with numerous [attacks](#) on oil facilities, tankers, and pipelines occurring since sanctions were re-instated.



The United States has linked each of these attacks to Iran, whether it be directly through the activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or by way of its support of the Houthis in Yemen or factions in southern Iraq. Despite this, President Trump has not refrained from further escalating tensions, most notably through ordering the successful termination of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, while also publicly questioning the need for the United States to protect oil flows from the region [“for zero compensation”](#).

The phenomenal increase in production in the United States along with a [slowdown in domestic demand](#) has resulted in a large decrease in the level of imports from OPEC countries. U.S. crude oil imports from OPEC countries accounted for 55% of total imports as recent as 2008 but is now down to just 29% in the [latest month of data](#) (November 2019). As illustrated in the proceeding chart, the overall change in the picture for U.S. import dependence has been dramatic.

U.S. balance of petroleum trade



In November 2019, the United States [exported](#) 771 thousand b/d more petroleum than it imported. A significant increase from September's data when it exported 89 thousand b/d on a net basis, which was the first month that this happened since monthly records began in 1973.

The United States has been a net exporter of petroleum products since 2011, exporting 435 thousand b/d more products than it imported in that calendar year. This number has grown significantly since then and year to date the United States has exported [3.2 million b/d](#) on a net basis.

Despite becoming a net exporter of petroleum and growing levels of crude oil exports, the United States is still a significant net importer of crude. Year to date the country has [exported](#) 2.9 million b/d and imported 6.9 million b/d, bringing net imports of crude to 4 million b/d. This number is also rapidly changing, with net imports of crude oil standing at 7.3 million b/d as recently as 2016. Sustained production growth and flattening domestic demand will eventually see the United States also become a net exporter of crude oil.

Given that most of the growth in production has been that of light oil and since most U.S. refineries are configured to process heavier oil, the percentage of heavy high-sulfur crude oil imports of total imports continues to increase with Canada and Mexico now accounting for nearly 70% of U.S. crude oil imports.

The growth in production and the shift in the U.S. export picture has undoubtedly put the United States in a much more comfortable position when it comes to the oil market and threats to supply. However, despite growing levels of production and the transition to net exporter status, the United States is still not insulated from global supply shocks, the country still imports significant quantities of oil, which is a global commodity traded in a highly interconnected market, where a supply

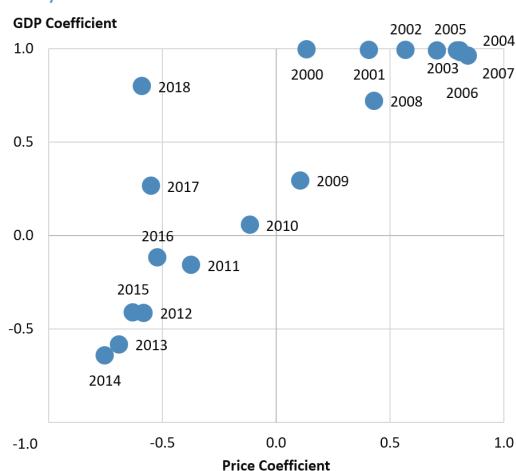
disruption in one part of the world affects prices everywhere. And while it is up for debate whether the U.S. economy is now a net beneficiary of higher oil prices as it has become a net exporter, the current U.S. president and future administrations are highly likely to remain in favor of lower prices in the interests of their voters. For this reason among others, the United States is unlikely to completely abandon its position in the Middle East but it is in a far more comfortable position, to that of decade ago, to watch events develop before intervening or to push allies to take on more responsibility in helping to ensure the stable flow of oil from the region.

2. The Cyclicalty of the Oil Market

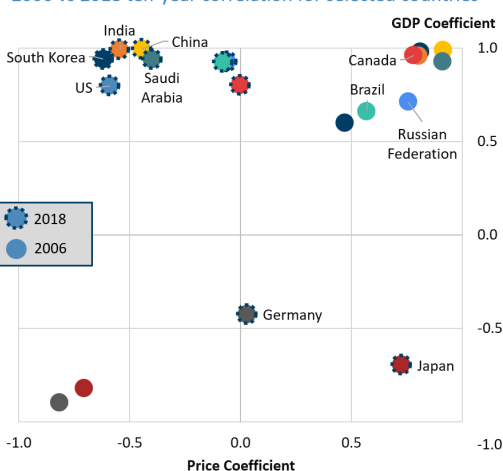
Another major dynamic that has affected US energy policy in the Middle East and will increasingly do so over time is related to the changing cycle of the oil market. The price elasticity of both demand and supply has appeared to have changed. In addition, the psychology in the marketplace has shifted from one of scarcity to abundance, where no longer is peak supply a concern, with the consensus view now settling on the fact that demand will peak first before supply does.

Correlation of oil demand with real GDP and Brent oil price

Ten-year correlations for the United States



2006 vs 2018 ten-year correlation for selected countries



Source: Andrew J. Stanley using World Bank and BP data.

**The graphs above show oil demand and its 10-year correlation coefficients with real GDP and crude oil prices (Brent). The left chart tracks the evolution of the 10-year correlation for the United States from 2000 - 2018. The right chart compares the 10-year correlations for 2006 vs 2018 (each country has the same color for both periods with the dotted outline representing the 2018 measurement).*

Comparing the 10-year correlations for oil demand among the top 10 consumers of oil in the world we can see how dramatically things have changed when it comes to demand and price. While oil demand remains closely correlated with economic growth for most of the world (except highly

developed economies such as Germany and Japan) most of the major economies now exhibit some negative correlation with price. The reversal has been dramatic in the graphic above, with every single country in 2006 that had a positive price coefficient, now having a price coefficient that is negative in 2018. In simple terms, oil demand increases in most economies as they grow but now appears to react to price like a normal product would.

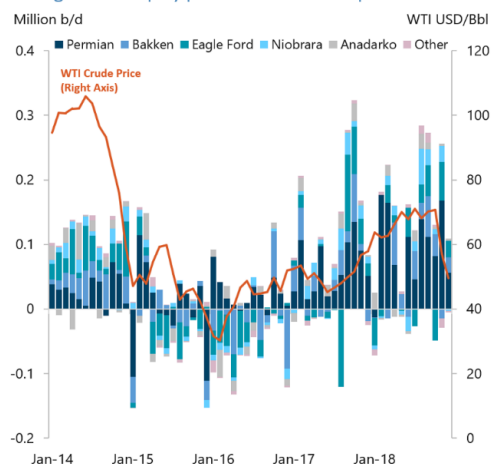
However, it is important to note that most of the negative correlation with prices has come after the price crash in 2014. While prices have increased since then and negative correlation remains, it is not certain that if prices increase further that negative correlation will continue to grow or even remain at current levels. Demand grew in reaction to low prices and if prices increase it is uncertain whether governments around the world will not decrease taxes on gasoline or not introduce price caps like in the case of India, given how politically unpopular increasing fuel prices and taxes have proven to be (for example the recent protests and riots in France were initiated directly in response to increasing fuel tax levels).

Despite this, however, the trend suggests that the greater levels of competition in the energy space, through the proliferation of more fuel-efficient cars and electric vehicles that producers can no longer take consumer demand for oil at any price level as granted. In addition, in the case of highly advanced economies such as Germany and Japan where oil demand and economic growth has decoupled, there will only be more countries to join this club over time. Further, for countries such as India and China which together are home to [38 of the top 50 most polluted cities in the world](#), efforts to mitigate pollution levels will take effect on oil demand. These countries are also highly dependent on imported oil and so for security reasons reducing dependence on this commodity also makes sense.

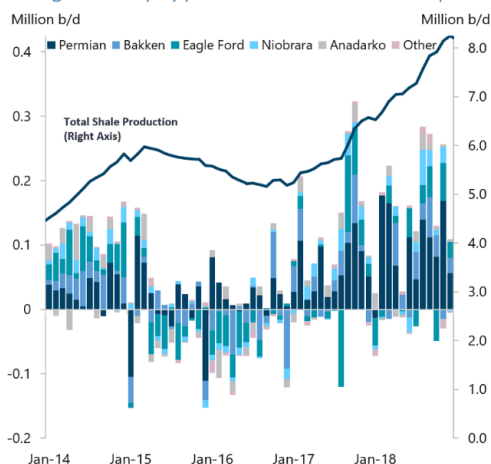
Not only has the price elasticity of demand for oil changed, but so too has the price elasticity of supply, thanks mainly to U.S. shale production. While it is difficult to clearly illustrate the price elasticity of supply in the market, with the costs of production continuing to adjust over time, it is pretty evident by the cycle of production in the United States over the past couple of years that this source of supply reacts on a much shorter time frame to price levels, to that of traditional sources.

Shale play production has doubled in five years at \$60 WTI

Change in shale play production and WTI price



Change in shale play production and total shale output



Source: CSIS/Andrew J. Stanley using EIA data.

As illustrated in the left-hand chart above (which shows the WTI crude price and shale play production growth), when prices increase U.S. production will not be far behind in taking on a greater trajectory of growth. The shale industry operates on a much shorter lead time and the level of capital expenditure required for projects is much lower to that required for an average conventional oil project. All of this has resulted in a cycle for the oil industry overall that is much faster than it used to be.

The pattern of supply, demand, and prices in the global oil market over the past few years clearly illustrates this. Where [despite sustained production cuts by OPEC+](#) and major sanctions by the United States on Iran and Venezuela, prices have not risen significantly because U.S. production continues to grow and make up for the supply fall from these sources. Once again, this dynamic adds to the current administrations' comfort levels in having to take actions that reduce supply in the market or risks supply disruptions.

However, while shale has helped to stabilize prices in the short term by reacting with greater levels of production growth in response to rising prices, in some regards this new dynamic may be undermining market stability in the longer term. This factor has diverted significant amounts of capital expenditure away from current or planned conventional projects, which have longer time horizons and require greater upfront capital investment. The uncertainty around future levels of demand is also discouraging investment in these projects. Not only are the technological advances in renewable energy, storage, and electric vehicles causing this uncertainty but an increasing body of evidence of anthropogenic climate change is also raising serious questions about the longevity of investing long term in oil. The recent rise in extreme-weather events seems to be creating a greater urgency for policy and decision makers to act to decarbonize the global economy.

