



VNU Journal of Foreign Studies

Journal homepage: <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/>



SOME HIGHLIGHTS IN THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST UNDER PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN (2021-2024)

Hoang Thi Mai Phuong*

*Office of Research and Partnerships, VNU University of Languages and International Studies,
No.2 Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Received 16 January 2025

Revised 21 April 2025; Accepted 13 May 2025

Abstract: U.S. foreign policy has undergone many adjustments under President Joe Biden (2021-2024), especially in the volatile context of the Middle East. This article analyzes the prominent issues in U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East under President Joe Biden (from 2021 to 2024). In the context of the world and the region facing diverse challenges from security to human rights, U.S. policy has shifted from traditional military strategies to new forms such as multilateral dialogue, strengthening the security network, curbing the influence of China and Russia, and making cooperative efforts to solve problems in the region. The article applies international relations research methods, as well as analytical synthesis and evaluation methods, system structure methods, and forecasting techniques. In addition to assessing the prominent issues, the article also forecasts new adjustments in U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East in the upcoming term of President Donald Trump.

Keywords: U.S. foreign policy, Middle East, Joe Biden, Donald Trump

* Corresponding author.

Email address: maiphuonghoang1803@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.63023/2525-2445/jfs.ulis.5448>

MỘT SỐ VẤN ĐỀ NỔI BẬT TRONG CHÍNH SÁCH ĐỐI NGOẠI CỦA MỸ TẠI KHU VỰC TRUNG ĐÔNG DƯỚI THỜI TỔNG THỐNG JOE BIDEN (2021-2024)

Hoàng Thị Mai Phương

*Phòng Khoa học công nghệ và Hợp tác phát triển, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,
Số 2 Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam*

Nhận bài ngày 16 tháng 01 năm 2025

Chỉnh sửa ngày 21 tháng 4 năm 2025; Chấp nhận đăng ngày 13 tháng 5 năm 2025

Tóm tắt: Chính sách đối ngoại của Mỹ đã trải qua nhiều điều chỉnh trong dưới thời Tổng thống Joe Biden (2021-2024), đặc biệt là trong bối cảnh đầy biến động của khu vực Trung Đông. Bài viết này phân tích những vấn đề nổi bật trong chính sách đối ngoại của Mỹ đối với khu vực Trung Đông dưới thời Tổng thống Joe Biden (từ năm 2021 cho đến 2024). Trong bối cảnh thế giới và khu vực đang đối mặt với những thách thức đa dạng từ an ninh đến nhân quyền, chính sách của Mỹ đã chuyển đổi từ những chiến lược quân sự truyền thống sang những hình thức mới như đối thoại đa phương, tăng cường mạng lưới an ninh, kiềm chế ảnh hưởng của Trung Quốc và Nga, nỗ lực hợp tác giải quyết vấn đề tại khu vực. Bài viết sử dụng các phương pháp nghiên cứu quan hệ quốc tế, cũng như các phương pháp tổng hợp phân tích và đánh giá, phương pháp cấu trúc hệ thống và phương pháp dự báo. Bên cạnh việc đánh giá những vấn đề nổi bật, bài viết cũng dự báo những điều chỉnh mới trong chính sách đối ngoại của Mỹ tại Trung Đông trong nhiệm kỳ sắp tới của Tổng thống Donald Trump.

Từ khóa: chính sách đối ngoại của Mỹ, Trung Đông, Joe Biden, Donald Trump

1. Introduction

The U.S. presidential election on November 3, 2020 marked the victory of the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, opening a term that would last until 2024. This is an opportunity for the U.S. to not only heal internal rifts but also review the foreign policies that have been implemented. An effective foreign policy requires a balance between domestic and international demands. U.S. policy towards the Middle East “has maintained remarkable consistency across administrations, with the exception of Donald Trump, since the region's energy resources began to be exploited and especially since the U.S. assumed a global leadership role” (Mezran & Varvelli, 2019, p. 15). The U.S. has always sought to use arms sales to enhance the capabilities of its partners to advance key regional security interests, including counterterrorism, ensuring uninterrupted oil flows, protecting Israel's security, and containing Iran (Congressional Research Service, 2020, p. 4). Some argue that the core tenet of Washington's Middle East policy has now shifted to a focus on containing Iran, despite the destabilizing effects of this policy on the region (Parsi, 2021, p. 3).

