

The Cost of Intervention: Rethinking U.S. Involvement in the Middle East

Kody S. Crosson

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Abstract

The critical balance of foreign affairs falls heavily under the purview of the United States (US), as it has postured itself as a global leader. This paper analyzes the historical, military, economic, and post-intervention impacts of US involvement in the Middle East. Through a review of existing literature, three key themes emerge: viewpoints from the Middle East, strategic decision-making, and post-state rebuilding from US involvement. Each theme is examined through the lenses of US Military Strategic Theory, Macroeconomics Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Failed State Theory. Ethical considerations and policy recommendations are presented, emphasizing the need for the US to prioritize regional partnerships, assess long-term impacts, and support sustainable security cooperation.

Keywords: *Middle East, Foreign Affairs, US Military Strategic Theory, Macroeconomics Theory, Postcolonial Theory, Failed State Theory*

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Introduction

The US is viewed as a beacon of light for nations that are facing tumultuous periods of time. Throughout its history, the US has gained a ubiquitous status as a country that offers assistance to contribute in creating sustainable protection and stabilized normalcy through alliances. After World War II, the US began to fully strengthen its alliances multilaterally with Europe and bilaterally in Asia that created conceptual communities separated only by distance (Fordham & Poast, 2016). The assistance from the US arrives in various forms that range from the augmentation of military efforts to the restructuring of problematic government models. Involvement from the US typically results from perceptions of wrongdoing or maleficence within the borders of other countries and regions.

Throughout US history, examples exist for positive foreign affairs involvement and examples that yielded unfavorable results. The latter examples indicate that US involvement in some foreign affairs has been unwanted or perceived as unnecessary. When dealing with foreign affairs, it can be difficult for the US to differentiate between the boundaries of information and perspectives of such information due to how it is arranged (Alger, 1962). A deeper understanding of the aftermath of selective foreign affairs may be a key indication that the US has been too forward-leaning in the past. This happens in the face of controversial involvements and conflicts. The involvement of the US in the Middle East exemplifies a stronger understanding of the type of intervention that is prolonged and not beneficial.

Foreign affairs are something that has been self-defined based upon political ideals of the time period being examined. The amount of involvement or governmental monetary allocation is equally correlated to the sitting US president and the federal majority-led opinion involving

foreign affairs. To further complicate the matters of global involvement by the US, the defined foundational parameters of foreign affairs is not something that the Constitution explicitly defines. The Constitution does not clearly outline US involvement with foreign affairs, but it does address the principles behind it. “Foreign affairs are not a term found in the Constitution, and what is characterized as foreign affairs is not a discrete constitutional category. Still, many provisions of the Constitution apply equally, and have had equal success, in foreign as in domestic affairs” (Henkin, 1996, p. 286). The Constitution implies that it encompasses the US and all of its affairs, foreign and domestic. The ambiguity and lack of clearly defined roles have led to a shift in opinion amongst the US and its governing bodies. Over the course of time, this enabled the US to get embedded within the Middle East and has remained controversial since the beginning.

The US involvement in the Middle East has been a widely debated topic amongst proponents and non-supporters. Much of the involvement in the Middle East has been based around the priority of counter-terrorism to aid in homeland security concerns (Lesser, 2020). Part of the issue with the US being involved in the Middle East is that no clear definition of engagement has ever been agreed upon. There has been military, political, and economic engagement in the Middle East that has been deemed inconclusive. Past attempts at peacekeeping with the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian conflicts are just a couple of examples of unsuccessful efforts at intervention by the US. Even with the subjective definition of engagement, the ability to create stability in a complex part of the world has been unsuccessful in attempts at over-involvement and inaction from the US (Brynen, 2016).

Problem Statement

The problem is that the US has positioned itself as a global power player for other nations to rely upon during potential times of need. This requires involvement of engaging in foreign affairs. The US has used this status to strategically involve itself in some self-interested affairs, like those in the Middle East. The US foreign affairs have successful and unsuccessful examples. Some Middle East countries and regions report a worse post-state subsequent US involvement. Over the history of the US, the ability to create consistency in the approach for involvement in foreign affairs has been difficult and can be costly to nations that do not seek certain types of support. Due to the historical stance of the US, foreign affairs involvement often lacks coherent legal guidelines that policymakers can adhere to for consistency. The lack of a structural legal framework facilitates a path to foreign affairs that may be unwanted or unnecessary for the receiving nation(s).

The US Government is granted many different powers under the Constitution that are individually written out clearly for the understanding of each concept. They all serve as significant foundations for the US and its ability to create laws. Specific to foreign affairs, the Constitution states, “Congress can regulate commerce with foreign nations and declare war. The president has power by and with the advice and consent of the Senate to make treaties, provided two-thirds of the Senators present concur. The president also has sole power in the control of foreign relations as head of state. The Judiciary Branch is the last vital component” (Reisenfeld, 1999, p. 786). Every power is separated but is to work together in the key principle of separation of powers. The Constitution does not contain all the Articles for legal guardrails to limit concerns of economic impact, loss of lives, and wars with nations that would prefer non-involvement with the US. The aftermath of subjectivity has created a pathway for the US to get involved in parts of the world that do not necessarily align with the initial reasons broadcast to

citizens. Prolonged involvement in the Middle East is one example that is based on historical convenience sakes rather than tangible necessitations of global assistance for sustained stability.

Thesis Statement

Although there have been many instrumental involvements of the US as a larger cog of stable foreign affairs, the prolonged role within the Middle East serves as a reminder that a different stance may be needed for sustained autonomous change within the region. The military involved failures, and adverse economic impacts show that the US may have stymied the Middle East's ability for self-stabilization and growth. The US should be more mindful in its exploration to be a global police force to the rest of the world. It may cause more adverse effects in attempting to understand politicized, religious, and territorial disagreements in the Middle East.

