

US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAS BEEN A COMPLEX AND MULTIFACETED ASPECT OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II. THE REGION HAS BEEN A FOCAL POINT FOR US INTERESTS DUE TO ITS STRATEGIC LOCATION, VAST OIL RESERVES, AND THE ONGOING GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS THAT HAVE ARISEN OVER THE DECADES. FROM THE COLD WAR ERA TO CONTEMPORARY COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS, US INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAS EVOLVED, SHAPED BY BOTH DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS. THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT, KEY OBJECTIVES, MAJOR POLICIES, AND THE CURRENT STATE OF US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

POST-WORLD WAR II DYNAMICS

THE ROOTS OF US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE POST-WORLD WAR II PERIOD WHEN THE UNITED STATES EMERGED AS A GLOBAL SUPERPOWER. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL IN 1948 MARKED A SIGNIFICANT TURNING POINT, LEADING TO HEIGHTENED TENSIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ITS ARAB NEIGHBORS. THE US QUICKLY RECOGNIZED ISRAEL, AND THIS DECISION LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR A LONG-STANDING ALLIANCE THAT CONTINUES TO INFLUENCE MIDDLE EASTERN GEOPOLITICS.

THE COLD WAR INFLUENCE

DURING THE COLD WAR, THE US SOUGHT TO CONTAIN THE SPREAD OF COMMUNISM IN THE REGION. KEY EVENTS INCLUDED:

1. THE EISENHOWER DOCTRINE (1957): THIS POLICY PLEDGED US ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES RESISTING COMMUNIST AGGRESSION.
2. SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES: THE US OFTEN SUPPORTED AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES THAT ALIGNED WITH ITS INTERESTS, SUCH AS THE SHAH OF IRAN, TO COUNTER SOVIET INFLUENCE.
3. MILITARY INTERVENTIONS: THE US ENGAGED IN MILITARY INTERVENTIONS TO PROTECT ITS INTERESTS, NOTABLY IN LEBANON DURING THE 1980S.

KEY OBJECTIVES OF US POLICY

US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS GUIDED BY SEVERAL KEY OBJECTIVES:

1. ENSURING STABILITY AND SECURITY

THE US AIMS TO MAINTAIN STABILITY IN THE REGION TO PROTECT ITS INTERESTS AND THOSE OF ITS ALLIES. THIS INVOLVES:

- SUPPORTING FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS.
- PROVIDING MILITARY AID TO KEY ALLIES SUCH AS ISRAEL AND EGYPT.
- CONDUCTING COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS AGAINST GROUPS LIKE ISIS AND AL-QAEDA.

2. PROTECTING ENERGY INTERESTS

THE MIDDLE EAST IS HOME TO A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE WORLD'S OIL RESERVES. US POLICY HAS HISTORICALLY FOCUSED ON ENSURING ACCESS TO THESE RESOURCES, REFLECTED IN:

- STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH OIL-RICH COUNTRIES LIKE SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT.
- MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE REGION TO SAFEGUARD SHIPPING ROUTES AND ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE.

3. PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WHILE OFTEN SIDELINED FOR STRATEGIC ALLIANCES, THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS HAS BEEN A STATED GOAL OF US POLICY. KEY INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

- THE ARAB SPRING (2010-2011): THE US INITIALLY SUPPORTED PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS BUT FACED CHALLENGES IN BALANCING SUPPORT FOR REFORM WITH THE NEED FOR STABILITY.
- THE USE OF DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS TO ENCOURAGE POLITICAL REFORMS, ALBEIT WITH LIMITED SUCCESS.

4. ADDRESSING REGIONAL CONFLICTS

THE US HAS SOUGHT TO MEDIATE AND ADDRESS VARIOUS CONFLICTS IN THE REGION, INCLUDING:

- THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: EFFORTS TO BROKER PEACE HAVE BEEN ONGOING, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS.
- THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: THE US HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN PROVIDING SUPPORT TO CERTAIN FACTIONS, COMPLICATING ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER REGIONAL ACTORS.