From the beginning of his term, Joe Biden was expected to pursue a foreign policy based on a long-term national interest model, demonstrating continuity across Republican and Democratic administrations since World War II to 2016 (AlHakim, 2021; Hoang, 2024). Biden chose to adjust his foreign policy with the desire to return to institutional diplomacy, pursue a

^o This research was funded by VNU University of Languages and International Studies (VNU-ULIS) in the project N.23.15.

cooperative approach to solving global problems, and strengthen cooperation with close allies in many important areas. This study will seek answers to two main questions: (1) What are the highlights of Joe Biden's foreign policy towards the Middle East in the 2021-2024 period? (2) How has this impacted the region?

2. Efforts to Maintain the U.S. Role and Strengthen the Security Network in the Middle East Region

The Biden administration continues to prioritize a strategic reorientation to the Indo-Pacific region to counter China, which is identified as the “top challenge” in the U.S. National Defense Strategy 2022 (The White House, 2022).

Reducing the military presence in the Middle East is a part of this strategy, however, the U.S. still strives to maintain important factors to ensure regional stability. Although the number of U.S. military personnel in the region decreased to about 45,400 by 2023 but the U.S. still maintains major bases in Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, and deploys advanced missile defense systems to protect its allies from threats from Iran and non-state actors such as Hezbollah and the Houthis (Byman & Moller, 2023). For the US, the reduction of its military does not mean the U.S. is giving up its influence. Instead, the US has shifted its focus to providing military assistance, defense technology, and advanced defense systems to allies such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the Gulf states. This strategy not only helps the U.S. maintain its leadership role but also frees up resources to deal with challenges from China and Russia.

Strengthening the regional security network was one of the important pillars of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East under President Joe Biden. The Biden administration has been working to build a multinational security network, with the goal of maintaining regional stability and reducing the U.S. military burden. This is especially important in the context of the U.S. strategic reorientation to the Indo-Pacific region and dealing with China. In fact, until now, Iran continues to be one of the biggest threats to Middle East security and U.S. strategic interests (The White House, 2022). Iran has not only accelerated its nuclear program but also expanded its influence through support for militant groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Iraq and Syria. These groups created instability and undermined the role of U.S. allies in the region, raising the risk of a full-blown conflict. In response, the Biden administration has focused on containing Iran through a combination of diplomatic and military deterrence. Efforts to revive the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) were a key part of this strategy, although it has encountered many obstacles both within the U.S. and pressure from partners such as Israel. In addition, U.S. policy during this period also focused on multilateral dialogue and cooperation, attempting to restore alliances that had been damaged during Donald Trump's term. These efforts were made to rebuild alliances and strengthen partnerships with regional and international actors, including traditional allies such as Saudi Arabia and partners such as Qatar (Samantha, 2023). This policy included re-engaging with international institutions and promoting multilateral cooperation on issues such as security, economics, and human rights.

In addition, the U.S. also recognized the importance of fostering a strong regional alliance network to ease its security burden. The Biden administration has worked to build cooperative relationships between Israel and Arab countries, notably promoting the normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia (AlAlkim, 2022). The U.S. hoped that this would be not only a strategic move but also open up the opportunity to build a collective security structure where allied countries could protect themselves from common threats such

as Iran. However, this process was not easy as the Israeli-Palestinian tension remained a major obstacle. The Biden administration has focused on persuading Saudi Arabia - a leading country in the Muslim world - to normalize relations with Israel. To achieve this goal, the U.S. has made two important commitments: (1) Mutual Defense Treaty, ensuring Saudi Arabia's safety against threats from Iran, and (2) Nuclear cooperation, including support for the construction of a nuclear fuel cycle in Saudi Arabia. However, the Israel-Hamas conflict in the Gaza Strip erupted when Hamas attacked Israel in October 2023, and Israel's controversial policies, such as expanding settlements in the West Bank, created great pressure from Arab public opinion, causing Saudi Arabia to pause plans to normalize relations with Israel. Not only that, Israel's lack of commitment to the two-state solution has also made its Arab partners cautious. So far, although no final agreement has been reached, the process has strengthened U.S. leadership in the Middle East and reduced direct military pressure. However, the Biden administration needs to adjust its strategy to balance security interests and regional public pressure. In the face of increasingly fierce great power competition, the Middle East remains an important part of U.S. foreign policy. The Biden administration, despite many challenges, remains steadfast in its balancing act of reducing its military presence, maintaining influence, and responding to changing threats in the region. The future of this policy will depend on the U.S. ability to flexibly adjust its strategy, as well as its ability to coordinate with partners to build a more stable and sustainable Middle East.

