

Intersections of Power: An Academic and Political Analysis of U.S.–Iran Relations, Think Tank Influence and Middle Eastern Geopolitics

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Introduction

The contemporary geopolitics of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf are shaped by interlocking strands of energy security, ideological competition, domestic politics and the roles of non state actors. This review synthesises scholarship on the strategic alignment of the United States and United Kingdom, the polarising effects of think tanks in American domestic policy, the implications of the Trump administration's immigration and security doctrines, and the evolving contours of U.S.–Iran relations. It also considers the influence of proxy warfare, the cultural interpretation of international relations through literature, the causes of Iran's brain drain, and the broader regional dynamics—including the decline of U.S. hegemony and the rise of China—culminating in an examination of nuclear negotiations and the foreign policies of emerging regional actors such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By integrating these diverse studies, the review aims to illuminate how domestic and international pressures interact to shape policy outcomes.

Energy Security and Great Power Alignment

Control over global energy resources has long underpinned U.S. and U.K. influence in the Persian Gulf. A qualitative content analysis of the “dual containment” era demonstrates that Anglo American strategies focused on securing sea lanes and forging ties with key producers, notably Saudi Arabia, to mitigate ideological disparities. This strategic alignment rested on maintaining open transit routes for oil, deterring regional adversaries, and establishing military facilities that projected power beyond the Gulf. The persistence of this strategy highlights how energy security serves as both a foreign policy objective and a domestic economic concern, binding Washington and London into a shared approach.

Think Tanks and Domestic Economic Polarization

Domestic policy debates in the United States increasingly rely on think tanks that are ideologically aligned with political parties. Studies of U.S. economic strategies reveal that conservative institutes advocate capital driven growth and deregulation, while progressive organizations emphasise demand driven policies and social safety nets. These think tanks not only supply research but also act as “policy entrepreneurs,” promoting legislative agendas and staffing government positions. The reliance on privately funded, partisan expertise has intensified polarization, reducing the influence of neutral academic research. This dynamic feeds back into foreign policy: hawkish institutes often lobby for sanctions and military interventions, whereas dovish organizations support diplomacy, thus shaping how administrations engage with adversaries such as Iran.

The Trump Doctrine: Immigration, Security and Diplomacy

The Trump administration redefined American foreign policy through a triad of immigration restriction, security maximization and transactional diplomacy. A review of the book *Waking Up from an American Dream* notes that the doctrine drew on Jacksonian populism, emphasizing the need to protect citizens from perceived threats and to renegotiate agreements deemed unfavorable. The travel bans and tightened border controls reflected a conflation of immigration with security; sanctions and pressure campaigns replaced multilateral engagement; and summitry with North

Korea and pressure on NATO allies underscored the administration's preference for bilateral deals. These choices reverberated in the Middle East, where the Trump team withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and pursued a "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran .

Historical Trajectories of Iran–U.S. Relations

Scholarship on post 1979 relations between Iran and the United States highlights a complex interplay of ideology, geopolitics and domestic contingencies. One extended review of the book *Sorry, How Can I Get to Washington?* divides the bilateral relationship into successive periods, analysing events such as the hostage crisis, the Iran–Iraq war, and multiple rounds of sanctions and diplomacy. The author argues that mutual mistrust, compounded by the absence of sustained diplomatic contact, has created a cycle of misperceptions. Iranian leaders draw on revolutionary legitimacy and resistance narratives, while U.S. administrations alternate between containment and limited engagement. This historical lens underscores how deeply entrenched narratives constrain policy innovation.

Proxy Warfare and Regional Deterrence

Iran's reliance on proxy forces is a central element of its regional strategy. In Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, Tehran sponsors non state actors that serve as both deterrent and instrument of influence. These proxies complicate regional security by blurring distinctions between state and non-state violence and by providing Iran with plausible deniability. The literature debates whether this model primarily deters adversaries or destabilizes neighbors; a balanced assessment suggests that while proxies can raise the costs of direct confrontation, they also provoke counter alliances and perpetuate cycles of sectarian conflict. Understanding the logic of proxy deployment is essential for designing effective policy responses.

