

Expert Institutions and Policy Engineering in Middle Eastern Affairs: A Collective Review of Scattered Indexes

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INTRODUCTION: The contemporary Middle East sits at the intersection of waning unipolarity and rapid technological change. Rising rivalries between the United States, China and regional powers are reshaping security strategies, economic alignments and the very fabric of governance. Think tanks translate these shifts into policy, while proxy wars and sanctions shape interstate relations. At the same time, the emergence of cyber threats and the globalisation of financial flows are compelling governments to develop new legal frameworks and insurance markets. This condensed review examines these interlocking themes by weaving together insights from recent studies on energy security, foreign policy doctrines, domestic policy entrepreneurship, Iran's asymmetric strategy, Gulf and North African development patterns, and new research on cyber risk governance.

Keywords: *Multipolarity, Geopolitical Competition, Policy Networks, Cyber Governance*

Hegemonic Shifts and Competing Development Models

Analysts have noted a gradual erosion of U.S. hegemony in the Persian Gulf and beyond. Washington and London historically aligned their energy security strategies to maintain control over transit routes and supply chains, forging military and political partnerships with Saudi Arabia and other suppliers. Yet the 2020s have exposed limits to U.S. dominance. The maximum pressure campaign against Iran generated polarization at home and failed to curb Tehran's regional influence. Meanwhile, China's state centered model of globalisation has become an attractive alternative. Recent work traces how Beijing uses the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to weave Asian supply chains, redefine trade governance and secure technological self-reliance. Theoretical lenses such as Dunning's eclectic paradigm and Porter's diamond model show how China leverages ownership, location and internalisation advantages; invests in infrastructure; and coordinates industrial policies to secure competitive edge. Unlike the liberal model, China's approach combines economic openness with cautious political and cultural adaptation and emphasises resilience to Western pressure. This divergence illustrates a wider shift toward a multipolar order in which emerging powers contest U.S. leadership by offering alternative forms of integration and investment.

Policy Networks and Domestic Contestation

Within the United States and the United Kingdom, think tanks play an outsized role in shaping policy agendas. Studies on domestic economic strategies underline how these institutions act as idea brokers: conservative and liberal organisations propose divergent responses to inequality, trade deficits and welfare spending. The rise of partisan think tanks has replaced nonpartisan expertise with ideologically aligned "policy entrepreneurs" who amplify polarization in Congress. This dynamic is also visible in foreign policy. The Trump administration's mix of populism and Jacksonian nationalism—labelled the "Trump Doctrine"—prioritised immigration restrictions, trade protectionism and bilateral deals over multilateralism. This approach upended decades of U.S. diplomacy and deepened rifts with allies, while failing to deliver coherent Middle Eastern strategy.

Across the Atlantic, think tanks have begun to grapple with emerging risks in the digital economy. A comparative study of British think tanks reveals two competing paradigms in the nascent cyber insurance market. Chatham House underscores the need for market-based solutions, contractual transparency and corporate risk ratings, whereas the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) views cyber threats through a national security lens and advocates state guarantee funds, mandatory standards and joint public private oversight. The study demonstrates that differences in mission, networks and analytical frameworks lead to distinct policy proposals. While Chatham House influences financial regulators and insurers, RUSI engages defence institutions and advocates state intervention. Integrating these approaches could yield a balanced governance regime that combines economic efficiency with strategic resilience.

Iran's Asymmetric Strategy and U.S. Relations

Relations between Iran and the United States since the 1979 revolution have oscillated between confrontation, containment and cautious engagement. Historical analyses highlight recurring patterns: U.S. support for the Shah bred resentment; the hostage crisis entrenched mutual animosity; and successive administrations alternated between dual containment and attempts at rapprochement. Iran has used a proxy strategy to expand its influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, supporting non state actors to deter adversaries and shape political outcomes. This approach serves both as a deterrent and a tool of destabilisation, enabling Tehran to project power while denying direct culpability. The effectiveness of this strategy depends on regional dynamics and the willingness of external powers to impose costs; however, it has undeniably entrenched Iran's role in regional conflicts.