3. Dealing with the Influence of China and Russia

The strategic vacuum left by the U.S. has created opportunities for China and Russia to expand their presence in the Middle East through economic and military cooperation.

Over the years, China has made significant strides in its development, expanding its strategic space and establishing itself as a regional and international power. From 2021 to 2023, China strengthened its economic ties with the region, with trade volume increasing tenfold over the past two decades (Hoang, 2024). China has been increasing its influence over the Gulf countries through technology and energy projects, with contracts with Huawei and energy infrastructure projects in Saudi Arabia and the UAE being prominent examples. This country has been investing heavily in the region, with a total investment of at least \$123 billion, especially in Arab countries and the Middle East. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a major driver of its growing influence in the region. In 2021, the Middle East and Africa received 38% of China's total BRI investment, up from 8% in 2020. Its investment in the region grown rapidly, with a 360% increase between 2020 and 2021 and a 116% increase in construction activity (Nedopil, 2022). So far, China has been making efforts to take advantage of positive relationships with the Gulf countries, Israel and Iran. Each of these relationships has brought great value to Chinese investment projects, while opening up opportunities for cooperation and common development in many different areas. Notably, in March 2023, China was the mediator, successfully promoting the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This is also a testament to China's growing influence and prestige in the region.

As for Russia, by 2019, Russia had gradually become an important and influential negotiator in resolving disagreements and conflicts in the Middle East. The official visit on October 14, 2019 of Russian President V. Putin to Saudi Arabia and the UAE marked a new and stronger step in the development of cooperation between Russia and these countries. In addition, Russia has also strengthened multilateral relations and cooperation with many other countries such as Türkiye, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt, to promote peace, stability, and common

development in the region. In 2021, Russia also facilitated Syria's entry into the Arab League and reintegration into the regional community.

The growing influence of China and Russia in the Middle East not only threatens economic interests but also erodes the long-term strategic role of the United States in the region. The steps of China and Russia have impacted three main aspects of U.S. interests: (1) *The decline of its monopoly position in technology and energy*: China's expansion of technology and infrastructure projects - through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - has prompted Gulf states to begin diversifying their strategic partnerships away from the United States, undermining America's traditional role as a major energy partner, especially as the United States seeks to reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Losing its privileged position in the energy market reduces America's influence in regulating global oil prices - a key lever in its foreign policy; (2) *Challenges to America's diplomatic and security role*: China's success in facilitating reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a major blow to the traditional role of the United States as a mediator in the region. This is not only a symbol of diplomatic prestige but also sets a precedent for Middle Eastern countries to look to China as a partner to balance the United States, especially on sensitive issues such as the Sunni-Shiite confrontation or regional security initiatives. Similarly, Russia, with its growing role in Syria, Libya, and its relations with Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, has established itself as an indispensable player in peace processes and conflict management. This complicates the United States' efforts to maintain a regional order shaped by the United States; (3) *The fragmentation of traditional U.S. alliances*: Faced with pressure from alternatives from China and Russia, many of America's regional allies - especially the Gulf states - have pursued a strategy of "multilateralization" of their foreign relations. This has weakened the cohesion of the US-GCC security alliance axis and reduced the U.S. ability to mobilize consensus on key issues such as sanctioning Iran, stabilizing Syria, or combating regional terrorism.

Faced with that situation, the U.S. has implemented many policies to reduce the growing influence of China and Russia in the region. The U.S. has forced the UAE to remove Huawei equipment from important projects, while providing clean energy and technology alternatives to its regional allies. At the same time, the U.S. has imposed sanctions on Russia (due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict) to limit Russia's ability to expand its influence in the region. Although the U.S. has maintained its leadership in the security field in the Middle East to date, the growing economic and technological presence of China and Russia continues to be a long-term challenge to U.S. influence in the Middle East.

4. Efforts to Solve Regional Problems

The Biden administration has prioritized diplomacy to resolve conflicts like the Gaza war and Iran's nuclear program, but with limited success.

4.1. The Israel-Palestine Conflict and the Two-State Solution

Under Biden, the U.S. has attempted to revive peace talks and reaffirmed its commitment to the solution. However, major obstacles remain, including Israeli settlement expansion, internal divisions among Palestinian factions, and instability in the Gaza Strip.

The two-state solution has long been seen as one of the most viable approaches to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Biden government focused on diplomacy as a main tool to deal with the Gaza conflict. These efforts revolved around short-term goals such as ceasefire and humanitarian support, and towards long-term goals such as two-state solution.