Literature Review

The following literature review includes an analysis of research conducted that pertains to the topic, problem, and proposals to address the US involvement with foreign affairs in the Middle East. The literature review examines supporting documentation to affirm the background of the approaches taken by the US to get involved in specific foreign affairs. The literature review will also justify the policy proposals.

History and Evolution of Middle East Involvement

The history and the evolution of foreign affairs involving the US dates back to the Founding Fathers and the crafted foundational laws within the Constitution. Americans have argued about foreign affairs since early concerns of potential threats to the newfound freedom and worries over the nation's liberty (LaFeber, 1987). It has been a highly debated aspect of the US and the Constitution. The Framers drafted the Constitution with the understanding that it

would mitigate the identified issues in the Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation was a vital transitional step from the ad hoc Continental Congress to the actual drafting of the Constitution and overall formation of the federal government (Swindler, 1981). One proposed change that stemmed from the Articles of Confederation was that too much power was placed in the hands of the Senate. It was through these changes that the expansion of power was determined to be under direct authority of the president in regard to foreign affairs and appointments to the national office (Rakove, 1982).

Economically and militarily, the US is strong. However, the US does not necessarily yield the power to dominate the entire international system with success. The Middle East has many different patterns and aspects. In the Middle East, the US would need to input social stratification and monopolization of the best brains in the government to determine true patterns of events requiring intervention (Buchan, 1969). A shift in defining the role of the US in the Middle East and its affairs, indicated significant domineering power struggles. The failure points resulted from the US never being able to identify reliable patterns in the Middle East. This has caused a prolonged wave of failures and long-term destabilization.

The Constitution does not explicitly address foreign affairs. However, the conceptual vagueness creates a general understanding of the US and its role in a global setting. Even though there are many disagreements when it comes to the Constitution, a primary one is that the US should not be involved in so many other countries' affairs. This is known as the Radical Imperialist Theory. This belief stems from the dominant image of the US after World War II, primarily through the 1960s, when many mainstream historians and political scientists felt there was more of an imperialistic approach to foreign affairs than a defensive one. Critics have felt

the US used an open-door method or policy to maintain access to favorable terms under the guise of various threats (Slater, 1976).

The Constitution does periodically explain proceedings on a foreign platform. Under Article I, Section 8, explains that one of the powers of Congress is, “To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes” (United States Congress, n.d.). The present-day interpretation of this section is vague and can lead to unrestricted decision-making that results in US one-sided vested interests. Throughout history, examples exist of times the US entered and chose not to enter into specific engagements for several reasons. For example, the US did not declare war on the Ottoman Empire in World War I but was involved in the Armenian question. The US also sent the King-Crane Commission to the Middle East to understand the needs of the Palestinians directly. This led to the agreement of the Balfour Declaration, which resulted in the US being reluctant to use its powers. During the same era, the US was fearing oil field exhaustion and began to have a keen interest in the Middle East. The State Department wanted access to the oil fields that were already being exploited. Through the open-door policy, the US began its oil holdings through the 1920s and 1930s in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East (Madadi, 1970).

The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and Britain’s promise to provide a Jewish homeland divided the lands and forced Arabs to determine larger national interests. France and Britain created the divide while also installing chosen regimes as the region grew volatile with time. The Cold War and its effects could clearly be felt in the Middle East as the US began its political involvement in response to the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 and the continuation of the oil discoveries in the Arabian Peninsula. In 1971, the US claimed its role as security to fill the gap left by Britain’s withdrawal from the Middle East. The US was determined to place ownership

of responsibility on Iran and Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia was considered an enemy of Israel. There was a miscalculation of understanding of the regional strife in the Middle East and the perceived political dimensions from the US. This ended up leading to the Yom Kippur War in 1973 (Rahman, 2010). The decades of US-involved tribulations in the Middle East create a stronger understanding of the debate on whether meddling from afar was, or ever can be, effective.

During the Yom Kippur War, the US also provided aid to Israel, while the Soviet Union provided aid to the Arabs. The ability for Israel to replenish based upon massive hits from the Arabs made the war quite difficult, with many lessons being learned from the perspective of the US. Israel had the upper hand and was able to hold up Syrian forces on the Golan Heights. Eighteen years later the US was able to use the lessons learned during its invasion of Iraq (Nowland, 2001). The intricacies of the Middle East were becoming more apparent on the world stage during this war, and it began to show the risks of being involved. The US found itself in three wars in the Middle East since 1990 and other interventions across the region. The relationship would continue to evolve over the decades as the US remained prevalent in the Middle East and its affairs, showing that there was no definitive ending.

Military Interventions and Consequences

Congress has been granted many powers in regard to foreign involvement. Section 8 of Article 1 also mentions the power, “To declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water in addition to provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions” (United States Constitution, n.d.). The subjectivity of Section 8 of Article 1 opens the door to interpretation. The decisions made by the US result from differing interpretations of the

Constitution. President Lyndon Johnson determined negotiations after three years of involvement in Vietnam, which is closely related to an imperialist system. “Lyndon Johnson escalated American involvement. Rather than secure a declaration of war, he seized upon an attack upon U.S. naval forces off the coast of North Vietnam to secure a congressional resolution authorizing him to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States” (Benedict, 2006, p. 335). Similar examples have existed throughout the Middle East.

