

Shifting Geopolitics and Policy Interplay in the U.S.–Iran–UK Triad: Recent Insights into Energy Security, Hegemony Decline and Domestic Dynamics

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*The authors declare
that no funding was
received for this work.*



Received: 01-August-2025

Accepted: 10-August-2025

Published: 12-August-2025

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This article is published by **MSI
Publishers** in **MSI Journal of
Multidisciplinary Research
(MSIJMR)**

ISSN 3049-0669 (Online)

Volume: 2, Issue: 8 (August-2025)

Introduction

The past five years have witnessed a confluence of geopolitical, economic and societal shifts that reshape longstanding assumptions about power and policy in the Middle East. Understanding this landscape requires an integrated analysis that connects U.S.–UK energy security interests, Iran’s domestic and foreign policy behaviour, the role of think tanks in U.S. policymaking, the evolution of U.S. foreign policy doctrines and the broader decline of American hegemony. Recent developments — such as renewed hostilities between Iran, Israel and the United States in 2025, intensifying U.S.–China competition, the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) assertive foreign policy and new projects like Project 2025 designed by conservative think tanks — provide empirical touchpoints for this analysis. The sections below synthesise scholarly literature with up-to-date data to illuminate causal relationships among these phenomena.

U.S.–UK Energy Security Strategy in the Persian Gulf

Energy security remains a cornerstone of U.S. and UK engagement in the Persian Gulf. At the strategic level, London

and Washington share an interest in preserving open sea lanes through the Strait of Hormuz, which channels about 20 % of global oil consumption. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, roughly 20 million barrels per day of oil — equivalent to one fifth of world petroleum consumption — transited the Strait in 2024, and volumes remained high through early 2025. The same report notes that the strait offers few alternatives; even short disruptions raise shipping costs and global prices. When the Iran–Israel conflict escalated in mid-2025, analysts worried that Iran might target this chokepoint; however, tanker traffic continued, illustrating both the strait’s resilience and its fragility. To mitigate vulnerability, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have developed pipelines bypassing Hormuz, collectively capable of rerouting about 2.6 million barrels per day. The UAE’s Fujairah pipeline, for example, has been increasingly used following refinery upgrades that enable more local processing of heavy crude. Meanwhile, Iran’s Goreh–Jask pipeline, inaugurated in 2021, still exports less than 70 000 b/d and did not significantly reduce dependence on Hormuz. These developments show how regional actors adapt infrastructure to maintain export capacity amid geopolitical risk, reinforcing Anglo American incentives to secure maritime routes.

Domestic Politics and Think Tank Agendas

The intellectual infrastructure that shapes U.S. domestic and foreign policy has become increasingly ideologically driven. Research from the Niskanen Center shows how partisan think tanks, funded by wealthy donors, have replaced nonpartisan expertise in producing policy proposals; the Heritage Foundation and the Center for American Progress provide readymade legislation and staffing pools for Republican and Democratic administrations, respectively. In the economic sphere, debates over supply side versus demand driven strategies often mirror these ideological divisions. A recent manifestation of this ideological policymaking is Project 2025, a 900-page blueprint produced by former Trump officials in partnership with the Heritage Foundation. The American Civil Liberties Union warns that the plan outlines a radical restructuring of the federal executive branch, with proposals to curtail reproductive rights, LGBTQ protections and immigration policies. As a blueprint for

a possible second Trump administration, Project 2025 exemplifies how conservative think tanks aim to institutionalise a nationalist agenda.

The Trump Doctrine Revisited

Donald Trump's return to the presidency in January 2025 has revived debates about the "Trump doctrine" and its impact on immigration, security and diplomacy. The review of *Waking Up from an American Dream* emphasised that Trump's first term prioritised national security and populist rhetoric, blending Jacksonian unilateralism with selective engagement. In his second term, the same patterns reemerge: at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025, U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance castigated European allies for inadequate defence spending, signalling a return to transactional diplomacy. American tariffs on European steel and aluminium reinforced perceptions of U.S. economic nationalism. For immigration, Trump's administration continues to implement restrictive measures under the guise of national security, aligning with earlier research that sees immigration and security as mutually reinforcing pillars of Trump's foreign policy.

Iran–U.S. Relations and Nuclear Negotiations

Relations between Iran and the United States entered a volatile phase in 2025. The Council on Foreign Relations reports that after withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, President Trump reinstated the "maximum pressure" campaign and later opened direct negotiations after his reelection; Israel opposed these talks, citing Iran's nuclear ambitions. The conflict escalated in June 2025 when the United States attacked Iranian nuclear facilities, prompting Iranian missile strikes on U.S. forces in Qatar and ultimately leading to a ceasefire. At the diplomatic level, the European Parliament's think tank notes that Oman has mediated indirect U.S.–Iran talks since April 2025, but a new deal remains elusive. Iran demands recognition of its right to enrich uranium at low levels (around 3.67 %) and insists on sanctions relief, while the United States proposes more stringent caps and conditions. The EU and Gulf states support reviving the JCPOA, whereas Russia and China advocate for Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology.