The risk associated with this dynamic is that while oil demand continues to increase, falling upstream investment may eventually result in a supply gap that shale can no longer immediately make up for. Non-shale upstream [investment](#) has markedly declined since the price crash in 2014, while shale investment itself is now showing signs of a slowdown as investors appear to be placing a greater emphasis on rewarding returns on investment as opposed to production growth. This risk of a supply gap appearing could cause another cycle of significantly higher prices, which in turn would ultimately accelerate the transition of the global economy away from oil.

While the chances of a major shortfall in supply occurring due to underinvestment seems to be low, it is still a real possibility, especially if it is supplemented by physical supply disruptions without the necessary buffers in place to deal with this. The oil security architecture, which was created in response to the Arab oil shock in 1973 some would argue is not being maintained given the possible supply risks at hand. For example, because IEA rules stipulate that member countries must hold 90 days of net oil imports in strategic reserve, the United States is now selling off its SPR (Strategic Petroleum Reserve) because of its transition towards net oil exporter status.

At the same time the current administration seems to not have much regard for the International Energy Agency, another piece of oil security architecture created by the United States. This was most notably demonstrated in the immediate aftermath of the attacks on Abqaiq and Khurais in Saudi Arabia, where President Trump announced on Twitter that he was considering a release of the SPR without any mention of coordination with the IEA, which itself, ironically, announced that there was no need for a release among members. It appears that the retreat from multilateralism is having an effect on the level of engagement with an institution such as the IEA, which has also seen its level of coverage of the oil market fall, with developing economies (i.e. non-OECD members) now accounting for most of the world's oil demand. As such the ability of the IEA to respond to a major global disruption appears to be in a weaker position to what it used to be.

Despite this, the changes that have been witnessed in the market in terms of the price elasticity of supply and demand would appear to indicate that a major shortfall in supply and in turn price spike today, would be much shorter lived to that in the past. Not only does the United States understand this, meaning that it has become less concerned with the possibility of this happening (in addition to all the other reasons discussed such as its transition to become a net oil exporter), but so does OPEC+. The group, as clearly evidenced through its recent deliberations since production cuts were implemented in 2017, is cognizant not to push prices to a level that would negatively affect demand, encourage too much shale production, or accelerate a transition away from oil. Because the market is now in a scenario where the data indicates that the world will see peak oil as result of demand and not supply, it could be argued that OPEC and its supporting members to the current production cuts are a force for good in helping to increase oil security by stabilizing the market and keeping prices at a level that encourages investment to meet future levels of demand. However, the organization has increasingly come under fire from the current president and on Capitol Hill where there is impending

NOPEC legislation. Ironically, if this legislation were to be enacted and if producers were opened to prosecution under the Sherman Antitrust Act, this measure could possibly have the exact opposite effect to which it is intended, by causing greater levels of volatility and in turn higher prices.

3. Energy Policy in the Middle East in the Broader Context of U.S. Foreign Policy

For decades US foreign policy in the middle East has faced a tug of war between successive administrations primarily leaning one way or the other between idealism and realism. Elements of both realism and idealism were apparent under Obama and Bush. For example, while many within the Obama administration would refer to its philosophy on foreign affairs as being guided by realism, the decisions it made during the Arab Spring to support the ousting of Mubarak in Egypt, in spite of the negative effects that this action would cause to its position in the Middle East, were made in a bid to promote democratic ideals. While realism appears to be the guiding force of Trump's foreign policy, it is also evident that it is taking on a unilateral course and that populism, which is not entirely new and has been apparent in previous administrations, has gained a significant place in Trump's foreign and security policies.

It is evident that this dynamic will have knock on effects on U.S. energy policy in the region, with concurrent populist and realist driven decisions likely to conflict with each other. The recent decision by the administration to terminate Qassem Soleimani is a possible example, whereby the action, which many have argued was overall detrimental to U.S. national security interests (with the Iraqi parliament voting in favor of removing US troops from the country as a result) was declared without any ambiguity as a solely U.S. led operation and brandished by President Trump as a victory for the country, in what appears to have been a populist bid to build his image as a strong leader in the process. Additionally, Trump's promise to put "America First" has also led the President to [question](#) on Twitter why the United States is protecting the Strait of Hormuz, as he put it, "for no compensation."

Despite this dynamic it appears that at least to some degree, the administration recognizes and has attempted to address the risks that some of these actions have posed to the oil market. For example, when Iran sanctions were introduced it pleaded with its key ally in the region Saudi Arabia to boost production to meet any shortfall and subsequently when it issued no waivers under the sanctions it secured assurances from the Kingdom that it would ensure stability and adequate levels of supply. In addition, following the various assaults on oil tankers and the attack on Abqaiq and despite President Trump publicly questioning the need to protect these waterways, the administration less publicly made efforts at the same time to strengthen coalitions aimed at defending sea routes and in the case of Abqaiq bolstered its defense capabilities in Saudi Arabia to deter and prevent future attacks. It is evident by these actions that the Trump Administration is cognizant of the risks to supply and in turn prices. As such, this administration and most likely future administrations, which are sensitive to high

or significantly rising domestic gasoline prices, will remain committed to ensuring the stable flow of oil from key allies in the region.

Committing adequate level of forces to the region provides a long list of [strategic benefits](#) to the United States that goes beyond solely ensuring the steady flow of oil to global markets. It allows the United States to counter and limit Iran's influence in the region, including its factions in Syria and proxies such as Hezbollah. It also permits the United States to limit Arab tensions, prevent escalation, and effectively coordinate with gulf and GCC allies. Many of these allies are major buyers of U.S. arms, which reduces the load on its operation in the region and is a massive source of revenue for U.S. companies. Between 2008 – 2015, the Arab Gulf GGC states signed \$100.2 billion in arms agreements, requested \$3.7 billion more in 2016, and an additional \$48.4 billion in 2017. Saudi Arabia was by far the largest purchaser and so militarily supporting this country, by helping to ensure stability within and its surrounding borders, and that it maintains its ability to export oil to global markets provides multiple indirect benefits to the United States.

In addition, the reemergence of great power competition, particularly between the United States and China, and to a lesser extent with Russia, will incentivize the United States to maintain a position of power in the region by controlling the waterways and to ensure relationships with key producers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iraq are maintained. Indeed, shouldering the responsibility for securing stability in the Gulf alongside allies and partners has been a key tenet of U.S. foreign policy for decades not only to ensure the stable flow of oil to global markets, but also “[. . . to prevent a hegemon or alignment of powers from dominating the region.](#)” All these factors will push the current and most likely future administrations to maintain some form of military presence in the Gulf and around the region.

However, supported by the changes in the oil production and export profile at home and given the current state of the oil market (i.e. relatively low prices and the emergence of negative correlation between price and demand among major oil consumers), along with the exhibited unilateral, populist, and deal making tendencies of the current administration, the United States recently appears more comfortable to make decisions that can disrupt supply in the oil market (or risks creating disruptions) and to take a step back in the Gulf to help realize more burden-sharing among regional and external partners.

8. The Evolution of the Regional Political and Security Interactions and Competition in the Middle East

Sayed Ghoneim

Introduction

In the Middle East, four players at political and security levels must be considered: the true two regional powers (Iran and Turkey) and two other countries who also strongly try to contribute to the formulation of the regional resolution for the Middle East as well as other regions. The other two players are Israel which is a small state who owns some huge national powers and permanently supported by the U.S.; thus, some considers it a regional power, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) the medium power with huge oil resources and financial capabilities.

Two other countries are acting from behind, United Arab Emirates (UAE) cooperating with KSA and Israel and Qatar in separate cooperation with Turkey and Iran.

These four acting states try to form the regional order as they have big interests in the Middle East (ME). Their competition has expanded to several regions, such as North Africa, Horn of Africa, Sahel and Sahara, Central Asia and the Balkans.

These all foresee more instability in the region with critical implications on Japan and East Asia, the main reason is the current lack of management of influence occurred as a result of the complicated Competitions among the playing actors using unbalanced powers.

1. Interactions and Competition between regional powers/ actor states

1.1. Israel – “stay focused, achieve goals”

For decades, the U.S. has treated the achievement of security for a Jewish homeland in Palestine as its top priority in the Middle East, supporting it with huge military aid to foster and guarantee Israeli military hegemony in the region and by diplomacy aimed at brokering acceptance of it by its Arab and Muslim neighbors. The results are in. At no small cost to the U.S. in terms of the radicalization of Arab and Muslim opinion, oil embargoes, subsidies, gifts of war materiel, wars, and now anti-American terrorism with global reach, Israel has become a regional military Goliath, enjoying a nuclear monopoly and overwhelming superiority in the region's battle space. But U.S. diplomacy has definitively failed.

In no small measure as a result of its own decisions, the Jewish state had not been recognized, its borders were not secured and was a pariah in its region. Therefore, Israel had to think to solve it out. The ongoing earthquake in the Arab world, so called "Arab Spring", has reoriented the political landscape and contributed to deep instability in its countries that will likely persist for the foreseeable future. This was the perfect opportunity to Israel to exploit the collapse of the nation-state system imposed by colonialist powers, which it regards "artificially constructed states" such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya breaking apart and creating dangerous power vacuums. These broken states are unlikely to

put themselves back together again; instead, they will probably be reconstituted into ethnically homogenous cantons or loose confederations.

Israel decided to be sober and realistic in addressing what's it called "its dangerous neighborhood", making its response follow a few clear principles. First: not to engage in wishful thinking or patronizing behavior by trying to impose democracy or a nation-state framework onto countries that are unwilling to accept such arrangements.

Second, Israel is trying to stay away from political or military interference in internal Arab conflicts in order to avoid risks and focus on its internal problem with the Palestinians; as well as its growing technological development. Nonetheless, it interferes immediately whenever there is a threatens against its interests; as it does in Syria. In the meantime, we find Egypt and Jordan are in calculated peaceful relations with Israel with constant coordination on border security besides the Palestinian issue.

At the same time, it didn't allow any violations of its sovereignty in the Golan Heights, delivery of advanced weapons to its enemies, or delivery of chemical weapons.

Israel perceives Iran as its most important competitor, looking at it as the "greatest threat from a distant location". We can realistically consider Iran what can be military called a (the largest external threat) to Israel. Israel considers Hezbollah, the Iranian military agent, the closest and most effective threat, which must be fought and defeated. Therefore, this group can be militarily labelled as the most serious threat. One of Israel's most important security objectives is to be the single nuclear force and the largest regional power from Mauritania in the west to Iran east. Given that Syria and Iraq which have the Iranian loyal forces represent the right side and the most important core of the Iranian Shiite crescent. Thus, the cohesion of Iraq and Syria is a direct and serious threat to Israel's security and interests.