MAJOR POLICIES AND ACTIONS

1. THE GULF WAR AND AFTERMATH

THE US-LED COALITION IN THE GULF WAR (1990-1991) AIMED TO LIBERATE KUWAIT FROM IRAQI OCCUPATION. THIS MARKED A SIGNIFICANT MILITARY ENGAGEMENT THAT SOLIDIFIED US PRESENCE IN THE REGION. THE AFTERMATH SAW:

- CONTINUING SANCTIONS AND MILITARY PRESENCE IN IRAQ.
- ESTABLISHMENT OF NO-FLY ZONES TO PROTECT KURDISH AND SHIITE POPULATIONS.

2. THE WAR ON TERROR

POST-9/11, THE US SHIFTED ITS FOCUS TO COMBATING TERRORISM. KEY ACTIONS INCLUDED:

- THE INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN (2001) TO OUST THE TALIBAN AND DESTROY AL-QAEDA.
- THE IRAQ WAR (2003) JUSTIFIED BY CLAIMS OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND LINKS TO TERRORISM, WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY DESTABILIZED THE REGION.

3. THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

IN 2015, THE US, ALONGSIDE OTHER WORLD POWERS, NEGOTIATED THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA) WITH IRAN TO LIMIT ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM. HOWEVER, THE US WITHDRAWAL FROM THE AGREEMENT IN 2018 UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION LED TO INCREASED TENSIONS AND A RETURN TO HOSTILE RELATIONS.

4. THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

IN 2020, THE NORMALIZATION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SEVERAL ARAB STATES, INCLUDING THE UAE AND BAHRAIN, MARKED A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN REGIONAL DYNAMICS. THE ACCORDS AIMED TO FOSTER ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS, WHILE SIDELINING THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE.

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

DESPITE DECADES OF ENGAGEMENT, US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST FACES SEVERAL CHALLENGES:

1. REGIONAL INSTABILITY

ONGOING CONFLICTS, SUCH AS THE CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA AND TENSIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND ITS NEIGHBORS, POSE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES FOR US INTERESTS. THE RISE OF NON-STATE ACTORS, INCLUDING MILITIAS AND TERRORIST GROUPS, COMPLICATES THE SECURITY LANDSCAPE.

2. RELATIONS WITH TRADITIONAL ALLIES

THE US FACES DIFFICULTIES IN ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRADITIONAL ALLIES, SUCH AS SAUDI ARABIA AND TURKEY. DIVERGING INTERESTS AND INTERNAL POLICIES, INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES, HAVE STRAINED THESE ALLIANCES.

3. THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN RESOLVING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT REMAINS A SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLE. US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL OFTEN DRAWS CRITICISM, PARTICULARLY REGARDING SETTLEMENT EXPANSION AND THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA.

4. ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

THE US ECONOMY IS INCREASINGLY DEPENDENT ON GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS. CHANGES IN DOMESTIC ENERGY PRODUCTION, PARTICULARLY WITH THE RISE OF SHALE OIL, MAY INFLUENCE FUTURE US ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE REGION.

CONCLUSION

US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS A COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF HISTORICAL LEGACIES, STRATEGIC INTERESTS, AND EVOLVING GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS. WHILE THE US HAS BEEN A KEY PLAYER IN SHAPING THE REGION'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, ITS POLICIES HAVE OFTEN FACED CRITICISM FOR THEIR EFFECTIVENESS AND CONSEQUENCES. MOVING FORWARD, A NUANCED APPROACH THAT BALANCES SECURITY, ECONOMIC INTERESTS, AND THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY WILL BE ESSENTIAL FOR ADDRESSING THE MYRIAD CHALLENGES THAT PERSIST IN THE MIDDLE EAST. AS THE REGION CONTINUES TO EVOLVE, SO TOO MUST US POLICY, ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES WHILE SEEKING TO ADVANCE ITS CORE INTERESTS.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF US RELATIONS WITH IRAN FOLLOWING THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S APPROACH?