The US has employed military intervention under rhetorical prose like “combating terrorism” and under other clandestine operations. Some of these operations took place during the 1960s, like the bombing runs of the US Air Force in Vietnam or the 23,000 troops sent to the Dominican Republic to assist in stabilization. These are examples that show significant public action is possible through influential policies and correlate strongly within the Middle East. The US places its emphasis on controlling major energy sources of the Arabian Peninsula and will oppose radical nationalists that get in the way of specific objectives while supporting moderate nationalists (Chomsky, 1987). The balance of the US to accept certain conditions and reject others creates conclusive beliefs that there are additional aspects to consider in regard to the Middle East.

Even though President George H.W. Bush stated that the US would not enter another quagmire in Iraq to protect Kurdish refugees, this would be the precursor of the Persian Gulf War. The statement was being made in the wake of the US and its involvement in Vietnam, specifically, how it divided a nation on the moral confusion around misinformed foreign policies. This became known as the Vietnam Syndrome. However, President Bush would go on to explain that Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait was similar to Germany’s invasion of Czechoslovakia,

which was coupled with credible media repetition reminders of World War II alliances. The re-legitimation of foreign affairs was facilitated through the call to action for the US and the dismissal of Vietnam being chalked up to an anomaly. Some felt the war was coincidentally timed with the proposed defense cuts and the ability to control oil in the region (Rowe, 1991). Again, the US entered into conflict with a different “reason” being shared with citizens to garner support.

The longer the US was involved in the Persian Gulf oil market, the more it created additional issues of entanglement on a global scale with other countries. The US involvement has created exposure points to other countries through the political landscape of alignment with their Western patronage. “Hegemony refers to presenting the interests of a ruling class as if they were universal interests” (Surlis, 2003, p. 599). The measurement of US hegemony ranges across diplomatic relations between external and regional states; military presence, security arrangements, and arms sales; and the economic ties along with energy agreements (Yolcu, 2020). The involvement of the US is broad stroke and brings forth additional interests that can be troublesome for regions as complex as the Persian Gulf.

On September 11, 2001, there was a large-scale terrorist attack carried out on US soil. Within a month of the attacks, the US would find itself embroiled in another conflict in the Middle East. The war was in Afghanistan, and its new government was already experiencing issues balancing the needs within the region. Early on, it was determined that the US and its military operations would not translate into harmony for Afghanistan. The cost of many civilian lives and the attempt to build a government around compromise would be put to the test (Veit, 2002). Some feel that the US military's attempt at the Global War on Terrorism makes Afghanistan just one stop of many throughout the region. The turmoil may reverberate for years

in the country, as the overall opinion of the US is not deemed overwhelmingly favorable for its war efforts.

The Middle East areas of conflict involving the US revealed additional relational considerations. Pakistan was the country that was housing Osama bin Laden, founder of al-Qaeda, and created a sense of concern around their involvement in international terrorism (Nadim, 2017). The death of Osama bin Laden also served as a reminder that an ideology is not simply killed at the source of the leader at that time. There is a distinction between the US and the futility of an actual war on terrorism or if such warfare was even realistic. The fact is that bin Laden has unleashed a dangerous ideology that will continue to be radicalized through a political lens amongst mobilized Muslims (Gunaratna, 2011).

The premise of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that may have been used to aid terrorist groups. The intense feelings after 9/11 helped amplify the concerns brought forth by the CIA regarding Iraq's regime. However, after the US involvement in Iraq, it was determined not to be factual as no WMDs were ever recovered in Iraq. As Iraq is a Shia-dominated state, the ability for the Sunni minorities to get overrun by Salafists from Syria was facilitated through the engagements from the US with the Iraqi army. This caused many important cities to be captured by an Islamist caliphate as forces were spread thin in the region. Again, there was a massive miscalculation of what it would mean to deal with the Sunni uprising, Shia violence, and Sunni-Shia warfare simultaneously (Gompert, Binnendijk, & Lin, 2014). The initial premise to remove Hussein from power was executed, but there was no real benefit to Iraq due to the fanning of flames of regional despair.

Economic Impact Considerations

The effect of President Johnson changed the face of the United States forever. Now, “No president has since asked Congress for a formal declaration of war, and every president has claimed the right to send troops into combat without one” (Benedict, 2006, p. 335). Foreign affairs have many layers and do not always consist of conflict and turmoil. “As a nation we have made peace and war; as a nation we have vanquished our common enemies; as a nation we have formed alliances, and made treaties, and entered into various compacts and conventions with foreign states” (Hamilton, Madison, Jay, & Goldman, 2008, p. 521). Treaties and alliances should form and impact the US positively. Presently, the majority of foreign affairs equate to lives, money, and resources lost for no repayment of any form for the aided nation. Over time, this becomes an extensive burden on taxpayers in the US. This is especially true when efforts are deemed unsuccessful or unsustainable.

Wars cost money. However, even peace-time agreements can be costly in other nations. The Middle East is no different. Not all money sent regarding foreign affairs is directly from the US Government. Many private organizations raise money and distribute it accordingly to particular nations in need. “Over the course of the last decade, the poverty rate in the United States rose from 11.3 percent to 15.0 percent. From a geographic perspective, the increase has been widespread, as 49 out of the 50 states have seen a rise in poverty rates from 1999 to 2011. This rise in poverty is linked closely to the current economic conditions” (Aliprantis, 2013, p. 7). The funding of each war in the Middle East was costly and resulted in long-term inefficiency that may have been better spent within the US.