The U.S. has actively participated in ceasefire efforts through negotiations with regional and international partners like Qatar and Egypt. Thanks to the intermediary of the U.S., in November 2023, a temporary the ceasefire agreement was achieved, allowing more than 100 Israeli and Palestinian hostages. In May 2024, President Biden announced a three-stage plan to link ceasefire with Gaza rebuilding and promote the two-state solution. However, this plan faced opposition from both Israel and Hamas, leading to incomplete implementation. In addition, the U.S. has led international efforts to provide humanitarian aid, including food, drinking water, and medicine for the people of Gaza. Typically, the U.S. built a temporary wharf on the Gaza coast to transfer aid, but this project was interrupted due to war conditions. The U.S. has called on Gulf and European countries to fund Gaza reconstruction programs. However, these countries required guarantees that the aid would not fall into Hamas. Despite significant efforts, the U.S. policy for the Gaza War still faces many major challenges. Israel's Netanyahu government maintains a tough stance, refuses to make large concessions to Palestine, and enhances the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. On the other hand, Hamas takes advantage of the conflict to strengthen the political position, while the Palestinian government in the West is considered weak and has lost the trust of the people.

Saudi Arabia's aim for normalization of relations with Israel also shows a complex geopolitical problem, where economic, security and religious engines are interwoven. Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), with a strategic vision, is aware that cooperation with Israel can bring important benefits, from technology transfer, economic investment to defense modernization and effective support for the goal of diversifying the economy in Vision 2030. However, the special role of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world, with the responsibility to protect the two most sacred holy lands, puts the country under great pressure in maintaining Palestine support. Normalization of relationships without guaranteeing any meaning to Palestinian can threaten the legitimacy of the regime and raise strong opposition in the public and the Arab world. Hamas's attack on October 7 emphasized not only the deep tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also a clear effort to break the mediation process between Israel and Arab countries. In this context, Iran emerged as an important factor, using the Palestine card to increase its influence in the region and weaken the efforts of Saudi Arabia. This increased the risk of Riyadh when walking on the path of normalizing relations with Israel. In this situation, the Biden government faced a challenging task: both promoting the regional mediation process, while ensuring the security benefits of Saudi Arabia and not eroding the Palestinian rights. This balance is not only the key to stable maintenance in the Middle East but also a decisive factor for the prestige and leadership of the U.S. in this turbulent area.

4.2. Iran Nuclear Agreement

The relationship with Iran is one of Biden's policies in the Middle East. The Biden government sought to restore the nuclear agreement (JCPOA) to curb Iran's nuclear program. However, the negotiation process faced many difficulties, including objections from Israel and the Gulf allies, along with tense escalating moves from Iran.

Earlier, the Trump administration withdrew from JCPOA in 2018 on the grounds of concerns about the effectiveness and activities in the region of Iran. However, Biden expressed his commitment to diplomacy and multilateralism, considering JCPOA as a potential framework to resolve Iran's nuclear program and reduce stress. Since taking office, the Biden government has participated in indirect negotiations with Iran in Vienna to negotiate the possibility of returning to JCPOA (Cook & Indodyk, 2022). These discussions aim to find the way for both the U.S. and Iran to fulfill their obligations as agreed. The goal is to achieve a

solution accepted by the parties to solve concerns about Iran's nuclear program and provide measures to mitigate sanctions on Iran. By re-joining JCPOA, the Biden administration also sought to restore diplomatic channels with Iran and create the foundation for the next negotiations on other regional issues. On the side of Iran, under the leadership of President Ebrahim Raisi, the country also applied a tough stance in negotiations, requiring the U.S. to remove all sanctions and provide legal guarantees. The reason was that the U.S. would not withdraw the agreement in the future. At the same time, Tehran also wanted a mechanism to verify the removal of sanctions before re-making nuclear commitments increase uranium enrichment to a high level and expand the nuclear program as a strategy of pressure on the negotiating parties. Tehran also sought to strengthen relations with U.S. rivals like Russia and China to reduce dependence on the West, complicating U.S. diplomatic efforts.