This stalemate underscores the complex web of regional and global interests that make a durable agreement difficult.

Iran's Proxy Strategy and Domestic Challenges

Iran's external behaviour is closely linked to its domestic vulnerabilities. Studies on Iran's proxy strategy emphasise that Tehran employs non state actors in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen to extend its influence and deter adversaries; however, this approach also destabilises the region by provoking counter interventions. The sustainability of Iran's regional activism is threatened by internal socioeconomic pressures. A June 2025 report by Iran News Update reveals that the number of Iranian student migrants has surpassed 100 000 — more than double the figure from 2010 — and only about 1 % are expected to return. The exodus accelerates due to economic crisis, political repression and the perceived lack of prospects. Officials acknowledge that the average age of emigrants has dropped below 18 and that 68 % of young Iranians wish to emigrate. Such “irretrievable elite flight” drains human capital and limits the state's capacity to innovate and govern effectively. The regime's inability to reform structural dysfunction fuels both domestic unrest and reliance on proxies abroad, creating a feedback loop between internal weakness and external aggression.

Decline of American Hegemony and China's Ascendance

The 2025 Munich Security Conference highlighted the fragility of U.S. leadership. Observers noted that the decline of American hegemony was “increasingly evident” as President Trump's protectionist rhetoric alienated European allies and opened space for Chinese diplomacy. China's foreign minister Wang Yi used the conference to advocate for a multipolar world order based on “equality and order,” appealing to Europeans anxious about American unpredictability. The conference's official report implicitly acknowledged that the unipolar era has ended. This geopolitical shift has regional implications: Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE maintain security ties with the United States yet deepen economic and technological partnerships with China, particularly through AI and infrastructure cooperation. These dynamics

illustrate how the erosion of U.S. dominance facilitates a more fluid, multipolar Middle Eastern order in which states hedge between great powers.

UAE Foreign Policy since 2018

The UAE has pursued an ambitious and diversified foreign policy over the past seven years. A discourse analysis of UAE foreign policy notes that since 2018, the country has moved from a policy of neutrality and Arab solidarity toward participation in Arab–Western alliances and normalization with Israel. Its objectives include countering regional rivals, gaining Arab and Islamic leadership, strengthening maritime security and diversifying the economy. Key decisions include the 2020 Abraham Accords with Israel, expansion of feminist policies, and trade agreements with India, Britain, Turkey, South Korea, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Israel. These policies reflect the UAE’s broader strategy of leveraging economic diversification and technological innovation to enhance national power while maintaining security partnerships with the United States and hedging with China. Emirati officials emphasise “peace over provocation” and invest in AI partnerships with U.S. firms, such as the U.S.–UAE AI Acceleration Partnership and projects linking Saudi Arabia’s wealth fund with Google Cloud.

Persistent Challenges in Iranian–U.S. Negotiations and Regional Discord

Despite periodic openings, deep mistrust continues to hinder U.S.–Iran negotiations. Analysts argue that both sides talk past each other: Washington frames negotiations through a Libya style disarmament model, while Tehran demands respect for its security concerns and sovereign rights, making compromise unlikely. The Middle East’s broader discord cannot be reduced to sectarianism alone; economic stagnation, governance deficits and external interventions all contribute to instability. The literature underscores that Iranian proxies respond as much to local grievances as to Tehran’s directives, and that U.S. strategies oscillate between deterrence and engagement, often without addressing root causes.

Conclusion

The interplay between U.S.–UK energy security strategy, think tank driven domestic agendas, Iranian domestic challenges and declining U.S. hegemony reveals a

complex policy environment. Securing the Strait of Hormuz remains essential for global energy markets, yet regional actors are building alternatives that may dilute Anglo American leverage. Conservative think tanks are preparing radical administrative reforms that would reshape U.S. governance, while liberal counterparts advocate for expansive social policies. Trump's return underscores the persistence of nationalist foreign policy doctrines that prioritise unilateral action and transactional diplomacy. Iran's mix of assertive proxy warfare abroad and severe brain drain at home highlights the contradictions of a state seeking regional influence while losing its human capital. Finally, the waning of U.S. hegemony and the rise of China encourage Middle Eastern states like the UAE or Saudi Arabia to pursue diversified partnerships, thereby accelerating a shift toward a multipolar regional order. Future research should examine how these trends interact over time, particularly whether energy diversification and technological cooperation can mitigate geopolitical tensions or further entrench strategic rivalries. (for the futuristic studies, readers can also check this source)

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