Israel's relations with Turkey has recently taken a sharp curve because of Israel's support to the idea of the establishment of a Kurdish state which will have an impact on Turkey's national security. That Israeli stance has intensified the acuteness of the Competition between them in gaining influence in Syria. However, the two countries need each other due to important geopolitical considerations which may appear in the future of the eastern Mediterranean sphere.

Israel sees the Arab region in four sectarian camps

The Iranian Shiite Axis (Iran, Hezbollah and their allies).

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Axis with Turkish support from the ruling party of Erdogan.

The Global Jihadist Axis (terrorist organizations like ISIS and others).

The Sunni Arab Axis (which mainly includes the Gulf States; besides Egypt and Jordan).

Israel perceives itself in one boat with the Sunni Arab Axis against an arch enemy; namely, Iran and Shiite organizations and sees that it is important to have the U.S. in the same boat with them against Iran. Israel also seeks to play an active role in managing the regional conflict rather than resolving the

conflict with the Palestinians. It shares KSA's strategic goals of undermining Iran, the common enemy of both. However, the Arab public opinion places restrictions on the depth of Saudi-Israeli cooperation. Accordingly, **strategic vision of Israel is** *“Ensuring a secured and prosperous powerful state of Israel, with a thriving regional influence extended internationally across the ME and Africa”*. **The Israeli strategic goals are** *“to maintain a close alliance with the U.S. and good relations with Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan. To secure the vital area, achieving its security demands, and develop its political, economic, social and security relations with the ME countries, reducing of hostilities. To ensure the continued excellence of Israel, making it always the active central state in the region. To normalize its relations with all surrounding Arab countries”*.

Israel has taken a good advantage of the presence of Donald Trump as president of the U.S. achieving several gains, mainly as next:

- The U.S. has given a cold shoulder to the expansion of settlements, approved the transfer of its embassy to Jerusalem considering it as the capital of Israel and ignored the idea of a two-state solution.
- Despite growing UN objections Israel has continued to disagree with the Palestinians by pursuing plans to build illegal settlements throughout the West Bank.
- Israel undermined the two-state solution which lead to increasing pressure on its relations with Egypt and Jordan. Meanwhile, the two countries suffer domestic pressure because of Israeli actions and the implicit recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.
- Israel has repeatedly called for rapprochement with Saudi and the inclusion of the U.S. in waging an explicit war against Iranian expansion.
- Israel did not back down on its attempts to normalize relations with important countries in the region. Israeli attempts in this regard; however, the Palestinian cause hampers the public normalization of these relations.

1.2. Turkey – “On the ground actor, competing recklessly”

“New Turkey 2023 - Great Nation, Superpower”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seeks, in order to achieve his strategy, to make Turkey among the first countries in the world in all possible fields, and aspires to achieve a new set of goals for Turkey as he sees it by 2023 as he moves from the position of prime minister to the presidency for a period up to ten years.

Erdogan's vision is centered on what he announced in his electoral program: “Democracy, prosperity, and respect on the road to a new Turkey.” Erdogan pledged that “New Turkey 2023” would be the strongest on the international stage, and more united in an ever-diversified society, enjoying a more developed economy.

Erdogan seeks to achieve aspire that "the new Turkey embraces its society, which has become more diverse and rises as a result of its developed lifestyle, prosperous economy, political stability and advanced democracy."

He declared four main goals: “to advance democratic progress, to ensure harmony between political institutions and society, to improve social welfare and to place Turkey among the world's most prestigious countries”. "Erdogan" has always sought to consolidate Turkey's influence in the world by turning it into a major player in the diplomatic arena, so that the republic's ambitions are reminiscent of what the Ottoman Sultanate has reached.

Turkey is trying to activate its regional role in the region since it has found out that it is necessary to adapt its foreign policy in a way that is compatible with the international and regional status quo in light of international and regional changes that have been reflected in the Middle East; especially the developments that have resulted the Arab Spring.

The arrival of the Islamic Justice and Development Party (which is affiliated to MB) to power has had a significant impact on the trends of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has adopted a foreign policy that exploited the tumultuous international circumstances. The period of the "Arab Spring" has witnessed an increasing emergence of the Turkish role and interest in most of the pivotal issues in the Middle East aiming at confirming Turkey's presence and its status as a central force for managing the Arab Spring countries through their new MB rulers, shaping the circumstances to make Turkey an active player in dealing with various issues and conflicts in the region.

Although, Arab Spring revolutions have disrupted many Turkish interests in the Middle East, such as; political instability in the Middle East has had an impact on Turkish economy; the Free Trade Agreement with Tunisia and Libya is cancelled and the establishment of a common trade zone between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey is also cancelled due to the Syrian crisis; also, the events in the region has caused a decline in the Turkish exports to Arab countries.

Nonetheless, Turkey has found out that adapting with those events in a suitable way will augment Turkey's interests on the political, economic and security tracks. The growth of the Turkish role is based on the objective of escalating Turkey's part in the coming stage in light of the country's successes in securing and preserving political and economic stability in order to move forward towards an effective and active regional role.

Turkey wanted to be a country of action rather than reaction; earlier, it relied on the cohesion and consistency of its foreign policy with the U.S.' general policy; but recently, and after it was the most important political and military U.S. ally in the region, the relations between Turkey and the U.S. have deteriorated to their worst conditions after Turkey has recently strengthened its relations with Russia on the military, political, and economic levels.

Turkey is a regional power, having an important military force in NATO and traditionally used to be a close ally of the West and Israel; currently is increasingly involved in regional affairs as it seeks to expand its influence in the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Balkans, which has returned to Turkey many problems and crises, especially after increasing its movement to explore for gas in the Eastern Mediterranean without international, European and regional agreement.

After the 2016 failed military coup in Turkey, and to maintain his strategy, Erdogan faced several internal and external challenges. His economy faced deterioration and he involved his military forces

in Syria and expected in Libya in addition to his troubled relations with several countries in Europe and the Middle East; however, Erdogan seeks to external military presence in the region, expanding his current military bases chain in Qatar and Somalia to extend to Libya, Sudan and Chad to guarantee enveloping the Middle east and North Africa.

Turkey, the country who used to practice the role of the mediator avoiding any conflicts among the regional players, is currently proceeding its competition in the region on three main directions (Syria, Horn of Africa and the East Mediterranean. Despite being a NATO member and traditionally a close ally of the West, Ankara has managed to follow its own security agenda on the most divisive regional issues, such as the Syrian war, relations with Iran, and Qatar crisis.

Although both U.S. and Russia have close ties with the Syrian Kurds, the two powers appear to have quietly accommodated Ankara's main security concerns, including accepting Turkish military presence in both the northern border regions and Idlib. Ankara has also a playing role in Russia's competing diplomatic track (the Astana and Sochi talks) and cooperates with Russia on de-escalations deals and lately on the de-militarized buffer zones in Idlib.

In the East Mediterranean, Erdogan and the Libyan President Al-Sarraj, announced in November 2019 their agreements on security/military cooperation and the defining maritime spheres, aimed at protecting the rights of the two countries stemming from international law, in a move considered a gain for Ankara's policies in Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Today, Erdogan can bargain with NATO over his stance towards Russia in Idlib, in exchange for Turkey's confrontation to the Russian expansion in the region. Also, Erdogan can bargain the European Union for its support for the movement of Turkish forces in Syria, in exchange for Turkey resolving the refugee crisis.

Accordingly, the current practical strategic vision of Turkey is “to reach the status of New Turkey, secured and prosperous state, as one of the major power states by end of 2023”.

To achieve this vision, the strategic goals of President Erdogan are as next:

- *To maintain Turkey as the strongest regional power, able to formulate the regional resolutions in the MENA, through enlarging its national powers, insisting on implementing the international political, economic, security, and social laws and standards.*
- *To enlarge the Turkish role in Europe and the MENA by consolidating its regional influence in Eastern Europe politically and economically, and in the ME politically, economically, militarily and socially.*

1.3. Iran – “provocative anvil”

According to Iran 2025 strategy, **Iran's 20-year vision** has set its ultimate goal as follows: *“By 2025, Iran will become a developed country with the first economic, scientific and technical position in South-West Asia (including Iran's regional neighborhood in the Central Asian, Caucasus, and Middle East regions) and have an influential role in the international relations”.*

A deeper look inside the Iranian regime and the Iranian political and security dynamics in the Middle East

Iranian Regime

By looking at the unique political system in structuring the Iranian regime, we find the Supreme Leader of the Iranian is the de facto political and religious ruler of Iran and is considered the main pillar of the Islamic regime's tent in the country. The advisors of all specialties of the Supreme leader are considered the “pegs of the tent”; they’re the supreme government that actually runs the state, not the ministers of Rouhani's government.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) having its military, security and economic capabilities are considered the strong deterrent arm that works in the interest of the Islamic regime and not in the interest of the Iranian state, where only those who believe in the regime can join it, but the public, at the age of recruitment, they join the regular Iranian armed forces.

As for the internationally recognized government, they implement the instructions and plans of the Supreme Leader's advisors. The government is headed by an elected president, as well as an economic peg subject to Iranian intelligence (*Boniad Mostdaafin – The Foundation of the Suppressed*), all of whom play politics under the tent of the Islamic regime and are keen to preserve it. This internal political differences in Iran, which are apparent to the world, are effective to reach a specific Iranian goal or to get out of a predicament. We should not forget the support of the men of the bazaar markets (businessmen) for the system and the size of partnerships between them at home and abroad in the U.S., Europe, China, UAE.

Based on its political system, it seems that Iran has a clear vision and project that is based on several factors in its moves towards the Arab Region. This project is called “the Iranian Islamic Project”. The early signs of that project have emerged since the Islamic Revolution in Iran led by Khomeini. The Iranian foreign policy towards the Arab region is a reflection or a tool to achieve the objectives of this project.

This political Islamist project works to penetrate into the Arab countries where Iran has an influence by attracting, recruiting and training youth besides financing some groups and encouraging rebellious movements. On the surface, it appears as a religious project that seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate, fight corrupt authoritarian regimes and support the weak. The reality is that it is targeting the stability and security of the countries of the region in an attempt to assume leadership therein.