However, the negotiations are very complicated and there are still significant challenges in achieving a comprehensive agreement to satisfy all stakeholders, especially Saudi Arabia and Israel, the U.S. long-term ally in the area. Saudi Arabia was cautious with JCPOA and expressed concern about its effectiveness in restraining Iran's nuclear ambition. Saudi Arabia has long considered Iran as a rival in the region and concerned about Iran's instability activities in the Middle East. The U.S. return to JCPOA will also create tensions between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, especially Saudi Arabia and Israel, which is the U.S. ally in the Iranian issue. Israel is a country with a resolute stance against JCPOA, considering it a direct threat to national security (AlAlkim, 2022). The administration of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (2021-2023) and later the successor governments repeatedly criticized the agreement, said that JCPOA was not strong enough to prevent Iran's nuclear ambition. Israel has concerned that JCPOA only limited Iran's nuclear program in the short term without resolving military activities and supported Iran's armed groups in the area like Hezbollah and Houthi. Israel put pressure on parliamentarians in the U.S. Congress to prevent the restoration of JCPOA (Hoang, 2024). This caused the Biden government to adjust the strategy, balance the maintenance of relations with the Israeli Allies and achieve diplomatic goals. On the other hand, American politics has been deeply polarized on JCPOA. The recovery of the agreement has encountered strong opposition from Republicans and a number of Democratic Party members (AlAlkim, 2022). The Republican Party considers JCPOA as a weak agreement, saying that the removal of sanctions will create conditions for Iran to increase its instability activities.

Facing that situation, the Biden government reviewed alternatives, as a temporary agreement to freeze Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions. However, both Iran and its opposition in the U.S. did not accept this plan. The effort to restore JCPOA from President Joe Biden had encountered many complex obstacles from Israel, U.S. political internal politics, and Iran's tough stance. Despite significant diplomatic efforts, political and strategic factors have slowed down this process. In order to reach an agreement, the U.S. needs to adjust the strategy, including building trust, strengthening cooperation with international partners, and balancing security and political benefits. However, the current situation shows that the ability to reach a comprehensive JCPOA agreement is still far away.

4.3. The War in Syria, Yemen

The U.S. policy under President Joe Biden for prolonged conflicts in Syria and Yemen reflected the change from the direct military intervention approach to a diplomatic and humanitarian priority. The Biden government focused on three main goals: reducing stress, reducing the humanitarian crisis, and curbing the influence of rival forces like Iran and Russia.

The Syrian conflict was seen as a double crisis: both a civil war with the intervention of

external factors and an international war against terrorism (AlAlkim, 2022). Immediately after coming to power, President Biden launched Syrian airstrikes. The U.S. air strike on February 26th, 2021 was aimed at one of the most powerful Iranian militia forces in the Middle East, called Kateeb Hezbollah, or Hezbollah Brigade (Al Jazeera, 2023). This force was a branch of the popular mobilization group with the majority of members of the Iraqi militia. The first action showed that Joe Biden's tough approach for the purpose of deterring Iran in the process of the U.S. took steps to resume the JCPOA agreement. Later, in June 2021, the U.S. also decided to attack arms operating and storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one location in Iraq. After the area near the Syrian military base was occupied by U.S. soldiers who were stationed in the Rocket series, on August 23rd, 2022, President Joe Biden ordered an airstrike against Iran-backed groups in Syria (Monshiri & Dorraj, 2023). The aforementioned U.S. move also took place in the context of Iran's announcement that it would give up some claims in exchange for the revival of the JCPOA agreement. From the beginning, the U.S. hesitated to bring troops into Syria, which would cause the U.S. to be bogged down as in the war in Afghanistan. Therefore, the role of Americans in Syria has certain limits. However, the U.S. did not withdraw from Syria with the calculations related to the localities and restrained the role of Russia and Iran, China here. The U.S. presence in Syria was to defeat IS. However, although IS was defeated, the U.S. still has many challenges in Syria from Russia, Iran, the President of Assad and Turkey - a U.S. NATO ally. The U.S. retained about 900 soldiers in northeastern Syria to support Syrian Democratic Forces in the fight against ISIS (Katulis et al., 2024). This presence aimed to prevent the revival of terrorism and protect the oil fields in the area. The Biden government continued to apply sanctions against the Assad government through the Caesar Act, in order to limit the financial resources to the Syrian government and put pressure to promote the peace process. The U.S. policy in Syria under Biden was mainly more preventive than thorough resolution. Although the U.S. maintained its military presence and continued to put pressure on the Assad government, the peace process was still stagnant, and the humanitarian crisis showed no signs of reduction. The situation in Syria is increasingly complicated and becomes deadlocked when the parties have not been able to offer a harmonious solution for all. The U.S. is still one side in this crisis and the competition between the U.S. and Russia in Syria still exists (Hoang, 2024). This dilemma of the U.S. in Syria is also a typical feature of the current U.S. situation in the Middle East.