Additionally, US citizens will feel the burden of the cost of wars for generations. The foreign affairs that the United States is involved in can also leave a country in a worse post-state. Disagreements about US involvement with different foreign affairs and the fact that some are

unwanted create a point of contention. The burden can be shifted to international non-profit government organizations (INGOs) as war expenditures are prolonged. “A growing number of INGOs dedicated to relief and development have taken on a substantial portion of this burden in response to Hurricane Katrina. It is estimated that INGOs dedicated to relief and development have combined expenditures totaling more than \$13 billion, nearly equal to the official aid budget of the United States in 2003” (Eikenberry, Arroyave, & Cooper, 2007, p. 7). The disproportionate money allocation of the past creates a stronger concern about how tax-funded dollars are being used towards things like the war on terrorism. Such efforts may not serve long-term benefits to the US and its financial preparedness.

The US must better understand its ineffectual contributions to other countries' affairs. The US cannot sustainably afford to continually send monetary, military, and political aid to countries seeking it with little long-term success. Foreign affairs cost a lot of money and a lot of resources. The resources and monetary aid can be depleted, which may cause US citizens to suffer. The US contributes billions of dollars to other nations every year. In fact, “Military aid, which comes through a funding stream known as Foreign Military Financing, has held steady at about \$1.3 billion since 1987 in Egypt alone. Economic aid, on the other hand, has fallen by more than two-thirds since 1998” (Marian & Theodoric, 2013, p. 2).

Billions to trillions of US dollars are allocated to other nations while little revenue is received in return, or any reciprocal service. In addition to expensive military aid, other nations were receiving US money for various funding reasons. “United States economic aid to Egypt has slumped from \$815 million in 1998 to about \$250 million in 2011” (Marian & Theodoric, 2013, p. 2). The numbers in the past were staggering and came with little beneficial returns for the US. Some argue that the aid helps other countries purchase more US goods and services.

However, many countries buy goods and services from the United States on credit, which translates to not getting paid immediately, which could be a default on promises. In 2010, the Obama administration agreed to fund Iraq roughly 3 billion dollars as the US would begin its withdrawal in 2011 (Laipson, 2010). The cost of war and rebuilding on a loose foundation creates post-state collapses.

Global Stability Fragmentation

The complexity of the issues grows exponentially when the US offers aid to other countries due to its global power position. The people of Iraq were asked to describe their lives before and after the 2003 invasion. “The proportion of Iraqis who say things are better now has slipped below half for the first time. Forty-two percent say their lives have improved, down from 51 percent in 2005 and 56 percent in 2004. Thirty-six percent now say things in their lives are worse today, up from 29 percent in the 2005 poll, which was taken during a period of relative optimism ahead of parliamentary elections. Twenty-two percent say their lives are about the same” (Cameron & Cohen, 2007, p. 1). The US does not always make a situation better but can complicate some that should be handled within the nation’s own government. Recovery is exacerbated if a sustainable long-term plan is not viable due to a lack of a solid foundation before withdrawal from a region or country.

The US is learning that it cannot fix the Middle East by waging war and attempting to change political structures. The US has its own problems that are intricate and require a lot of funding. Every conflict, examples of widespread hatred, dictatorships, and uprisings, cannot be defeated through the use of involvement in foreign affairs. As evident in Iraq, many countries would prefer no presence by the United States. The citizens of the US and those in need within its borders feel the economic impact of funding through the raising of taxes. Animosity can

build in the Middle East when the US is intervening in specific state affairs. A stance taken by Afghanistan was, “The United States should bow to Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai's wishes to speed up the US troop exit from his country, determining their assistance is not needed” (Lewis, 2012, p. 1).

The ability for a country to be free from policy failure is not plausible. The US has been involved in many failed military actions, peacekeeping initiatives, troop deployments, diplomatic agreements, economic sanctions, trade agreements, and other nations, and many more actions that begin to create larger problems (McConnell, 2018). The interjection of such strong foreign affairs involvements can create global destabilization while removing autonomy for other nations to grow. Destabilization can inadvertently happen from the US involvement in regime changes and the conclusion of times of war. The withdrawal from Iraq brought forth concerns of the renewal of sectarian violence because there was never a clear reconciliation of the main political groups (Laipson, 2010).

For over 20 years, the US was engaged in a war in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorist groups. Even with the killing of many senior leaders of the organizations, there is still a strong presence in the region. In 2020, under the Trump administration, the Doha Agreement was created if the US agreed to release Taliban prisoners and to withdraw US forces. This came at the agreement of also ensuring the Taliban would not overtake the region again. In 2021, the Biden administration wanted to stall the agreement to reevaluate its details. Once concerns of security escalations arose from this reevaluation period, there was a rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan that resulted in bipartisan criticism. Since the post-withdrawal, many younger Afghan people are concerned for their liberties and other freedoms, with the Taliban making it obvious that it would like total state control (Barak, 2021).

Summary

The stance of the US and its involvement in the Middle East has changed over time. The US has been involved in multiple wars and military interventions in many different nations within the Middle East. The expansion of foreign affairs in that part of the world has proved to be a challenging task for the US to endure any sort of consistent sustainability from previously taken actions. A divide exists amongst US citizens and the people of those affected nations in realizing actual gains from involvement in the Middle East. Three emerging themes revealed themselves during the review of literature that included viewpoints from the Middle East, strategic decision-making in the Middle East, and the post-state rebuilding from US involvement. Each theme is analyzed from four perspectives, including US Military Strategic Theory, Macroeconomics Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Failed State Theory. The theories will provide diverse insights into the emerging themes.

A lecture given at the Naval War College echoes the realities of the Middle East and the US's attempts for definitive normalcy per Western standards. The Middle East is undefinable and has been fighting since the Sumerians, Akkadians, and Egyptians. It was then the Hittites, Minoans, Hellenes, Medes and Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Gauls, Arabs, Tatars, and Mongols of the Ural-Altaic regions. There were also Crusaders from Europe, and for the last 300 years, Russia, France, and Britain have had a fierce competition. The Germans and Italians have joined, and lastly, the US has an interest in the Middle East (Wright, 1966). History has proven that the Middle East is a unique, intricately delicate, and complicated region to simply “fix” in the simplest of terms.