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION HAS AIMED TO RE-ENTER THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA) BUT FACES CHALLENGES DUE TO IRAN'S NUCLEAR ADVANCEMENTS AND REGIONAL ACTIVITIES. RELATIONS REMAIN TENSE, WITH SANCTIONS STILL IN PLACE.

HOW HAS US POLICY AFFECTED THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT IN RECENT YEARS?

US POLICY HAS SHIFTED TOWARDS PROMOTING NORMALIZATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAB STATES WHILE OFFERING LIMITED SUPPORT FOR A TWO-STATE SOLUTION, LEADING TO CRITICISM FROM VARIOUS GROUPS WHO ARGUE IT NEGLECTS PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE US PLAY IN THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN SYRIA?

THE US HAS FOCUSED ON COMBATING ISIS AND SUPPORTING KURDISH FORCES IN NORTHERN SYRIA, WHILE ALSO PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN AID. ITS OVERALL INFLUENCE IS LIMITED DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF RUSSIAN AND IRANIAN FORCES.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS IN US MIDDLE EAST POLICY?

THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS REPRESENT A MAJOR SHIFT IN US POLICY, FACILITATING NORMALIZATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SEVERAL ARAB NATIONS, WHICH THE US VIEWS AS A WAY TO COUNTER IRANIAN INFLUENCE AND PROMOTE REGIONAL STABILITY.

HOW DOES US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST IMPACT ITS FOREIGN POLICY?

THE US MILITARY PRESENCE SERVES AS A DETERRENT AGAINST ADVERSARIES LIKE IRAN AND PROVIDES SECURITY TO ALLIES. HOWEVER, IT ALSO COMPLICATES RELATIONS WITH REGIONAL POWERS AND RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT ENTANGLEMENT IN PROLONGED CONFLICTS.

WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THE US FACE IN SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

THE US FACES CHALLENGES SUCH AS BALANCING RELATIONS WITH AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES, MANAGING PUBLIC OPINION, AND DEALING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF ITS INTERVENTIONS, WHICH CAN LEAD TO INSTABILITY RATHER THAN DEMOCRACY.

HOW HAS THE US RESPONSE TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN YEMEN EVOLVED?

THE US HAS INCREASINGLY RECOGNIZED THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN YEMEN AND HAS CALLED FOR CEASEFIRES WHILE ALSO BALANCING ITS SUPPORT FOR SAUDI ARABIA, LEADING TO CRITICISM OVER ARMS SALES AND MILITARY INVOLVEMENT.

WHAT IS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S STANCE ON THE KURDISH FORCES IN IRAQ AND SYRIA?

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES TO SUPPORT KURDISH FORCES AGAINST ISIS, RECOGNIZING THEIR ROLE IN STABILITY, BUT FACES DILEMMAS IN BALANCING RELATIONS WITH TURKEY, WHICH VIEWS THESE GROUPS AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS.

HOW DOES US ENERGY POLICY INFLUENCE ITS RELATIONS WITH GULF STATES?

US ENERGY INDEPENDENCE HAS SOMEWHAT REDUCED ITS RELIANCE ON GULF OIL, BUT THE US STILL MAINTAINS STRONG TIES

WITH GULF STATES FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, SECURITY COOPERATION, AND COUNTERING IRANIAN INFLUENCE.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF SHIFTING US POLICY ON REGIONAL ALLIANCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

SHIFTING US POLICY, ESPECIALLY TOWARDS IRAN AND ISRAEL, HAS LED TO REALIGNMENTS IN REGIONAL ALLIANCES, WITH SOME ARAB STATES SEEKING CLOSER TIES WITH ISRAEL, WHILE OTHERS REMAIN CAUTIOUS OR CRITICAL OF US INFLUENCE.

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