The war in Yemen began in 2015 between the international government of Yemen, backed by Saudi Arabia, and Houthi forces, supported by Iran (Kelsey et al, 2021). This is considered one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world, with millions of people facing hunger and epidemic. Immediately after taking office, Biden announced that the U.S. would not support Saudi Arabia's attacking activities in Yemen, including providing weapons and intelligence support (Katulis, 2023). This marked an important change compared to the Trump administration's policy. Biden appointed Tim Lenderking as the U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen, focusing on diplomatic efforts to achieve a comprehensive ceasefire (Katulis, 2023). However, the Houthi forces continued to carry out missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, causing regional tensions. Besides, even though they are fighting the Houthis, Saudi Arabia and the UAE still have conflicts over strategic goals in Yemen, making peace efforts difficult. Thus, it can be seen that Biden's policy in Yemen has achieved some progress, including reducing the intensity of the conflict and promoting humanitarian aid. However, sustainable peace has not been achieved, as the warring parties continue to pursue their own interests.

4.4. Relations With Allies in the Region

First of all, it is important to recognize that the U.S. remains one of the most influential powers in the Middle East, with strategic alliances with countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. The Biden administration has continued to maintain security commitments and military support for Israel, clearly demonstrated through troop deployments and military aid (Hoang, 2024). This is not only to protect U.S. interests in the region but also to maintain the U.S. position in the confrontation with terrorist forces and hostile countries such as Iran.

However, Biden's approach has also faced criticism and challenges (AlAlkim, 2022). His foreign policy is aimed at not only protecting U.S. interests but also promoting democratic values and human rights. This has led to tensions with regional allies, especially Saudi Arabia. Recently, Joe Biden has made adjustments to strengthen relations with allied countries here, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia. President Biden's trip to the Middle East to consolidate the important role of the U.S. has resolved many diplomatic issues as well as opened up prospects for economic, scientific and technological cooperation for all parties and achieved certain results in "warming up" relations with key allies, expanding cooperation with countries in the region (Katulis et al., 2024). However, it should be frankly admitted that, currently, the U.S. focuses its foreign policy on the Indo-Pacific, so its resources with the Middle East have decreased significantly. The competition between China and Russia here has also partly caused Middle Eastern countries to have certain choices and adjustments in their policies towards the U.S., so it seems that the Middle East is increasingly moving away from the U.S.

The U.S. faces a lack of trust from Iran and suspicion from its Arab allies. America's oil-centered involvement in the Middle East is becoming less strategically important as the U.S. aims to become the leading exporter of oil and gas. Recent adjustments in U.S. foreign policy have led countries in the Middle East to share the perception that it is difficult for the U.S. to fulfill its commitments to the region. Israel and Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are also finding that current U.S. policies are not strong enough to prevent threats from Iran.

4.5. Humanitarian Issues in the Region

The humanitarian issue in the Middle East is one of the most serious challenges in U.S. foreign policy under President Joe Biden (Samantha, 2023). The Biden administration has attempted to put humanitarian issues at the center of its strategy, but its results have been limited by complex conflicts and political challenges.

The U.S. is the largest donor of humanitarian aid in Syria, with billions of dollars provided through international organizations such as the United Nations and the Red Cross (Katulis et al., 2024). In Yemen, the Biden administration has committed more than \$1 billion in humanitarian aid to Yemen, including food, water, and medical assistance. In Gaza, after the 2023 Gaza war, the U.S. has provided hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild infrastructure and provide humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. The U.S. has coordinated with the United Nations to extend resolutions allowing cross-border aid from Türkiye into opposition-held areas, despite opposition from Russia. The U.S. has called on Saudi Arabia and the Houthis to open aid routes, especially in blockaded areas. The Biden administration has increased the refugee admissions quota to 125,000 people per year, partly for refugees from the Middle East, to address conflict-related displacement. The U.S. funds United Nations programs such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Katulis et al., 2024). Therefore, humanitarian issues in the Middle East have been a priority for U.S. foreign policy under Joe Biden, with a focus on aid, diplomacy, and refugee

assistance. While significant progress has been made, major challenges such as protracted conflicts, lack of funding, and obstruction from rival forces continue to undermine the effectiveness of these efforts. To achieve lasting results, the U.S. must strengthen international cooperation, address the root causes of conflicts, and maintain a high level of commitment to humanitarian assistance.