Analysis

The review of literature on the involvement of the US in the Middle East can be used to highlight the long-term struggles of attempting to navigate the region's intricacies. The intricacies that exist in the region of the Middle East are intensified due to the historical fact that one or more superpowers have always been involved in attempting to offset a rival or groups of powers (Mirkasymov, 2007). The themes that will be discussed will be examined through three distinct perspectives: viewpoints from the Middle East, strategic decision-making in the Middle East, and post-state rebuilding from US involvement, using four theories. The theories that will be utilized include Military Strategic Theory, Macroeconomics Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Failed State Theory.

Viewpoints from the Middle East

The Middle East is used to cover areas stretching from Morocco through Afghanistan, with the predominant religion being Muslim. The term the Middle East is not so synonymous with a geographical region as much as it is with the emotional overtones that exist through the rise of linguistic nationalism (Keddie, 1973). The Middle East has changed over time, and the intervention of other countries has led to this change based on various alignments to potential alliances with the US. The Middle East is complex and has many moving political parts that cause greater influences, both intended and inadvertent, as more countries attempt to make changes to their geopolitical landscape. Understanding the impact and views of those in the Middle East is critical to understanding why such divides exist or have existed in the past.

The US found itself in a dilemma when concerns bubbled up over the thought that inaction in the Middle East could directly result in nefarious action by the Soviet Union in the 1960s. However, the Middle East has viewed the US as a reactionary force to initiatives taken within the region. Specific examples include the need to adapt or alienate initiatives like

petroleum cartel politics and international financial stabilization (Binder, 1980). Some Middle Eastern nations view the US favorably, while others do not. Over the course of history, many of these stances and alliances have shifted with time. In 1974, the US was providing arms to Iran for the price of \$4.4 billion and was not willing to help Arab states in their attempt to seek a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Alnasrawi, 1989). Animosity towards the US serves as one example of many when the US had to determine who to help out and when to help them out. An enemy is typically made when assisting a sole country in the Middle East. It creates a greater imbalance in the Middle East, solely dependent on alignments with the US.

At one time, Military Strategy Theory was thought to be atheoretical. Nowadays, military staffs, experts, and others use many mini-theories of strategy to take advantage of collective wisdom within the field for military approaches (Bowdish, 2013). Military Strategy Theory is one that has a strong footing in the realm of the Middle East. Though much of the Middle East's history has changed drastically over the years, the US and its presence have remained in many parts of the region. The US has occupied Bahrain since 1948 as a strategic location to patrol the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Sea. The strategic location also allows the US to monitor the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb. In addition, the US has a military presence in Djibouti, a medical research center in Egypt, and strong security partnerships with Israel, to name a few key components (Wallin, 2018). The geography of much of the Middle East provides critical military strategic locations that are vital to security efforts carried out by the US.

Some Middle East countries have been victims of the failed sustainability of the US Military Strategic Theory, as evident after the departure of the US from Afghanistan. Within one year, there has been a sharp decline in security in Afghanistan, and the aid-dependent economy

has resulted in high unemployment (Berdal, 2016). The US has accidentally assisted in facilitating the Failed State Theory in that some of its actions caused short-term benefits with catastrophic, crippling long-term effects for countries. Failed State Theory is when a political organization wields exclusive coercive power over large areas that use their power to maintain order, create wars, engage with other states, and deliver social control prior to it failing (Gros, 2000). The historical success rate of the US in pulling out of a country seamlessly in the Middle East has not been high. The people of those countries must cope with the failed state aftermath that could go on for a prolonged period of time. It may even be felt generationally.

Some theorize that the failing states in the Middle East may not be as important as they once were to transitional terrorism due to the change from operating from a base to being more in line with autonomous cells in dozens of other countries (Patrick, 2007). The potential decrease in terrorism attractiveness is a benefit, but it does not fully eradicate the aftereffects of being in a failed state of affairs. When viewing Iraq, the country is still dealing with widespread corruption, systematic militia stations, terrorist operations, and issues with Iran. Additionally, Iraq is still in turmoil with Turkey and a fratricidal war between the Shia that could break out (Bakawan, 2023). Afghanistan and Iraq serve as the most current reminders of the inability to positively influence the political landscape of such countries in the Middle East. It also serves as a reminder of the additional countries that typically play a role in another country's failed state. The issues in the Middle East are not isolated or contained to one specific area, but rather widespread and integral.

Strategic Decision-Making in the Middle East

When analyzing the Middle East, it would be remiss not to consider the Postcolonial Theory and the relevance it has within the region. "Postcolonial theory principally addresses the

needs of the Western academy. It attempts to reform the intellectual and epistemological exclusions of this academy, and enables non-Western critics located in the West to present their cultural inheritance as knowledge” (Gandhi, 2020, p. ix). The Middle East has been subjected to so much involvement and influences that fall within the Postcolonial Theory that strategic decision-making in the Middle East would never solely be in the hands of those countries. It results in the influences of what is happening around them. When considering strategic decision-making in the Middle East, some will focus on the nature of Muslim politics that dealt with the developmental failures that were created through postcolonial regimes across the region that resulted in failed economies (Kandiyoti, 2002).