The Iranian project is built on several pillars that coincide with those of its foreign policy. However, the ideological, doctrinal and security and strategic dimensions represent the basis of the establishment of that project. The doctrinal dimension is represented in Tehran's belief in the imperativeness of the establishment of an Islamic caliphate state that includes all Muslim countries under its flag and the need to move strongly to achieve this objective. Through its religious discourse, Iran stresses that the Islamic Revolution carries a message the world needs at the present time. Hence, exporting the idea of the revolution is a compulsory religious duty. The security dimension stems from Iran’s fear of the Greater Middle East project that has been proposed by the U.S. after its entry into

Iraq in an attempt to control the political / security and military rhythm in the Arab Region. Therefore, Iran has tried to create a regional role for itself in the absence of a Pan Arab project and the floundering U.S. policy in the Middle East. Thus, Iran has sought to develop its relations with the Gulf states and other Arab nations such as Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan. Iran has gone as far as intervening in many issues such as those of Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon and linked the stability in these countries with their acceptance of its role in the region. Iran has tried to transform the nature of conflicts in the region from nationalistic into religious and civic type of conflicts in order to ensure that it has a major role in the region. The Iranian political discourse has, in general, also assumed and opposing stance to the U.S. policy in the Gulf.

The Iranian project is also based on the assumption that the balance of terror in the Gulf and the Iranian presence in the Levant will pressure Washington to accept Iran as the most prominent regional partner and thus share interests and influence in the region.

As for the second Iranian project, it is the nuclear project, which Iran declares is a peaceful project, and then the nuclear agreement that so called "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA" was signed in June 2015 by Iran and the permanent member states of the UN Security Council, Germany and the European Union.

Israel and some Gulf states objected to the agreement in fear from Iran's non-peaceful nuclear project. They see that Iran practices provocative and aggressive attitudes in several places in the region. Iran sees Israel as the main enemy that must be balanced with the same weapon (nuclear weapon), it also gets ready for balance with Pakistan.

On another hand, geopolitically, Iran enjoys a geostrategic location that controls Hormoz Strait having close sea boundaries with all Gulf countries. Militarily, Iran depends on its internal strategic depth compared with UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, those countries which lack this advantage; therefore, these three countries always in need to secure their coasts and sea boundaries with Iran. Iran and KSA seek to impose their will on each other by maximizing their influence and control in areas of conflict, or at least seeking to strike a balance between them.

Militarily, Iran has used Houthis and Hezbollah as military tools to support its existence and influence in the region and to confront the Israeli-Saudi expected coalition against it. Iran also expanded its economic and trade relations with strong stockholders such as China, India, and the EU, bearing in mind, that any war against Iran will severely affect the prosperity of some Gulf states and will hinder their development, as well as it will increase the instability of the region in general.

Iran believes that Israel is the main enemy that must be confronted with the same weapon (nuclear weapon) and stands ready to impose a state of balance against Pakistan. The Iranian Competition against KSA and the UAE is very visible in Yemen and Iraq; while the Iranian Competition against Israel and Turkey appears in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq as well. Israel and the Gulf alliance against Qatar are well aware that Syria and Lebanon in the north and Yemen in the south at different geographical ends of the Middle East represent two strategic bridges of the Iranian influence. The northern bridge connects Iran to the Mediterranean and the southern bridge connects it to the Red Sea. This has

made KSA, the enemy of Iran, continue its efforts in trying to undermine Iran's growing influence in the region. Of course, this increased hostility between the two countries is in the interest of Israel and opens the doors for its demands to the U.S. to support it militarily against Iran. Therefore, Israel has gradually begun to show its relations with KSA and other Gulf states.

According to all above, **in my personal view, the strategic vision of Iran is** *“to maintain the Iranian Shiite Islamic State secured and prosperous country with regional and international influence, having the nuclear capabilities that balance Israel, India and Pakistan on one hand; and enable Iran to maintain its power mainly against KSA and UAE and any other Gulf or other Sunni Arab states on the other hand”*.

To achieve this vision Strategic, the Iranian goals are *“to enlarge its economic, military, nuclear, and technological powers; using its diplomatic power beside its soft power to enable the Iranian nation to achieve the regional supremacy and influence, with an effective cultural power on the surrounding communities, and to achieve a change in the regional formula on the long term. Iran also aims to support those who suppressed against those arrogant dictators at any point in the world”, refusing of entry under a cloak of any of the superpower states”*.

1.4. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) – “Sunni Arab leader”

Saudi Strategic Vision is *“To ensure the survival of KSA, a secure, stable and prosperous kingdom with regional and international strategic leadership”*.

KSA depends on three main strengths *“religious value, huge investment, and geostrategic location”* protecting its values of moderate Islamic identity, independence, good-neighborliness and non-interference in the affairs of others.

Saudi strategic goals are *“maintaining its Arab and Islamic identity, to become a global investment power and to ensure the leading role regionally and internationally”*.

KSA derives its charisma from being a leader of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, the Islamic world and the center of the Arabian Peninsula. All that makes enables its policy to interfere more in the affairs of some countries. Since the eruption of the Arab Revolutions, KSA has moved militarily, politically diplomatically, economically and in the media with all its weight to confront all the changes in the region that are not compatible with its policies. Saudi politics has moved on several tracks.

First: The military track

According to the requested by the legitimate government of Yemen to intervene against Houthis, KSA announced its leadership of the Arab Coalition launching a military campaign to confront the Houthi threat in March 2015.

Second: The political track

It is based on obtaining support from large sectors because instability in the region constitutes a political gap that represents an Iranian threat to its regional role. This methodology has interacted on the regional level through media platforms and social networks, transforming religious discourse into a sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites. It is worth noting that KSA has a Saudi Shiite minority

while Bahrain, the ally under Saudi protection, has a Shiite majority and all of them are affected by this war. KSA considers Iran responsible for all the security threats to the region, whether by supporting the Houthis in Yemen or Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria and the Popular Crowd in Iraq. The increasing schism among the GCC countries after KSA, UAE and Bahrain's break against Qatar turned its six countries GCC countries into three distinct groups: Qatar on its own; the trio of Bahrain, KSA and the UAE; and the remaining two countries, Kuwait and Oman, which have been trying to fashion a middle way between their feuding neighbors; Kuwait and Oman tried repeatedly to mediate between KSA and Qatar in 2014 and 2017. This schism increased because of specific reasons, such as: the lengthy war in Yemen, which resulted differences of views among the Arab coalition and among the GCC countries as well; the Saudi-UAE Joint Co-operation Committee (JCC), announced in December 2017; the proposal of the GCC military union, declared by KSA, as Oman and Qatar believe that the GCC military union may seek outbreaking a regional war against Iran increasing the instability in the region.

The Competition on KSA and UAE side against Qatar increases leading to a more acute international and regional division. There is also inconsistency in the Saudi-Emirati strategy towards the Yemeni position.

In Yemen, the conflict extended and was very complicated, and competition increased because of several changing proxies **as next:**

KSA and Qatar supported Hadi government, Pro-Hadi security forces, Allied group of (al-Islah group which is affiliated to MB – Popular resistance - Pro-Hadi Popular Committees - Hadhramaut Tribal Alliance - Southern Movement (until 2017) - Salafist militias (from late 2015).

KSA and UAE supported Saleh loyalists (from 2017), Republican Guard (from 2017) and National Resistance.

UAE, starting from 2017, supported Southern Transitional Council (STC), which included (Southern Movement - Popular Resistance - Popular Committees - al-Hizam Brigade "Security Belt" - Hadhrami Elite Forces - Southern Resistance Forces SRF"- Shabwani Elite - Tihamah Resistance), Allied groups including (Spear Operations Group (against Al-Islah).

On the regional level, Syria contained two axes of competition; first: between Iran on a side and KSA, UAE and Israel on another side; second: between Iran and Turkey and Israel; Turkey and Iran gathered with Russia in Sochi and Astana talks. Russia was and still able to manage its influence and competitions having the only access in Syria. Syria has witnessed an increase in Tehran's influence over the years. Since the Syrian civil war broke out, Iran has been involved in the conflict –directly through the Revolutionary Guards and indirectly through the proxy of Shia militias. In the meantime, KSA was and still distracted from Syria, where it supported certain opposition groups to Assad, when conflict broke out in Yemen. Gradually, the country decreased its military support to the moderate rebels. At this time, KSA and UAE on a side and Qatar on another side supported the Islamic Front in Syria against Assad regime which was supported by Iran. KSA does not have enough proxies and instruments in Syria to challenge the Iranian influence.

On the other hand, Turkey has deployed its forces in Syria declaring its goal of protecting its national security against Kurds and maybe as an attempt to reshape the new Syrian map of influence. Israel declared its sovereignty over Golan Heights and put pressure on Hezbollah and Iran and continue targeting his forces, seeking to stop their military deployment from Syria to Lebanon. Compared with Turkey, Israel and Iran; I think that the biggest loser in Syria is KSA.

In Libya the situation is different in terms of proxy instruments. KSA is beside UAE and Egypt supporting Hafter and the Parliament, while Qatar and Turkey supported the Presidency Council and extreme Islamic groups in Tripoli and Misrata.

Palestinian territories, which occupied by Israel with the U.S. support, is also a theatre of influence between major and regional powers in addition to actor states. Iran and Qatar and Turkey from a side supporting Hamas; on the other side, KSA, UAE and Egypt are on a third side supporting the Palestinian Authority.

In October 2017, supported by UAE and KSA and brokered by Egypt and Dahlan; Fatah and Hamas agreed to form a reconciliation government. Accordingly, Egypt opening the Rafah border crossing. This action was regarded by Iran, Qatar and Turkey as an attempt to weaken the military wing of Hamas to broker an agreement between the group and Fatah, whilst pledging economic recovery to Palestinians aggrieved by the blockade through the proxy of Mohammad Dahlan and with the assistance of Egypt.

They also regarded (KSA, UAE and Egyptian) side has aimed to create a new political environment in Palestine, where Dahlan can become more popular and support the 'peace' plan developed by Jared Kushner and his close ally, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Today, with declaring the Deal of The Century, competition between the all players is running, but Israel was able to achieve most of its goals on the account of the Palestinian Cause.

In January 2020, the heads of five East African nations (Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, and Egypt) and three Middle Eastern ones (KSA, Yemen, and Jordan) gathered in the Saudi capital to sign the Red Sea Pact, a new framework for enhanced trade and diplomacy along the Red Sea corridor. The agreement, some three years in the making, lays the groundwork for what Saudi officials hope will become a new cooperative regime for the area.