5. Assessing the Impact of Biden's Foreign Policy in the Middle East and Forecasting

President Joe Biden's foreign policy in the Middle East has had profound implications, both regionally and internationally.

On a regional scale, by prioritizing diplomacy and reducing the direct military presence, the Biden administration has maintained some stability in traditional alliances while encouraging regional leadership from countries like Saudi Arabia. However, long-standing tensions, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iran's nuclear program, remain unresolved. This leaves the regional security landscape fragile, with many potential risks that could spark a crisis.

Biden's "diplomacy first" policy has created space for Middle Eastern countries - especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE - to take a more proactive role in leading reconciliation initiatives and shaping the regional order. This policy reflects a shift from the U.S. "direct management" model to soft coordination through regional partners, thereby maintaining minimal stability without deep military intervention. Although Biden has pledged to strengthen alliances with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states, several steps - such as criticizing human rights, withdrawing defensive weapons from Saudi Arabia in 2021, or hesitating to respond to Iran - have shaken strategic trust between the US and its allies. Typically, Saudi Arabia's temporary move towards China and Russia in the fields of oil, defense, and technology, or Israel's opposition to the U.S. renegotiation of the nuclear deal with Iran, shows strategic divisions even among key allies.

The Biden administration has yet to find a breakthrough solution for hot spots such as the Israel-Palestine conflict and Iran's nuclear program. Thus, Biden's caution helps avoid falling into a "military quagmire", but is not strong enough to create a strategic breakthrough, leaving the regional security situation still fraught with many risks.

On a global scale, the U.S. strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific region to counter China has marked a major shift in geopolitics. However, this shift has also created a power vacuum in the Middle East, opening the way for Russia and China to increase their influence through economic, energy, and security cooperation initiatives. This not only challenges the traditional role of the U.S. in the region but also complicates an already unstable balance of power. Besides, Biden's policy tries to combine the protection of geopolitical interests (security stability, control of oil, protection of Israel) with democratic values and human rights. However, this combination creates contradictions in U.S. actions. Despite some progress in reducing tensions and promoting security cooperation, Biden's policy still faces the difficult task of balancing strategic interests with national values. The ability to maintain U.S. presence and credibility in the Middle East will depend on its ability to coordinate effectively with regional partners to ensure long-term stability while not undermining its global standing in the context of increasingly fierce great power competition.

Now, with the re-election of Donald Trump, based on the results left by the Biden administration as well as how Trump implemented foreign policy in the previous term regarding the Middle East region, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East may have new adjustments as follows:

- First, Trump can continue to pursue an “America First” agenda that focuses on economic gains, reduces long-term military commitments, and pushes for symbolic deals that strengthen Washington’s position. One of the top priorities could be expanding the Abraham Accords, particularly with the goal of normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Although this move promises to generate significant strategic and economic benefits, the lack of significant concessions to Palestine could expose the process to many obstacles from both within and outside the region.

- Second, a tough policy toward Iran will continue to be a key feature of Trump’s second term. A revival of the “maximum pressure” strategy through economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation is likely to be prioritized to curb Tehran’s nuclear program and reduce its regional influence. However, this policy also carries the risk of escalating the conflict, especially as Iran maintains support for militant groups such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, and continues to expand its influence in hotspots such as Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

- Third, militarily, Trump can continue the trend of reducing direct presence in the Middle East, to save defense costs and reallocate resources to priorities in dealing with China in the Indo-Pacific region. In this context, the U.S. can promote cooperation with regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the UAE, expecting them to take on a larger role in maintaining regional security. However, this downsizing also risks creating a power vacuum, allowing other powers such as Russia and China to increase their influence.

- Fourth, in terms of economic interests, Trump is likely to focus on bilateral trade and energy deals, promoting arms exports and strengthening energy cooperation to stabilize oil prices. At the same time, he may increase pressure on Gulf states to limit cooperation with China, especially in sensitive areas such as technology and strategic infrastructure. However, this could also complicate U.S. relations with European allies, which have traditionally taken a softer approach to Iran and supported multilateral trade.

- Overall, with his new term beginning in January 2025, Trump’s Middle East policy will continue to focus on pragmatic goals that emphasize short-term U.S. interests but may increase instability in the long term. Unresolved conflicts, great power competition, and the risk of humanitarian crises will continue to pose major challenges to this policy. Trump’s success or failure in a second term will depend on his ability to balance U.S. strategic interests with the need for long-term stability in the region.