Cultural Reflections: Literature as Think Tank

Intellectual history and cultural analysis can complement political science by illuminating the values that guide foreign policy. A recent article examining the *Adventures of Two Captains* trilogy argues that modern literature can function like a

think tank by offering narratives that shape public perceptions. The authors contend that characters in the trilogy represent competing ideologies, and their interactions mirror debates within policy communities. By portraying U.S. exceptionalism in a literary setting, the work invites readers to reflect on how stories of heroism, exploration and moral mission influence actual decision makers. This approach suggests that studying cultural texts alongside policy documents can enrich our understanding of international relations.

Brain Drain and Policy Failures in Iran

Iran's domestic challenges, particularly the exodus of highly educated citizens, are critical to its capacity to engage internationally. Analyses of migration trends reveal that state repression, economic stagnation and lack of academic freedom drive scientists, engineers and artists to emigrate. The brain drain deprives Iran of expertise needed for technological innovation and undermines its negotiating leverage. Policy prescriptions include creating supportive research environments, reducing corruption, and offering incentives for expatriates to return. Without addressing these internal weaknesses, Tehran's ability to diversify its economy and participate in high stakes diplomacy will remain limited.

Navigating Engagement: U.S. Options Toward Iran

Strategic analyses of U.S. engagement with Iran emphasize the interplay of regional power balances, nuclear proliferation concerns and geopolitical competition. One study suggests that while Iran lacks the systemic influence of China or Russia, U.S. policymakers still seek to constrain its capabilities through sanctions, regime change pressures and support for regional rivals. Implementing these strategies has proved challenging because of Iran's resilience, shifting regional alliances and the involvement of external factors such as Russia and China. The article frames the future of U.S.–Iran engagement as a scenario in which both sides must weigh the costs of confrontation against the benefits of limited cooperation on shared interests like counterterrorism and regional stability.

Sources of Discord in the Middle East

Conflict in the Middle East arises from a confluence of historical grievances, religious divides, resource competition and external interventions. A review article describes the region as a “magnificent mosaic” where multiple cultures and faiths intersect. The authors argue that understanding the causes of discord requires analyzing how identity, ideology and socio-economic factors interact. They call attention to colonial legacies, competition over water and oil, and enduring sectarian schisms. The complexity of these factors suggests that simplistic explanations—such as attributing violence solely to religion or resources represent the region’s dynamics. A holistic approach that incorporates geopolitical, cultural and economic dimensions is necessary for effective conflict resolution.

Negotiation Obstacles and Future Prospects

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the nuclear impasse have repeatedly been hampered by unrealistic expectations and mismatched strategies. Analysts argue that U.S. demands for Iran to abandon its nuclear programme entirely resemble the Libya disarmament model—an expectation that Iranian leaders view as unrealistic. Such demands lead Tehran to question Washington’s commitment to mutual concessions. The prospective return to the JCPOA is further complicated by domestic politics in both countries, regional conflicts such as the Gaza war, and the role of other global powers. These obstacles suggest that future negotiations must accommodate political realities and craft incremental steps to rebuild trust.

U.S. Counterterrorism Doctrine

The U.S. National Security Strategy of 2002 codified an expansive approach to counterterrorism, pledging to employ “every tool”—from military force and homeland defence to law enforcement and intelligence—to prevent attacks. The strategy asserts that states supporting terrorism will be held accountable and that the United States reserves the right to take pre-emptive action against emerging threats. This doctrine has justified interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and continues to inform policies such as drone strikes and counterterrorism partnerships. Critics argue that broad mandates for pre-emption risk eroding international norms and entangling

the U.S. in perpetual conflict. Nonetheless, the doctrine remains a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy.