The ability for countries in the Middle East to make strategic decisions is typically based upon other alignments or beliefs of stances from the US. This is a remnant of postcolonial involvements stemming from the Ottoman Empire and British influences. The abilities of certain countries to make decisions and grow from cultural beliefs are problematic, as forced intervention erased much of that part of their history. Looking at the 2003 Iraqi invasion by the US left a lot of the Middle East divided. It also led to different strategies employed by different countries in response to it. The war was dangerous for the Iraqi people, but it served as a benefit from Iran’s history of invasion by Iraq in 1980. Kuwait’s beliefs were similar to Iran's reminders of their invasion from Iraq in 1991. The invasion in 1991 would have caused global disorder if Iraq had succeeded in gaining control of the Arabian Peninsula and the oil wells (Ofek, 2017). Suddenly, a realization forms upon the fact that much of the Middle East’s strategic decision-making is reliant on a postcolonial era of influence. Some countries try to overcome such obstacles, but it is problematic as it is embedded in their histories.

Throughout much of the research involving the Middle East, there is a recurrence of one vital resource that has been cited for many wars and involvements from other countries. Oil fields of the Middle East are massive and provide a certain stability to the global economy. Macroeconomics Theory deals with the holistic economy and key contributors that can aid or hurt it. The global reliance on oil places the Middle East extremely high in relevance and need for the rest of the world. Though oil reliance is not a new concept, it fits nicely into the modern theoretical developments of Macroeconomics Theory. A monetary authority that decides on policy should be able to understand and determine the needs for inflation to include output considerations (Chari & Kehoe, 2006). A strong economic contributor, though price varies, is oil, which is both a solution and a leading problem in the Middle East's ability to maintain peace.

As the US became the new Western power wanting oil, it was not through waging war but more so about establishing control over oil fields. The US eventually brought forth new militarization and wars that began to address authoritarian regimes that became a new geopolitical landscape (Jones, 2012). As the emphasis on oil grew stronger, much of the world relied on the stability of the Middle East and its strategy to produce oil. Much of the oil production in the Middle East goes to various parts of the world. Since Venezuela, Russia, and Iran have US sanctions on their oil, the Middle East is responsible for fueling China, India, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and the US (Young, 2025).

The Middle East's footprint on the global economy outlines the importance of understanding the impact of Macroeconomics Theory that can cause a ripple effect across the globe. Recently, under the Trump administration, the tariffs imposed on China showed the power of oil pricing on a macro level. The US tariffs on China drove oil prices down from \$12 to \$7 a barrel, which lowered the public economic health of much of the Middle East (Young,

2025). The Middle East must be constantly vigilant and understanding of oil volatility and induced wars as a larger part of their strategic thinking.

Post-State Rebuilding from US Involvement

In recent years, Iraq and Afghanistan have been suitable case studies for understanding a post-state rebuilding from US involvement. Iran can also be viewed through a different lens to create a stronger understanding of post-state rebuilding after the discontinuation of certain agreements. The withdrawal from Iraq is felt more as a global strategy of disengagement of the Middle East, and the 2018 decision to leave the Vienna agreement has left tensions high with Iraq and Iran (de Busschère, 2023). The timing of two countries in the Middle East to face quite different exoduses of support from the US helps highlight how delicate the balance is in their foreign affairs. Iraq Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) determined that at least 157 construction projects would need to be completed in ten years to rebuild hospitals, schools, homes, roads, and service infrastructure after the war with the US (Ala'Aldeen, 2019).

The country's recovery will take a long time to reach any sense of community stabilization. The US Military Strategic Theory on the front end of involvement has assisted in reaffirming the Failed State Theory within Iraq's long-term rebuilding phase. Many policy-makers believe that the US attempting to provide Afghanistan and Iraq with a democratic influence would allow them to be free from targeting of terrorism and strategic base positioning (Jabareen, 2013). However, a failed state effect happens once the US withdraws its resources, like troops, money, and influence, from a region. This is not to state that the US should remain in such countries, but rather to suggest that the best course of action may be no involvement at all. The subsequent turmoil inflicted upon a country is most felt by innocent bystanders of the conflict itself.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has found key lessons from its involvement in Afghanistan. There needs to be a strategic plan backed by sustainable investments due to the fact that there was never enough funding to assist in an Afghan peace-and-state-building mission. NATO also identified that neighborhood and local grievances must be understood. Lastly, NATO feels that no one should be obsessed with military state-building (Zyla & Grant, 2022). The key concepts are instrumental in ensuring that the US does not accidentally spiral a country, or countries, into a failed state of affairs after attempting to assist them. This creates additional issues for the recovering country that will potentially require more funding after a military state-building attempt. Once the US withdraws from that part of the Middle East, it resets the clock to a time even earlier than intervention.

Conclusion

The research reviewed can be used to reaffirm the support for the conclusion that the US involvement in the Middle East is not always in the best interest of regional stability. This was concluded through the review of research specifically targeting the viewpoints from the Middle East, strategic decision-making in the Middle East, and post-state rebuilding from US involvement. The US Military Strategic Theory was able to be applied to explain the strategic theories behind the US and its choice of involvement or noninvolvement in different parts of the Middle East at key times. Additionally, the emphasis on the oil fields of the Middle East was able to be expanded upon through the Macroeconomics Theory to show the correlation of need and fighting for an area that produces much of the oil used in Asia and the US.

The Failed State Theory identified critical recovery of countries in the Middle East that were on a long road to recovery after US involvement. Iraq and Afghanistan display a failed state status as the US departed from their countries. The causation of such a state is evident from

a short-term stabilization from US involvement. However, no long-term strategies are employed to continue it after the withdrawal. Lastly, Postcolonial Theory creates a stronger understanding of the identity crisis that is facing the Middle East due to no direct fault of its own. The rise and fall of the attempt at state-led developmentalism, and the lack of post-independence states have been difficult for the Middle East (Kandiyoti, 2002). The Middle East must now work towards a new chapter that will have a higher level of success through sustainable, homegrown ideals. Localized diplomacy should be well received by those seeking stabilization.