6. Conclusion

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East under President Joe Biden reflects a balancing act between diplomacy and strategy, with a focus on reducing military presence, promoting regional cooperation, and addressing humanitarian challenges. The Biden administration has made some progress, in promoting normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states, strengthening regional security networks, and reducing tensions in hotspots such as Yemen and Syria. However, persistent challenges, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran’s nuclear program, and the growing influence of major powers, such as China and Russia, continue to complicate the situation in the region. On the international stage, the strategic shift to the Indo-Pacific region has emphasized the U.S. geopolitical priorities, but has also left a power vacuum in the Middle East, creating opportunities for rivals to increase their presence. Although Biden’s policy maintains U.S. leadership on security and humanitarian issues, limiting direct involvement in key conflicts prevents the U.S. from addressing the root causes of instability.

The future of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, which will most likely be under

President Trump, will depend on the ability to balance strategic interests and national values in a volatile regional context. To achieve long-term stability, the U.S. must continue to work closely with regional partners and develop comprehensive solutions to protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises. These efforts will not only shape the Middle East landscape but also profoundly affect the U.S. global role and position in the decades to come.

References

- AlAlkim, H. H. (2021). U.S. President Joe Biden's Foreign Policy towards the Gulf. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 11(3), 378-401.
- AlAlkim, H. H. (2022). Biden's Administration Policies towards the Middle East: Initial Appraisal and Potential Prospect. *International Journal of Social Science and Studies*, 10(2), 8-25.
- Byman, D., & Moller, S. B. (2023). *The U.S. and the Middle East: Interests, Risks, and Costs*. The Tobin Project. https://tobinproject.org/sites/default/files/assets/Byman%20%26%20Moller%20-%20The%20United%20States%20and%20the%20Middle%20East_0.pdf
- Congressional Research Service (CRS) (2020, November 23). *Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44984.pdf>
- Cook, S. A., & Indyk, M. (2022). *The Case for a New US-Saudi Strategic Compact*. Council on Foreign Relations. https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/CFR_CSR94_U.S.-SaudiStrategicCompact.pdf
- Harb, A. (2023, September 20). Biden's Israel trip displays 'performative' approach to Gaza war: Analysts. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/20/bidens-israel-trip-reveals-performative-approach-to-gaza-war-analysts>
- Hoang, T. M. P. (2024). Efforts to Maintain the U.S. Role in The Middle East under President Joe Biden (2021-2023). *International Journal of Social Sciences: Current and Future Research Trends*, 21(1), 265-274. https://ijsscfrjournal.isrra.org/index.php/Social_Science_Journal/article/view/1703
- Katulis, B. (2023). *Treading Cautiously on Shifting Sands: An Assessment of Biden's Middle East Policy Approach, 2021-2023*. Middle East Institute. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep53224>
- Katulis, B., Freedman, B. & Taylor, S. (2024). *The limits of Biden's Middle East diplomacy*. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/limits-bidens-middle-east-diplomacy-assessment-us-policy-april-july-2024>.
- Kelsey, N. (2020), *Reluctant Reception: Refugees, Migration and Governance in the Middle East and North Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kelsey, N., Yildirim, A. K., Ulrichsen, K. C., & Mohammad, A. T. (2021). *Key Middle East Policy Issues for the Biden Administration*. Baker Institute. <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/key-middle-east-policy-issues>
- Mohamed, K. & Khalid, H. M. (2017). Obama and Transformation Strategy from the Middle East to the Asia - Pacific Region. *Asian Social Science*, 13(6), 46-54. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v13n6p46>
- Monshipouri, M., & Dorraj, M. (2023). U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East. In S. Akbarzadeh (Ed.), *Handbook of Middle East Politics* (pp. 190-209). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Nedopil, C. (2022). *China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2021 Key findings*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12834.50887>
- Samantha, B. (2023). U.S Influence in the Middle East is waning. *International Banker*. <https://internationalbanker.com/brokerage/us-influence-in-the-middle-east-is-waning/>
- Soare, S. R. (2021). Biden's Security Policy: Democratic Security or Democratic Exceptionalism? *Intereconomics*, 56, 14-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-021-0945-1>
- Sullivan, J. (2023). The sources of American power: A foreign policy for a changed world. *Foreign Affairs*, 102(8).
- The White House (2022). *National Security Strategy*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>