This will economically support the Saudi's 2030 vision plan. Riyadh' objective of the Pact is to enhance trade and security along and within the waterway, through which some 13% of global trade currently flows.

KSA was always the country which try to accommodate about the oil price to sustain the world trade. As Russia didn't agree with oil production cut, KSA decided to play for its own long-term interest and to show it will not only obey to the will of other countries, including U.S.. By acting like this, KSA is not trying to badly damage Russia, but is trying to affirm its leadership on the oil market and to tell the world that it has to count with KSA. This action will cost a lot to KSA. Oil production cost only 3,5 \$ per barrel but the fiscal break even – to keep government budget on the right track – is above the 70\$. KSA is deeply hurting the shale and the non-state funded producers. Doing so, KSA is trying to

take the oil leadership again from the U.S., being able later to impose its will. It's a risky game but KSA's budget is under pressure because the war in Yemen and the promises to realize Vision 2030. If KSA cannot gain control of the oil price again, for sure KSA will never be able to implement Vision 2030.

1.5. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) – “Key state, acting from behind”

After “Arab Spring”, increasingly, UAE, through its strategic extension, strengthened and is still enhancing its position within the Middle East that is of strong geopolitical attributes. The objectives of the UAE's strategic extension briefly are: countering the hegemonic aspirations of Iran; weighing on the evolution of the Arab Spring and countering its implications; Balancing and strengthening the GCC; Protecting its southern flank by building a blue power on African Shores.

The UAE's strategic extension will support its foreign policy, which is based on four main pillars: trade, tourism, monitoring and confronting Iran's regional hegemony, countering terrorism and countering the rise of MB's movements. Compared to the Gulf states, especially KSA, Qatar and Kuwait, UAE does not regard Islam as a tool by which it could achieve its objectives. However, UAE is more inclined towards KSA in the realm foreign policy and regional relations. To be clear, UAE adopts a secular and realistic foreign policy. This policy is demonstrated in many stances such as providing support to Egypt and the Libyan army in Libya against Islamic fundamentalists. On the opposite side, Qatar supports the MB.

UAE's alliance with KSA is derived from a common concern over Iran (Iran is a non-Arab country and follows the Shiite branch of Islam; whereas the GCC countries are Sunni Arab monarchies. Moreover, the UAE since its inception has border issues with Iran, including a dispute over the ownership of the islands in the Arabian Gulf.

For security reasons, the countries of the GCC are allied with the U.S. as a means to achieve defense and security. Since 2015, relations between UAE and Israel have improved considerably. This is evidenced by the desire of the GCC to permit the opening of an Israeli Trade Office in Abu Dhabi (probably unannounced until now).

The U.S. and Europe perceive that UAE participates in and strongly supports the rejection that KSA practices against any movement towards the western democracy; especially from its political perspective in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, as both countries along with the GCC partners regard these type of the political systems in the region as a means to corrupt and threaten the fundamental principles of their strength and the cohesion of their countries.

UAE, the key small state, is working hard to protect its national security, maintain very fruitful relations with all powers in and outside the Middle East. Its long-term strategy is based on maintaining its security and prosperity, developing its internal and external economies, expanding its strategic seaports' projects, building and enhancing its international and regional relations, and managing the rivalries with its competitors', having effective roles in several areas of interest.

UAE has played an important role in confronting the Arab Spring revolutions in the region, in supporting the 2013 military /people's movement in Egypt against MBs (MB) and in advocating of MbS' rise to power in Saudi Arabia. Keeping a low profile in the crown princes' ambitious push for regional power, the UAE encourages MbS and Saudi Arabia to take important steps at home and abroad. Having supported the Saudi crown prince's military campaign in Yemen, the country hasn't been directly affected by the Yemen crisis and therefore feels less pressure than KSA; however, UAE was smart in its early withdrawal from Yemen to avoid any possible internal and external pressure. The excellent relation between President Sisi and MbZ supported Egypt in several economic and security issues, on the other hand, UAE has huge investments in Egypt; these investments were planned to be gained by Qatar when the MB were Egypt in 2012.

Competition between the UAE and KSA in Yemen, on the one hand, and between UAE and Qatar on the other, spilled into Somalia late 2017, aggravating friction between Mogadishu and Somali regional leaders. Turkey existence in Somalia helped on collapsing of Abu Dhabi's relations with the Somali government.

UAE enhanced its influence in Horn of Africa and started to build on its Eritrea-Ethiopia peace-making by continuing to underwrite and promote that deal, while at the same time looking to reconcile with the Somali government and may return its existence in Djibouti.

UAE, KSA (supported by Egypt) has emerged during this decade, mainly in 2018, as an important protagonist in the Horn of Africa.

Through political alliances, aid, investment, military base agreements and port contracts, it is expanding its influence in the region, when Eritrea and Ethiopia announced – after a flurry of visits to and from Emirati officials – that they had reached an agreement to end their twenty-year war. UAE and KSA diplomacy and aids were pivotal to that deal.

An array of calculations shapes the UAE's actions in the Horn. The Gulf port cities have a long history of ties with Africa, centered around maritime trade and dating to the era before the Emirates united as a nation-state. From 2011, however, Abu Dhabi began to look at the countries along the Red Sea coast as more than commercial partners. Turmoil in the Middle East, Iran's growing regional influence, piracy emanating from Somalia and, from 2015, the war in Yemen combined to turn the corridor's stability into a core strategic interest. The 2017 Gulf crisis, which saw KSA, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar, pushed leaders on both sides of the divide to double down on their alliances, including in the Horn. Since then, the UAE has nailed down diplomatic relationships and extended its reach, particularly along the Red Sea.

Yemen, the main theater of competition between KSA and Iran, is ranked atop of the list of external threats against KSA. The Yemen crisis, which was MbS' first foreign policy and national security experiment, is still out of the Saudi control.

Although the UAE is often known acting in line with Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi support to the Southern Transitional Council (STC) may lead to divid Yemen –which is a considerable concern to Riyadh and the disagreement between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on their policy in Yemen. The main dispute between

KSA and UAE is al-Islah movement, which is linked to MB organization, in return, the UAE takes drastic measures against it. UAE always seeks to benefit from southern Yemen, especially the port of Aden and various economic resources. Aden is not just a foothold for the UAE, but a major area of influence that enables the UAE to counter al-Qaeda (AQAP) and to build a global economic and security bridge linking Aden to the southern African continent, which could re-secure the UAE's strong presence in Somalia and also achieves full control over Bab al-Mandab strait, which is obviously of great interest of Egypt, the UAE important ally.

The UAE also seeks to form a geographic scope in southern Yemen with official political authority consistent with its foreign orientations towards the file of Iran and political Islam, and the intellectual ground on which the South Yemen state was founded is the leftist Arab nationalism, which rejects the existence of any intellectual Religious formations in the rule of the state such as political Islam, thus forming a common ground between the state of the South and the UAE.

1.6. Qatar – “Influential microstate”

Since Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani took power in 1995, Qatar (the small button) has sought to achieve to main goals: first: to adopt a more independent foreign policy vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia (the big belly); second: to conduct an attempt to confront the Saudi will in the region. To achieve these two goals, Qatar started to follow flexible policies and measures to protect itself from KSA in a safer position by approaching two regional powers; first: Turkey as a regional Sunni ally who is able to protect it, and to balance its giant neighbor (KSA); second: Iran as an Eastern strategic depth and as an economic partner of the biggest gas field, which is also the strongest competitor to KSA and the global power (the U.S.); On the other hand, it hosted the largest U.S. military base outside U.S. territories at Al Udeid. Qatar also established Al Jazeera news agency in 1996 as a strong media arm to support its new strategy.

To be clear, Qatar has understood the need to improve its political and social relations with Iran to secure its economic interests with it; in addition to secure its eastern front that make a vantage point from the Gulf ambitions; especially those of KSA. There're already concluded security agreements between Qatar and Iran. What is known of these agreements is what is concluded in 2010 and 2015 in the field of crime prevention, combating terrorism and securing marine coasts. All of them has severely angered its three surrounding countries.

On another track, I see that Qatar has considered winning international and regional allies who can achieve the political and security guarantees necessary for its protection when needed. Qatar has been helped to develop a strategy that seems genius to achieve that aforesaid objective for Qatar along the medium and long terms. That is, Qatar has become a strategic ally of Turkey and Israel, the most important ally of the United States.

In my opinion UAE is more important to U.S. than Qatar. Of course, there is al-Udeid, but UAE has also military bases where the U.S. and other strong western allies deployed. Qatar is rich considering the GDP/capita, but UAE has a bigger GDP, is more diversified and has a professional military power.

With the success of the Arab Spring revolutions, Qatar and Turkey have supported the idea of replacing Arab regimes with other regimes loyal to Qatar. The MB as a representative of political Islam is considered as the best political alternative to governing Arab countries. That alternative has initially been approved by the U.S. despite Israeli's discontent; yet, with Turkish political support and financial and media support from Qatar itself. The plan was to oust most of the Arab rulers followed by the governments of the Gulf states on a phased process and on the long run all will be fully loyal to the ruling Qatari family and the Turkish government with an American-Israeli approval. Hence, if the rulers of the Gulf remained, the Arab countries with pro-Qatar regimes would be completely encircled by the Gulf states in support of Qatari influence. In the event of the fall of the ruling families in the Gulf states, the map of the Arab Gulf region and even the entire region map may change.

The increasing Competition between (KSA-UAE) and Qatar helped to increase the intensity of the regional and international division. There is also inconsistency in the Saudi-Emirati strategy towards the Yemeni position. There is no doubt that Qatar, which has the largest gas field in the world in partnership with Iran, has achieved significant political and security gains in the region through its accumulated relations with the U.S., Europe, Israel and Turkey, and has almost achieved great economic gains through massive investments planned to be established in Egypt during the rule of The MB; however, its current regional competitors KSA and UAE have replaced Qatar forming major economic investments and partnerships with Egypt in several promising investment areas.

Qatar exercised its influence in several regions affecting the Gulf states and Egypt in the Middle East and North Africa, where Qatar believes that Egypt is considered the most important strategic depth for KSA and UAE, which made Qatar for decades working to overthrow the ruling Egyptian regime supporting them and replacing it with a loyal government of leading elements Organized by the MB, turning Egypt into a thorn threatening the back of KSA and the UAE.