Ethical Considerations

The failure of the US to strengthen its overall vision of foreign affairs is vital to the long-term success of the Middle East. If the US continues to employ militarization and war to attempt to force change in the Middle East, then history is certainly likely to repeat itself. This will become an ethical crisis of great magnitude, given the number of innocent people who become casualties of wars that are undertaken on some false premises. The US must reconvene its approach to the Middle East and understand the economic recovery of such nations and the influences that may follow. The aftermath of a US withdrawal is difficult for countries that have third-world statuses to overcome. The people of such countries may find themselves in a generational battle to reach normalcy and stability.

The US should continue to attempt to strengthen relationships with key countries in the Middle East since there is a stronger need for global security of the world. The Middle East provides many strategic positioning locations and access to vital waterways. If the US cannot strengthen these relationships, ethical considerations for future warfare should surely be considered as a strong incentive to cultivate those relationships. The US is working on a better understanding of an agreement for the Middle East. The agreement states that the Middle East

should, “Not act as a safe haven or breeding ground for Jihadist terrorists; not be dominated by any power hostile to the US; and contribute to a stable global emergency market” (Dagher, 2021, pp. 2-3). These types of relationships will help to mitigate additional ethical concerns.

The overall strategy from the US should be reconsidered regarding its Global War on Terrorism. As highlighted throughout much of the reviewed research, the US and its attempt to fight terrorism have come at a great cost in various parts of the Middle East. The destabilization has yielded high concerns for the ethical consideration of those involved. The reality is that elimination of global terrorism is far off, and the US should consider a focus on a wider circle of Muslims who could be influenced by messaging from terrorists (Benjamin, Crenshaw, & Byman, 2003). Creating more unity in an approach to peace and stability would result in fewer deaths, destruction, and long-lasting economic hits. The US could rid itself of continuing down the same type of strategic path that results in pure turmoil and destabilization.

Another potential ethical consideration is the continuation of energy security over human rights and diplomacy. The coercive actions brought forth through military intervention are heavily reliant on the need to access and secure oil fields. The need for oil is obvious and important. However, ethically, the US cannot continue to make that one of the sole purposes of its involvement in the Middle East. The US should better understand that the future of the Middle East is in its current structure as opposed to a forced one through military action.

People in the Middle East want political freedom, and their governments acknowledge the need for reform. Yet the region appears to repel democracy. Arab regimes only concede women’s rights and elections to appease their critics at home and abroad. If democracy arrives in the Middle East, it will not be due to the efforts of liberal activists

or their Western supporters but to the very same Islamist parties that many now see as the chief obstacle to change (Ottaway & Carothers, 2004, p. 22).

The Middle East must be the one to find its future state and capitalize on the wants for political freedoms. Some of the countries show signs of understanding of what their people want, and if there is involvement from the US, it may create a longer timeline. The Trump administration recently took a step in the direction of diplomacy, with time being the true test for success with Israel and Palestine's relations.

We are united in our determination to dismantle extremism and radicalization in all its forms. No society can flourish when violence and racism is normalized, or when radical ideologies threaten the fabric of civil life. We commit to addressing the conditions that enable extremism and to promoting education, opportunity, and mutual respect as foundations for lasting peace (White House, 2025).

Policy Recommendations

The US involvement in the Middle East is not something that will simply cease to exist someday, so it is important to consider policy recommendations that may create a greater likelihood of success. The following policy recommendations are to address the vulnerabilities that exist in the current antiquated model of raw military power and forced political ideologies.

Policy Recommendation #1:

The US should redirect its focus towards regional partnership by empowering countries in the Middle East to engage in meaningful conversations through a specific form of diplomacy. Fortunately, this has already been happening in parts of the Middle East. Violence and conflict are not the only things happening in the Middle East, and shifting people's first impressions of the region may highlight the diplomacy that is currently at work (Hines, 2021). The US should

be mindful in how it addresses and positions its stance in the diplomacy that is already underway. As made evident, the action the US takes or the conversations with certain countries can counteract certain efforts being made by those countries.

The diplomacy should be deliberate and should also focus on the Middle East, strengthening its foundations to create a strong, economically-backed future. It must change its chokehold on the Middle East and its operating posture. It must also consider whether there can be the facilitation of strengthening economic partnerships within the Middle East by neutrally hosting meetings.

Current American policy in the greater Middle East region appears to be no different on three similar points: Symbolic pursuit of globally defeating all terrorists, waging small wars on the periphery without a fully mobilized commitment, and a persistent policy of fighting terrorists instead of dealing with the structural forces that originally created them (Burke & Matissek, 2020, p. 1).

The US can get away from the stigma that may surround it in its approach to terrorism and the Middle East. However, it will require a level of trust and commitment to find long-term partnerships not forged in the blood of war.

Policy Recommendation #2:

The US should consider long-term impacts from military interventions and determine if a reconstruction period would be appropriate. The aftermath of many wars in the Middle East resulted in a failed state for different countries. If an analysis could be conducted, it may be beneficial in creating a better understanding of simulation models and exercises. Since failed states happen after the US involvement and subsequent withdrawal, it is vital for the US to create a policy to identify what post-conflict considerations should truly be made. Iraq was not a failed

state until after the US got involved, Gaza only began to fail after outside influences, and so it is important to understand post-conflict reconstruction to create a stronger understanding (Jabareen, 2013).