Identity Politics and Migration

Debates over national identity intersect with foreign policy through domestic attitudes toward immigration. Social research on Mexican immigrants finds that discrimination varies by skin colour, education and socio-economic status; darker and more educated Mexican Americans report greater stereotyping and hostile treatment. This racialisation influences immigration policies and shapes public perceptions of who is “American.” Such domestic dynamics can spill over into foreign policy when anti-immigrant sentiment informs approaches to refugees or when diaspora communities lobby for or against U.S. intervention abroad. The recognition of these linkages highlights the importance of integrating social policy considerations into discussions of international relations.

Decline of American Hegemony and the Rise of Multipolarism

Scholars and practitioners note that U.S. dominance in the Middle East is waning as new actors assert themselves. An interview with international relations scholar Uzma Siraj observes that shifting alliances and domestic pressures weaken U.S. hegemony, opening space for other contenders but not entirely displacing Washington. The interview highlights China’s increasing role as mediator, particularly its efforts to broker détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia in line with its Belt and Road Initiative. At the same time, a speech at the Middle East Policy Council points out that China’s rapid economic rise and America’s self-inflicted political and economic challenges fuel speculation about a Sino American power shift. The speaker notes that the United States continues to spend more on its military than the rest of the world combined, yet growing Chinese influence illustrates the erosion of unipolarity. Together these analyses suggest that the Middle East may evolve toward a multipolar order in which regional states, China, Russia and other powers share influence.

Modelling Nuclear Negotiations Using Fuzzy Logic

Quantitative approaches can illuminate factors shaping complex negotiations. A 2023 study employs a type two fuzzy method and partial least squares modelling to analyse determinants of Iran's nuclear talks with the P5+1 countries. Surveying experts through snowball sampling, the authors identify eight variables that influence negotiations: individual resources (0.441), role resources (0.485), government variables (0.76), social changes (0.593), international variables (0.573), internal environment (0.582), informal influential groups (0.834) and sanctions (0.149). These coefficients indicate that domestic factors and informal networks carry significant weight, challenging assumptions that external pressures alone determine outcomes. The fuzzy approach captures the uncertainty inherent in diplomatic bargaining and provides a framework for scenario analysis.

UAE Foreign Policy Patterns since 2018

The foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates has undergone marked transformation since 2018. Discourse analysis shows that the UAE has shifted from neutral, Arab centric policies toward active participation in regional and global alliances. Key decisions include normalising relations with Israel, signing comprehensive trade agreements with India, Britain, Turkey and South Korea, and expanding feminist policies and de-escalation initiatives. These moves aim to counter the influence of rival powers, enhance maritime security, position the UAE as a leader in the Arab and Islamic worlds and diversify the country's economy. The UAE's assertive posture reflects a broader trend of middle powers seeking autonomy amid shifting global hierarchies (for a more comprehensive study regarding other broader related aspects check the following source).

Conclusion

The articles reviewed here collectively illustrate the intricate interplay between domestic politics, ideological narratives and international structures. Energy security considerations tie the United States and United Kingdom to the Persian Gulf, while think tanks and political movements shape domestic debates that spill into foreign policy. The Trump Doctrine and subsequent shifts in U.S. leadership demonstrate

how administrations can rapidly reorient strategies on immigration, security and diplomacy. Iran remains a pivotal actor through its use of proxy forces, its struggle with internal brain drains and its complicated negotiations with global powers. Cultural analyses remind us that the stories we tell influence the policies we pursue. Regional dynamics—including the decline of U.S. dominance, the emergence of China as a mediator, and the independent strategies of the UAE—point toward a multipolar Middle East. Quantitative models of negotiations and qualitative assessments of foreign policy patterns provide complementary insights into how states navigate a complex environment. Future research should continue to bridge disciplines, integrate domestic and international factors, and explore the implications of shifting global power structures for regional security and cooperation.

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