With the Arab Quartet's 13 demands unmet one year on, the Gulf crisis appears to have taken on inertia of its own and appears neither to be heading towards escalation nor resolution. If that is indeed the case, what may result is the worst of all worlds: a fragmented GCC complicating economic and security cooperation, Qatar continuing its activities in the region, and Doha is moving towards Turkey and gradually towards Iran. As it turns out, trying to force the richest country in the world per capita to concede through economic warfare can make it quite difficult to build leverage and extract concessions as it means challenging Qatar in an arena in which it has a comparative advantage.

2. Changing strategies of acting states (Saudi, UAE, and Qatar)

Based on the information and ideas presented in this chapter, it became clear that the world order is changing to a multipolar world of several competing powers and acting states, ready to form several temporary smaller groups; to be shaped in flexible alliances and partnerships at both international and regional levels. These temporary alliances and partnerships will seek to exploit the stronger competitor mistakes, using their shared interests and available resources. The U.S. and China will top the world, Russia and Europe will remain the international competitors in different aspects with less

national powers compared with the top two superpowers. However, Interests continues to be stronger competitor to values; accordingly, some isolated countries would be more acting and intervening to protect their interests which were undermined by their values; Japan and Germany could be examples of this matter.

It will be more common to have economic ties with one partner and security ties with another. This would be a result of specific changes, such as, the U.S. will remain strong but less influential, China will be stronger but remains not influential, Russia will remain suffer lack of economic power which gets it closer to China in temporary alliance, and Europe will continue struggling with its own internal cohesion and the former moves to a less interventionist pattern.

These all will affect the strategies of the ME regional powers and acting states, and we will concentrate on KSA, UAE and Qatar.

The three influential Gulf states share two major issues; adherence to absolute monarchy and the need for joint or unilateral security with the support of one or several major powers. On another hand, KSA and UAE share their concern over Iran's Shiite policies; however, UAE is more flexible of handling its relations with Iran to relieve this concern.

2.1. Main GCC concerns, challenges and disputes

- In deferent aspects, it's noted that goals and interests of the six GCC countries towards some issues in the region and towards sources of threats are not unified or matching and led to obstacles, such as:
 - The idea of a common currency disappeared in 2006 when Oman said it would not take part. Three years later the UAE also pulled out of that project, after plans were announced to establish a Gulf central bank (that would look after the currency) in the Saudi capital Riyadh.
 - Ignoring an agreement to introduce value-added tax (VAT) across the bloc in January by the GCC countries except The UAE and KSA, which were to stick to the deadline.
 - Not completing a GCC rail project of a high-speed passenger and freight line from Kuwait City in the north of the Gulf all the way to Oman's Arabian Sea coast.
 - The increasing schism among the GCC countries after KSA, UAE and Bahrain's break against Qatar.
- Dispute resolution relies on internal mediations but not specific mechanism.
- The centrality of governance in some countries is considered as a major role of controlling the policies of each country of them, as well as the tendencies of independence (Qatar and Oman) that are sometimes incompatible with the nature of the union.
- Some border issues still remain, mainly with KSA and between Qatar/Bahrain, KSA/UAE and UAE/Oman.
- Priority is focused on achieving economic integration; commonly before political and security aspects.
- The growing threat of terrorism and regional instability.

- The expected shortage of water and food in the GCC countries.
- Changing of the political and security international order.
- The current instability of the global economic system.
- The Iranian expansion and hostility, especially against KSA, UAE and Kuwait.
- The competition for the royal crown in KSA.

2.2. KSA

To maintain his country powerful, influential and able to lead the Sunni Arab states, MbS, backed by the Saudi King and UAE, will conduct specific measures **as next:**

Internally

- Continue undermining his competitors from the royal family.
- MbS will emphasis on 'fighting extremism' and 'going back to moderate Islam' must be considered in conjunction with KSA future goals in the Middle East. Clearly, this discourse promises to create an ideological basis for a crackdown by the U.S., Israel, Egypt and several Gulf countries against the Shia militias, who have been an important part of Iran's expansionist agenda.
- Three MbS's goals; first: he simply tries to attract foreign investors and rehabilitate the Saudi image against the backdrop of declining oil prices; second: to undermine the "Wahabi Islam" inside KSA, the main threat to the west. This will make the U.S. and Europe always in MbS's back supporting him, even in case of the failure of Trump to win in his second term; third: to whitewash or transform the notion of Wahhabi Islam in KSA, the country which has been held responsible for radicalism in the Sunni-Salafi world since the 9/11 terror attacks.
- KSA will try to regain the real control of the oil production, not only obeying to maintain the oil price by cutting its own production. With its new oil war, KSA aims to suppress some competitors in order to get more control to bring later the oil price closer to its fiscal break even.
- Because of economic and political reasons, KSA may have to postpone his economic restructuring plans or will move slowly. It will avoid any effects that could cost it the public's loyalty, meaning it will continue to offer many Saudis public-sector jobs and maintain its insurance system. To confront this issue, it will try to shift huge numbers of Saudis employees into the private sector. On the other hand, not achieving Vision 2030 in time can be costly for MbS, it's also why he tries to set his opponents out of the game.
- Establish transferred technology and military industries in cooperation with the U.S., China and other producing countries in Europe and Asia.
- To overcome the shortage of water and food, KSA will undertake a variety of measures to ensure long term sustainable growth. These include introducing energy-efficiency measures such as (introducing energy-efficiency measures - investing in clean fuel and renewable energy

supplies - improving water efficiency - investing in new water desalination capacity - buying or leasing agricultural land abroad.

Regionally

- KSA will face more challenges if he doesn't find a military exit from the Yemeni quagmire; therefore, KSA may have to go for any of two options. The first is to continue fighting in Yemen against Houthis; the second is to reach a point of successful negotiation with Houthis. The second option will be more successful if the IRGC becomes in a much weaker status. In all cases, one coherent Yemen is a Saudi concern.
- On the ground, (One Yemen) seems to be wishful thinking. Hadi is losing all of his supports, the JEDDAH/RIYADH agreement didn't achieve the desired success and the Houthis are consolidating their positions. The aimed military victory against the Houthis is not complete. Accordingly, it seems that the only way for KSA is to stop and withdraw from Yemen as UAE.
- Israel prefers to conduct a direct fight against Hezbollah more than Iran, but it's preparing itself ready and superior against it as well. However, KSA will increase its relations with Israel insuring a strong arm against their common threat, specially that Egypt is not guaranteed to participate in a war against Iran.
- Although the differences between KSA and UAE and between KSA and Egypt in several issues in the region, KSA will increase its ties with both countries to maintain its joint projects and to confront the competitions of Turkey and Qatar.
- KSA will move more towards Africa to secure its food resources, having benefits from its new giant partner, China, which has big influence in Africa. KSA will also move more towards East Africa and the Red Sea, as the development of the Red Sea zone—in particular tourism and trade along the waterway—represents an important part of the economic diversification at the heart of the "Vision 2030" plan. It will support KSA to turn toward neighboring Africa, a region that officials in Riyadh increasingly view as intrinsic to their country's economic prosperity, domestic security and geopolitical position. This also would help KSA's protect its vulnerable western and southern flanks against maritime piracy and against Iran's Revolutionary Guards who were discovered smuggling arms to Yemen's Houthi rebels by way of Somalia.
- At the shot-term, KSA will continue Qatar's break; however, I expect attempts by KSA and UAE to contain Qatar from a side and Iran from another.

Internationally

- KSA will conduct more independency in its international relations, such as changing the oil price without consulting the U.S., bearing in mind that decreasing the oil price by KSA not only affects Russia, but also affects the trade of the American shale oil in the U.S. very passively.
- It will also conduct more independency in the armament field; KSA will work to diversify its arms sources, with a significant trend towards China and other Asian and European countries.

Concerning Russia, it will be relatively fewer military deals; however, KSA will keep on its competition with Russia in the field of oil.

2.2. UAE

Through its federal system of coherent governments, UAE will continue maintaining its high level of security and prosperity. It will keep its position as a key country, turning from acting to leading from behind player in the areas of interest. **It will work as follows:**

Internally

- Continue with its non-oil production and investments specially in technology, seaports, peaceful nuclear programs, space and others.
- Continue its moderate Islam fighting the extreme political Islamic movements and organizations.
- Work hard to find water and food resources to overcome the expected shortage of water and food, adopting several measures as mentioned regarding KSA.

Regionally

- UAE will continue to be present in some conflict but no more as overt party in the conflict.
- UAE will do everything to preserve its international reputation in order to protect its regional and international economic ambitions. But UAE will remain military active to fight MB everywhere it can, like in Libya, paying efforts to prescribe Muslim Brotherhood organization as a terrorist organization
- UAE will Increase and strengthen its ties with Egypt and Israel, in the meantime, it will find a floor of communicating with the Iranian government away from the IRGC and Syrian regime in a way for calmer relations.
- Along with KSA, UAE will move more towards Africa and the Red Sea for the same reasons and strategy of KSA.
- UAE will try to reinforce its international diplomatic reputation, hosting a lot of summits, trying to be present in all international forums, trying to trust chairmanships. This to give an international visibility to the country.

Internationally

- Along with KSA, UAE will conduct more independency in its foreign policy and diversifying its armament resources, enhancing its relations with China and Europe and keeping its strong strategic alliance with the U.S.. This will guarantee its flexibility and maneuverability supporting its increasing strategic extension. With the YMEN campaign, UAE learnt that it has to master the logistic chains for the supply of Military equipment and ammunitions.
- It will also conduct more independency in the armament field; KSA will work to diversify its arms sources, with a significant trend towards China and other Asian and European countries. Concerning Russia, it will be relatively fewer military deals; however, KSA will keep on its competition with Russia in the field of oil.

- UAE will try to reinforce its international diplomatic reputation, hosting a lot of summits, trying to be present in all international forums, trying to trust chairmanships. This to give an international visibility to the country.

2.3. Qatar

Qatar will continue pursuing its offensive strategy, in an attempt to build a new regional order suitable to secure it and achieve its interests, with a hope to occupy a leadership position, in which will conflict with wills and interests of the key Arab countries in the region; KSA, UAE and Egypt.

Internally

- Qatar will continue to exploit the gas fields as main financial resources.
- It will continue to develop its national resources to become more self-sustainable (mainly in the food domain).
- The government of Qatar will have to inject money in the economy to cope the impact of the boycott.