Recent cycles of nuclear negotiations and sanctions illustrate the challenges of resolving the dispute. U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under President Trump re-instated broad sanctions and precipitated renewed nuclear activities by Iran. Subsequent talks, mediated by the European Union and Gulf states, sought to cap uranium enrichment and provide sanctions relief, but mistrust and conflicting objectives persist. Think tanks and academics caution that unrealistic demands—such as complete dismantlement of Iran's nuclear

programme—risk derailing diplomacy. A durable agreement would need to reconcile Iran's desire for civil nuclear capability with verifiable limits and broad economic engagement.

Domestic politics also influence these dynamics. Iran suffers from a significant brain drain, as educated elites emigrate to escape economic mismanagement, corruption and repression. This exodus erodes the country's scientific and managerial capacity and exacerbates social inequalities. On the U.S. side, domestic polarization constrains foreign policy flexibility: lawmakers under pressure from ideologically driven constituencies resist compromise, while powerful lobby groups shape narratives about threat perceptions.

Gulf and North African Transformations

Gulf monarchies and North African states are also transforming their economies and diplomatic postures. A comparative study of Saudi Arabia and other Arab states notes that increased fiscal independence since 2018 has allowed monarchies like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to pursue diversified foreign policies, including normalisation with Israel, involvement in multilateral forums and investment in renewable energy. At home, these countries implement globalisation strategies through sovereign wealth funds, logistics hubs and trade agreements, aligning with both Western and Chinese initiatives. Yet labour market rigidities and reliance on expatriate labour remain significant challenges.

Simultaneously, cyber threats have emerged as a critical concern. Research into Persian Gulf and North African countries identifies phishing, denial of service attacks, man in the middle intrusions, zero-day exploits and backdoor infections as the most dangerous forms of cyber-attack. Regional organisations estimate that up to 30% of companies have experienced cybercrime, with particularly high victimisation rates in the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain. Iran's cyber war capabilities, demonstrated by the 2010 Stuxnet incident, have spurred Gulf states to develop national cyber strategies, often in cooperation with the United States, United Kingdom and China. North African countries vary widely: Tunisia has implemented advanced legislation and training programmes, while Egypt, Morocco and Libya lag behind. The article

concludes that future cyber-attack risks depend on relations among Iran, its neighbours and foreign powers, highlighting cyber security as an emerging dimension of Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Digital Risk Governance and Cyber Insurance

Cyber insurance governance is now a subject of academic inquiry. Studies of British think tanks show that the creation of cyber insurance markets involves balancing economic and security considerations. The absence of standardised terminology, historical data and shared risk assessments complicates pricing and underwriting. Market oriented frameworks emphasise private incentives and contract transparency, proposing rating systems and standard policy clauses to encourage adoption. Security oriented frameworks treat cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure as matters of national defence and call for state interventions such as guarantee funds and mandatory compliance standards. This debate mirrors the broader tension between liberal and statist approaches to governance in the digital age. A hybrid model—featuring public private councils, shared data repositories and dynamic regulatory oversight—may offer a pragmatic path forward.

Conclusion

The Middle East's evolving political economy cannot be understood without considering the interplay between geopolitical shifts, domestic policy networks and emerging digital risks. Declining American hegemony and the ascent of China and other regional powers are reshaping energy security strategies and trade governance. Think tanks operate as intermediaries between academia, government and industry, but their conceptual differences lead to divergent policy prescriptions, influencing issues from domestic economic reform to cyber insurance legislation. Iran's asymmetric strategy and its nuclear ambitions continue to vex regional stability, while Gulf monarchies navigate between globalisation and security imperatives. The rise of cyber threats and the development of cyber insurance frameworks illustrate how technological change introduces new arenas of competition and cooperation. Future research should explore how multipolarity, digitalisation and domestic political contestation will interact to shape governance structures across the region.

Disclaimer: *The analyses and interpretations presented in this work are intended solely for scholarly and scientific purposes. They do not represent, imply, or reflect any political position, preference, or normative judgment on the part of the authors.*

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