Until the lasting effects of the involvement, and the type of involvement the US determines is most appropriate, are fully understood, it will be difficult to gauge success based solely on invading a country. Historical examples show this to be an important consideration for policy to be rigorous when working towards military strategy and attempts for stabilization. The economic impact and return on investment can be borderline null in some of the engagements by the US. The US paid heavily in humans and financially to ensure a regime change in Iraq for nothing of value in return (Ala'Aldeen, 2019). One should question if such a policy was understood and adhered to, it may not have made sense to invade Iraq.

Policy Recommendation #3:

The final recommendation is for the US to help the Middle East form greater security cooperation in the region. The need for the US to fill in for Britain's once rule of the region is not going to provide the ability to be the security guarantor. In fact, as the US expanded its presence in the Gulf is when many countries in the Middle East took notice by resisting the interventions (Rahman, 2010). A softer approach should be taken that empowers the countries in the Middle East to start working together and finding common ground through multinational projects like pipelines.

Through the evolution of partnership, the need to strengthen security efforts as a region is likely to find much more success. Then, the alliances with the US and other Western countries would not amplify the political ideals and affiliations of those in the Middle East. It would provide discussion about regional progression and working towards listening to the people who

live there and want certain political protections. The US could help in this by understanding that the Middle East can work together when more common goals are obvious and not based upon fearmongering of military intervention.

Summary

The policy recommendation proposal is based upon the justification that was provided through the review of literature, the problem statement, and the consideration of theoretical frameworks to review the subject from diverse lenses. The US has been unsuccessful in its goal to assist in providing stabilization to the Middle East. It is difficult to truly determine if the Middle East would be more stable if the US took a different approach. Maybe if the US were engaged more heavily with Libya or Syria, things could have been better. The reality is that when comprehensively evaluating the US and its involvement in the Middle East, there is a multitude of analytical challenges and methodological hurdles (Brynen, 2016). It is believed that through the appropriate policy recommendations, the US could overcome some historical failures that serve as examples of longer-term lasting effects of current involvement.

Three analyses of themes were conducted through three different perspectives. The themes include viewpoints from the Middle East, strategic decision-making in the Middle East, and post-state rebuilding from US involvement. In order to understand the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the US and its involvement in the Middle East requires viewing historical trends and patterns. It is equally important to understand the views from the Middle East to begin to better understand the firsthand impacts felt, rather good or bad. Examples from the military engagements of the US with Afghanistan and Iraq are highlighted for recency's sake in the strategic decision-making that the Middle East must consider. The engagement in Iraq helped describe the post-state rebuilding from the US and its actions taken in 2003. The US

intelligence and CIA failed when they claimed aluminum-tubes were to be used towards erroneous WMD and on the verge of fantasy (Ofek, 2017). The conflict that ensued helped to create a better understanding of the need to fully comprehend post-state rebuilding.

A key policy change for consideration is the need for the US to empower the countries within the Middle East to engage in more long-term diplomatic efforts that have a multinational benefit. There are already acts of diplomacy that are happening in the Middle East. The US needs to help cultivate those relationships and try to lessen the impact of interjection. This is especially true when it comes to military intervention. If the US can begin to understand the regional network of successes that are taking place in the Middle East, it may provide reaffirmation that it is working. Diplomacy is happening in the Middle East with the Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME), a particle accelerator, the Dolphin Gas Project, and the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC) are all examples of multiple Middle Eastern countries partaking in a greater good of partnership (Hines, 2021).

The second policy recommendation revolves around the further development of the initial theme of post-conflict reconstruction of areas that find themselves on the front line of a US withdrawal. Some countries in the Middle East have their greatest struggles once the US is no longer occupying their country. This can result in a short-term security solution and faux stabilization based upon military force. A post-conflict reconstruction requires specific sequences. It involves the political reconstruction, economic reconstruction, social reconstruction, and provision for general security (Jabareen, 2013). The final post-reconstruction sequence is one that became the third long-term policy recommendation.

The final recommendation is for the US to help the Middle East form a greater security cooperation in the region. History shows that smaller and weaker militaries relied on the US for preservation of security and sovereignty during the heavy involvement in the Gulf States (Rahman, 2010). The region cannot develop autonomous militaries that can provide true long-term security if the US is “masking” the significant issues that are being faced. The need for a more regionalized security approach is necessary for the Middle East to begin to find mutual stabilization based upon locally posted militaries throughout the region.

Ethical considerations were identified for the current vulnerabilities of current US models involving the US and future failures of policies. Understanding the great loss of life is one of the most important ethical considerations to fully analyze. The wars that the US has been involved in within the Middle East have caused mass casualties of those directly involved in the conflict and others that simply were collateral damage. Understanding the immense price to be paid for such losses should be better implemented into the planning of US involvement in the Middle East. This is true when considering the long-term effects of such losses. The US has been interested in oil in the Middle East, but this does not mean that basic human rights should be tarnished in the pursuit of such energy reliance. Lastly, and most holistically, the US must strategize its Global War on Terrorism. “By occupying Iraq, the United States has given al-Qaeda a major opportunity to drive home its argument that the leader of world infidelity seeks to destroy Islam and subjugate its believers” (Benjamin, Crenshaw, & Byman, 2003, p. 4).

In conclusion, the policy recommendations were provided and reaffirmed within the review of literature. The policy recommendations included the need for better cultivation of regional diplomacy amongst Middle East countries, the need to better understand post-conflict reconstruction, and the need to let the Middle East strengthen regional security. In the

development and implementation of the policy recommendations, it is believed that the US would have a more favorable outcome to its overall goal of lifting up the Middle East in its pursuit of regional stabilization. Lastly, the existing literature outlines the aftermath of the current stances taken by the US in the Middle East. There were examples of the rebuilding phase in Iraq and Afghanistan, which created a stronger understanding of the actual cost of intervention.

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