Regionally

- It will continue to exploit the GCC division to reinforce the legitimacy of the Royal family. The current GCC dividing boosted the development of the Qatar Armed Forces. Qatar is also free to compete against its former GCC allies on economic markets.
- It will continue to reinforce its ties with Turkey supporting it and MB, and Turkey will reinforce its military presence in Qatar.
- Qatar will never abandon the newly reinforced ties with Iran, which means that there is certainly from the Qatar point of view no trust in the tentative of reconciliation from KSA.
- Any reconciliation with the quartet will signify cutting the new ties, and becoming definitively under influence of KSA / UAE
- It will strengthen its ties with Oman and with Kuwait as well; the Oman harbors have replaced the UAE harbors for the transit of goods.
- To develop its international economic position, Qatar will compete against UAE (and KSA)

Internationally

- It will develop its image through organizing sport events like the world football cup in 2022.
- It will try to consolidate its ties with U.S. on account of the UAE; this will be very difficult because of its relations with Iran.
- Qataris are extreme Wahhabi more than the Saudi, although their very religious Emir is Sunni. It's not possible that Qataris will change their Wahabi ideology which will passively affect Qatar's international relations at the long-term.
- Qatar will pay big efforts to not to allow U.S. or Europe proscribing MB as a terrorist organization keeping it as its political pillar against its competitors in the region.

3. Impacts on East Asia and implications for Japan

3.1. Impacts

- Threatening the main sources of oil and gas to East Asia which contains four of the world's five largest oil importers. To be clear, beside that regional instability directly affects the energy security; we have to regard considering the relationship between the pace of economic and industrial growth in East Asia and the increasing demand for oil, will severely affect the energy security in the ME and will lead to affect oil & gas importing countries in East Asia specially countries that rely more on the GCC countries.
- Increased sanctions on Iran will lead the oil & gas importing countries in East Asia to rely more on GCC countries, especially with the current huge reduction of the oil price.
- China will try to work faster on its global initiative (Belt & Road), building up more relations with the key countries in the Middle East and Africa, and to strengthen its economic and diplomatic ties with Europe. In the meantime, it will carefully try to interact in some specific regional crisis.
- Deploying military ships to the Gulf under the U.S.'s umbrella provokes Iran; it will consider this military approach a hostile action. This also may lead to compose a security dynamic changes of countries like Korea towards China and Europe in this concern.
- Qatar split leads to Gulf divided relations with East Asian countries.
- Fleeing terrorist elements from ME to Central Asia and Southeast Asia countries, specifically Afghanistan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, show fear of expanding their spread to East Asia.

3.2. Implications for Japan

Japan may have specific roles in the region, such as:

- Japan may play a mediation role between Iran on a side and KSA and UAE on another side, in an attempt to find a way for reconciliation. The (independency) of Takanami military ship deployment to the Gulf, not under the U.S. umbrella, will help in this issue.
- It may increase its presence in the Middle East in several fields such as industry, energy, mining, reconstruction, scientific research & development, education, infrastructure, transportation, communication, etc.
- Calm increasing of the Japanese military presence in the region through Peacekeeping Operations and joining Military Pass Exercises in Red Sea are expected.
- Working with U.S., UK, and Europe trying to restore the confidence of the Middle East countries in their western allies, hoping that the Middle East countries will not be attracted by Chinese efforts and Russia's fake news shown in the media.

9. Trump's Maximum Failure and Iran's Evolving Strategy in the Region

Mohammad Ataie

Introduction

In the wake of the U.S. economic war on Iran and the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, it was hardly a surprise that hardliners won a landslide victory in Iran's February parliamentary elections. The Trump administration should be credited for the rise of hardliners in the new parliament. The U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement and the imposition of crippling sanctions on Iran have undermined President Rouhani and factions who advocated for dialogue and rapprochement with the U.S. as a solution to Iran's economic problems. Although in 2018, Rouhani's reelection was a strong signal to the world and the Trump administration that Iranian people want to continue diplomacy and dialogue with the U.S., the response from Washington was further sanctions and threats against Iran. Even with the coronavirus slamming Iran, the Trump administration has continued to hammer Tehran with more economic sanctions. The net result has been to discredit Rouhani and the factions who advocated for better relations with the U.S. However, Trump's Maximum Pressure campaign has failed to curtail Iran's reach in the Arab world and reverse its policy of embracing non-state actors across the region. The results of the February low-turnout parliamentary election in Iran highlighted the damage to moderates who favored reconciliation with the United States and Trump's failure to force Tehran to change course in the Persian Gulf, the Levant, and Iraq.

1. Continued Tensions and HOPE in the Persian Gulf

In the Persian Gulf region, Tehran's strategy has been to improve the relationship with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. From the Iranian point of view, improving ties with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council would deprive Trump from creating the so-called "Sunni belt" against Iran. Throughout his presidency, Hassan Rouhani has sought direct talks with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to resolve tensions with the two neighbors. Riyadh views Tehran's repeated calls for dialogue as insincere tactics to counter the U.S. Maximum Pressure campaign. Although Saudi Arabia has engaged in secret talks with Iran to cool tensions in the region¹³², the prospect of high-level direct talks between the two countries any time soon appears remote. The kingdom accuses Iran of empty talks and using Yemen for its "expansionist agenda"¹³³. In October 2019 Saudi Arabia's

¹³² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/14/saudi-arabia-held-secret-talks-with-iran-ease-regional-tensions-are-they-holding-back-us/>

¹³³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-iran/saudi-arabia-accuses-iran-of-ordering-drone-attack-on-oil-pipeline-idUSKCN1SM0WJ>

Minister of State, Adel al-Jubeir, condemned Tehran's paradoxical offer for regional dialogue and demanded Washington increase its Maximum Pressure on Tehran¹³⁴.

Saudi's own pursuit of isolating and crippling Iran in the region is no less contradictory than Iran's diplomatic approach to the kingdom. A series of foreign policy blunders by the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, have played into the hands of Iran. Since June 2017, the blockade of Qatar has pushed Doha toward Iran. All the while, Oman and Kuwait have not been on board with isolating Tehran as they consistently call for diplomacy. Historically, both Oman and Kuwait view Tehran as a counterweight to Riyadh and they are currently even more concerned with Mohammed bin Salman's shortsighted moves in the region. As Rouhani seeks deeper relations with Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar, normalization of relations with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE remains a major challenge for Iran in the Persian Gulf region.

In the wake of the downing of a U.S. drone by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in the summer of 2019, the UAE seems to have slightly changed course from escalation to engagement with Iran. The American ambiguous response to the oil tanker attacks in the Gulf of Oman and the downing of the RQ-4 Global Hawk sent a signal to Abu Dhabi that Arab allies of the U.S. may have to bear the primary cost of conflict if the situation escalates between the U.S. and Iran. This fear seems to have influenced Abu Dhabi's approach to Tehran. In late July, for the first time in six years, officials from Iran and the United Arab Emirates met in Tehran and signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance maritime border security cooperation¹³⁵. In Tehran this was perceived as a major departure from Abu Dhabi's hawkish stance since 2015¹³⁶. On April 26, 2020, the UAE foreign minister called his Iranian counterpart to discuss the latest regional developments and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic¹³⁷.

In this context, during the opening of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, President Rouhani proposed the Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE). According to Iran's foreign minister, HOPE is based on the premise that all regional states have a responsibility to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the region¹³⁸. Iraq, the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, and possibly Yemen would be part of the HOPE platform for regional cooperation in maintaining freedom of navigation and energy security. Indeed, Iran's call for an inclusive regional dialogue forum dates back to the 1990s¹³⁹. Like the previous initiatives, the HOPE plan has so far failed to gain support from Saudi Arabia. However, it remains the blueprint for the Iranian strategy in the Persian Gulf. In February 2020,

¹³⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/pressure-iran-talk-saudi-minister-191024093009753.html>

¹³⁵ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/438834/Tehran-Abu-Dhabi-sign-MOU-on-maritime-security-cooperation>

¹³⁶ While Abu Dhabi and Riyadh have cooperated deeply since 2015 on Yemen and Iran more widely.

¹³⁷ <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/158065/FM-Zarif-Emirati-counterpart-hold-phone-talks>

¹³⁸ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/440454/Iran-will-call-for-coalition-for-hope-to-secure-region>

¹³⁹ <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/making-sense-of-hope-can-irans-hormuz-peace-endeavor-succeed/>

as the coronavirus began to spread in Iran, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif evoked the initiative in a tweet to call for regional cooperation, “[i]n line with #HOPE” to contain the virus¹⁴⁰.

A significant challenge for Iran’s HOPE initiative is the war in Yemen. Yemen became a focus of the Islamic Republic’s support for non-state actors after Saudi Arabia launched its devastating campaign of air strikes against Yemen in 2015. Since then, the country has become yet another flash point of conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. While it is unclear what military assistance the Houthis have received from Iran, by backing them Iran gained a foothold on the southern flank of Saudi Arabia and an opportunity to distract and weaken Riyadh. While support for Houthis serves the goal of containing Saudi Arabia’s geopolitical influence, Iran has shown a willingness for diplomacy in Yemen. In August 2019, Tehran hosted Houthi leaders and diplomats of European countries to explore a solution for the war in Yemen. In the absence of dialogue between Riyadh and Tehran, Iran continues backing the Houthis as a low-cost, high-impact way to pressure Saudi Arabia¹⁴¹.

2. The Levant and Iraq; An Interconnected Front

In the Levant and Iraq, Iran’s objective is to preserve the status quo to shore up its allies within the political structures of Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. Despite mounting pressure and military strikes, the U.S. and Israeli have failed to undermine Iran’s network of influence in these countries. In response, Iran has raised the level of its diplomatic and military involvement on the side of its allies in these countries. From the Iranian perspective, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq are interrelated arenas and crucial to maintain its access to the Mediterranean shores. Iran’s diplomatic and military engagement also fits into Ayatollah Khamenei’s “expansive extraterritorial vision,” which seeks to establish Iran’s role in its region and push the engagement front with external adversaries further away from Iran’s territorial borders¹⁴². Central to this vision is embracing non-state actors, which includes both Shi’i and non-Shi’i forces, such as the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Given the symbolism of the Palestinian cause in the Muslim world, close relations with the “Palestinian resistance” casts a favorable light on Iran’s growing regional engagement and gives Iran a trans-sectarian legitimacy in the predominantly non-Shi’i and non-Persian environment. Iran also believes that it can utilize ties with Hamas and the Islamic Jihad to counterbalance the Israeli military advantage.

In Lebanon, Iran seeks to buttress the political arrangement which elevated Michel Aoun, the influential Christian ally of Hezbollah, to the presidency in 2016. After 95 days of street protests and political disagreements in Beirut over naming a successor to Saad Hariri, Iranians breathed a sigh of relief when the new Lebanese government was finally formed by Prime Minister Hassan Diab in January 2020. In contrast to the Saudi’s cold shoulder to Diab’s government, Tehran immediately

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/445558/Zarif-Coronavirus-like-terrorism-knows-no-bounds>

¹⁴¹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/80557>

¹⁴² <https://www.leader.ir/fa/media/play/27607?year=1398&type=0&page=4>

welcomed his appointment and dispatched the speaker, Ali Larijani, to Beirut to congratulate him. During this visit, Larijani touted the idea that Iran is ready to help Lebanon's ailing economy. Although this statement raised questions about Iran's ability for economic intervention, Larijani's visit marked a symbolic moment as it was the first visit of an international leader after the formation of Diab's cabinet. In the eyes of Americans, the current political arrangement is merely an Aoun-Hezbollah-Damascus axis and a threat to the U.S. and its allies in Lebanon¹⁴³. By contrast, for Iran and Hezbollah, the formation of Diab's government ended, for now, a much feared, in the words of the Hezbollah Secretary General, power vacuum detrimental to the prevailing political arrangement in the country¹⁴⁴. At the same time, the formation of the status quo cabinet in Lebanon allows Hezbollah to concentrate on its extraterritorial activities in Syria and Iraq, where the Lebanese group has found itself further engaged after the assassination of Qassem Soleimani¹⁴⁵.

Hezbollah, along with other pro-Iranian forces, will continue military engagement in Syria to recapture the last remaining opposition strongholds in the country. Tehran pursues this military objective in parallel with diplomatic cooperation with Russia and Turkey. Especially paramount for Tehran is scaling down tensions with Turkey to protect their shared economic and trade interests. Iran and its allies kept a low profile amid recent Syrian-Turkish clashes in Syria's Idlib Province. When Turkish artillery attacked on an Iranian position in northwestern Syria, Tehran demonstrated restraint. Despite the heavy casualties among Iran-backed Afghan and Pakistani fighters, President Rouhani demanded quick de-escalation, asserting that the intensification of tension in the region would not benefit anyone¹⁴⁶. Rouhani further directed that the Astana process engineered by Iran, Russia, and Turkey to resolve the Syrian conflict must not be undermined. Tehran will pursue the two-track strategy of maximizing the gains of the Syrian government and, simultaneously, minimizing frictions in Syria with Turkey, a crucial trade partner at the time of American economic warfare against Iran.

Iran's objectives in Syria can be summarized as preserving the country's territorial integrity, safeguarding Assad's rule, which ensures a vital strategic depth for Lebanese Hizbullah, and securing an unhindered land corridor to the Mediterranean. Israel views such a land corridor, which links Iran through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon, as a military alternative to the air bridge between Tehran and Damascus and thus a direct security threat. Despite Israeli strikes to hamper the IRGC build-up in Syria, Iran remains undeterred to continue its military and advisory presence in Syria and transfer arms to Hezbollah. Despite the death toll caused by Israeli strikes, the IRGC has consistently chosen

¹⁴³ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/01/25/what-to-expect-from-a-new-lebanese-government-anti-corruption-as-witch-hunt/>

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<http://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/1354366/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83-%D8%A3%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A8>

¹⁴⁵ <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/02/02/us-iran-prolong-detente-in-lebanon-with-a-status-quo-cabinet/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/445720/Iran-s-advisory-urges-Turkey-to-avoid-unwise-acts-in-Idlib>

to swallow the pain to avoid escalation with Israel in Syria. While walking away from a response to Israel has spurred both anger and ridicule on social media, Tehran's position reflects its priorities to first and foremost tighten President Assad's grip on power and focus on military operations to recapture the remaining rebel-held territories.

In contrast to Syria, Iraq is likely to witness a calibrated escalation by the IRGC and its allies against U.S. forces. The assassination of General Soleimani on January 3, 2020, ended an era of coexistence between Iran and the U.S. in Iraq. On January 7, Iran responded by launching ballistic missiles against U.S. bases in Iraq but avoided inflicting American casualties. Khamenei has said that the ultimate revenge for the assassination would be the American exit from the region. Since then, there have been multiple rocket attacks on U.S. bases and interests in Iraq. These attacks prompted U.S. airstrikes against Iran-backed Iraqi forces that the U.S. claims were responsible for the incidents. The absence of credible evidence about who fired the rockets raises the question of whether such attacks are conducted by parties which have an interest in a military conflict between the U.S. and Iran or whether they are part of Iran's gray-zone strategy to force the U.S. from Iraq¹⁴⁷. What is clear is that neither Khamenei nor Trump want to escalate to all-out war, which could be an economic catastrophe for Iran and politically costly for Trump in an election year.

For months, Iraq has been facing anti-government protests, a leadership vacuum, and a severe economic crisis. In the past few days, while Iran-backed forces and American army have been facing off in Iraq, Baghdad has been inching toward a way out of the internal political crisis by nominating a new Prime Minister acceptable to both Iran and the U.S. The prime minister-designate, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, is believed to be a potential candidate because of his ability to balance Baghdad's relations with Iran and the United States. In Tehran, al-Kadhimi is known for his harmonious relationship with the Popular Mobilization Forces (al-Hashd al-Sh'abi), which is a key Iranian ally in the country. Although far from ideal, many in Tehran believe that al-Kadhimi can manage the U.S. threat and would bring political stability amid a severe economic crisis in Iraq.

3. Ramifications of a Hardline Parliament

Despite the rising influence of hardliners in Iran's politics, the prospect of possible diplomacy with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia is not entirely bleak. With the landslide victory of the so-called Principlists in the election, over 75 percent of the seats will be controlled by factions who advocate a tough position against the West. Mohammad Baqir Qalibaf, the leading figure in the Principlists' coalition, is likely to chair the new parliament. Analysts believe that Mustafa Mirsaleem will become his deputy. Both Qalibaf and Mirsaleem ran against President Rouhani in the 2017 presidential election. Given the hardliner's record of opposition to Rouhani's internal and international policies, such as the Joint

¹⁴⁷ <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/jan/10/report-iran%E2%80%99s-military-strategy>

Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it seems that Iran's policies would turn toward escalation with the U.S. and its Arab allies. However, many in Tehran argue that the Principlists' agenda in the new parliament should not be judged merely by its rhetoric.

The parliament's influence in forging Iran's foreign policy is limited as it is one of several state bodies which are responsible for foreign policy. While the ultimate decision-making authority lies with the office of the Leader, state bodies such as the Presidency, the Supreme National Security Council, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and the Expediency Council influence the foreign policy of Tehran. Therefore, the eventual impact of the parliament on Iran's regional and international policies will be defined by other key state organizations and ultimately the office of Ayatollah Khamenei. The new parliament will also need to deal with major economic challenges facing Iran. This has been evident from Principlists' election campaign slogans about addressing Iranians' economic concerns. The turnout in Iran's parliamentary election on February 21 was conspicuously low, which is a new indicator of popular discontent with the economic situation and the Islamic Republic's policies. As some Iranian media predict, the urgency of economic challenges will shift the hardliners away from anti-American rhetoric to pragmatism in dealing with foreign policy issues¹⁴⁸. Thus, the new parliament is likely to back diplomacy both with regional and international adversaries of Iran. This means that hardliners in the new parliament will be less inclined to impede President Rouhani's foreign policy and possible future talks with the U.S. or Saudi Arabia.

Some observers even believe that with Principlists at the helm, the possible future talks between Iran and the U.S. would be more likely to succeed¹⁴⁹. The Principlists' faction have advocated an uncompromising line toward the West. Once in power, however, they may pursue negotiation with the West, without facing internal opposition to such talks. It is noteworthy that the Principlists were conducting secret talks with the U.S. in Oman when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was president of Iran. The clandestine meetings between U.S. and Iranian officials eventually led to the conclusion of the landmark nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 under Rouhani. As Ali Motahari, a former member of the parliament notes, Khamenei would not allow the new parliament to undermine Rouhani's foreign policy¹⁵⁰. According to Motahari, the Principlists would be responsible for running

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<https://fararu.com/fa/news/432779/%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%84%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8C>

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<http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1989811/%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B7-%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%86%D8%A7%DA%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AF>

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<https://www.eghtesadnews.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D9%87%D8%A7->

the country and therefore they would adopt a moderate foreign policy, and if necessary, would establish ties with America.

4. An Impervious Yet Misunderstood Regional Strategy

As Iran battles the coronavirus pandemic, the United States has tightened its economic sanctions, hoping that the virus outbreak would compel Iran to capitulate to its conditions and change course in the Middle East. However, it is unlikely that the Maximum Pressure, even coupled with the coronavirus crisis in Iran, would produce the desired effect on Tehran's regional strategy. This is largely because U.S. policymakers have failed to understand the rationale of Iran's reach across the region. The advocates of sanctions in the Trump administration insist that a revolutionary mindset is driving Iran's regional policy and call it abnormal. This ahistorical view of the Islamic Republic's regional policy dismisses the security objectives and concerns in Iran's pursuit of influence in the region¹⁵¹. Iran's non-state foreign policy has been part of its broader strategies of containing regional and international threats. In his remarks about the IRGC's presence in Iraq and the Levant, Ayatollah Khamenei has underscored these geopolitical challenges, saying that without engagement in Syria and Iraq, Iranians would now be fighting external enemies in the cities of Iran¹⁵². Only this "defensive doctrine," Khamenei believes, will be able to contain security threats to Iran¹⁵³. Otherwise, in the absence of non-state strategy and a network of influence across the region, Khamenei argues, an isolated Iran would succumb to U.S. threats within Iran's borders. Thus, no matter the economic cost of the U.S. sanctions, Tehran seems intent upon expanding its regional policies which it views as vital for survival.

61/326746-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%84%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%DA%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%B0%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AF

¹⁵¹ <https://lobelog.com/is-iran-abnormal/>

¹⁵² <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=36894>

¹⁵³ <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=43647>

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