

The Role of the American President in Establishing US Foreign Policy: The Case of the Middle East and North Africa

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Abstract

This article analyses the foreign policy roles of the American president in the context of the Middle East and North Africa through examining the presidents' speeches, statements, policies, and actions from Truman to Trump so as to better understand how American presidents establish and shape American foreign policy in the MENA area, what are the constant and historic US interests in the region and the mechanisms through which American foreign policy is carried out. The analyses of these roles reveal two main historic and constant US interests in the region; namely, protecting Israel and the region's oil resources in addition to fighting terrorism which will soon become a third historic and constant interest. The analysis reveals that challenging the aforementioned interests would create moments of crises which triggers a change in US foreign policy. This change is characterized by launching military actions, establishing stricter defensive and security measures, authorizing arms sales, applying economic sanctions, increasing or decreasing foreign aid, leading diplomatic negotiations and mediatory interventions, making supportive or opposing political statements or taking positions on the event that triggers this change. The analysis also reveals that republican presidents tend to be more active, responsive and forceful than the democrats in the Middle East.

Keywords: US Foreign policy, Middle East, American presidents

Introduction

The 'head of state' or the 'head of government' are generally considered the main makers and shapers of foreign policies.¹ The American president, as both the head of state and the head of government, does not only lead the executive branch of the federal government, but he is also the commander-in-chief of the US Armed Forces. In so saying, the US president is considered the main player in US foreign policy. Moreover, the president's foreign policy decision making is mostly based on the advice of various governmental departments and agencies such as the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Joint Chief of Staff, the Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Council. Grimmatt (1999) sums up

¹In most countries, the positions of 'the head of state' and the 'head of government' are separate. However, their power differs from one country to another. To illustrate, the head of state can be the most powerful politician in some countries in which the head of government exercises less power. These include some non-European monarchies such as Morocco or some republics such as Turkey and Russia. In other countries, however, the head of state is a symbolic figure only and the head of government is the person who governs the country. These include most European monarchies such the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium. These two positions are fused in some countries such as the US, Nigeria and Argentina in which the President is both the head of state and the head of government. See Siaroff (2013) for more information on comparing political regimes.

the foreign policy roles of both the President and Congress as defined in the constitution. He states that the US constitution divides foreign policy powers between the President and Congress, which illustrates the system of checks and balances upon which the interaction between different branches of the American government is based. Grimmett differentiates between six different ways the President can make and shape foreign policy, and to which Congress can respond. These roles are:

1. Responses to foreign events
2. Proposals for legislation
3. Negotiation of international agreements
4. Policy statements
5. Policy implementation
6. Independent action

This article examines these roles in the context of the Middle East and North Africa through analyzing relevant literature such as the presidents' speeches, statements, policies, and actions from Truman to Trump in order to better understand how American presidents establish and shape American foreign policy in the region, especially in moments of crises, what are the main and constant interests of the US in the region and the means through which American foreign policy is conducted.

1. Response to foreign events

As the spokesman and the head of foreign service, the armed forces, the intelligent services and the bureaucracy, the President has to respond to current international events and unexpected actions in foreign countries, especially those events and actions that challenge US interests. To illustrate, The US, at Truman's direction, was the first country to recognize the state of Israel on May 15, 1948 in the very same day the Provisional Government of Israel proclaimed a new state (Shannon, 2012).

As a response to Mossadegh's decision to nationalize Iran's oil industry and to hinder the expansion of the communist danger in the country, Eisenhower, Truman's successor, ordered the CIA to help overthrow Mossadegh's government and reinstate the Shah in power in August 1953. As a result, the US oil corporations were granted an equal share in the Iranian oil industry along with their British counterparts.² Eisenhower did also react to the Suez Crisis when Britain, France and Israel, known as the Tripartite Aggression, attacked Egypt in 1956 after Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. Eisenhower believed that attacking Egypt would strengthen Nasser and make him an Arab hero, especially that he made a good use of inflammatory anti-colonial discourse. Eisenhower did not only condemn the attacks but he also pressured the three states to withdraw their troops (Neff, 1988).

American presidents' responses to critical events in the Middle East continued with President Kennedy. As a response to Nasser's backed revolutionaries in Yemen in 1962, which aimed at toppling the *Imamate* regime, and fearing that this civil war would extend to a wider conflict with Saudi Arabia which aimed at reinstalling the *Imamate* to power, Kennedy recognized the Yemeni revolutionary regime through ordering an immediate withdrawal of Saudi forces and a gradual withdrawal of Egyptian ones (Bass, 2003). Being accused of supporting Israel in the Six-Day War, Johnson's immediate response was to call for a ceasefire to avoid the intervention of the Soviets, especially after Israel's occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights (Hahn, 2007). The Oil embargo of 1973 was also an unexpected event which necessitated the immediate reaction of the president, especially that it deeply affected US interests and security. As a response to this embargo, the Nixon administration launched a new energy strategy which aimed at increasing domestic production in an attempt to ease the skyrocketing prices of oil. However, this strategy was not very helpful, which forced Nixon to negotiate Israel's pullout from the Sinai and the Golan Heights (Merrill, 2007).

²in his diary, Eisenhower confessed that he did secretly order the CIA to overthrow Mossadegh's government saying "another recent development that we helped bring about is the restoration of the Shah to power in Iran and the elimination of Mossadegh. The things we did were "covert". If knowledge of them became public, we would not only be embarrassed in that region, but our chances to do anything of like nature in the future would almost totally disappear." See Eisenhower Diary. August 8, 1953. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB477/docs/Doc%201%20--%201953-10-08%20Eisenhower%20diary%20covering%20Iran%20Aug%2019.pdf>

On November 11, 1979, seven days after the beginning of the Iran hostage crisis,³ President Carter embargoed the Iranian oil and applied economic sanctions including freezing Iran's assets in the US, yet Carter did risk to use the military until April 11, 1980 when he took the risk of agreeing on a highly risky liberation operation called "Desert One", which ended unsuccessful due to technical malfunctioning in some helicopters (Houghton, 2004).

Responding through US forces continued with President Reagan who, after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June, 1982, sent 800 U.S. Marines to Lebanon as a part of a multinational peacekeeping force whose mission was maintaining a ceasefire. Furthermore, as a response to one of the most deadly attack on Americans on October 1983 when the Marines barracks were blown up at the Beirut airport leaving more than 240 deaths and 100 injured, Reagan approved air strikes against the leaders of Hezbollah (Geraphy, 2009).

Another case in which an American president responded to an attack of an Arab country on another one was on August 2, 1990 during President George W. H. Bush's presidency. He responded to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on the spur of the moment through exerting economic sanctions against Iraq and deploying US Armed forces to the region only a week after the invasion (Haley, 2002). In October 1994 and as a manifestation of its disappointment with these economic sanctions, the Iraqi government re-mobilized about 64000 troops near the borders with Kuwait. As a result, Clinton ordered the deployment of US troops to prevent a second Iraqi aggression (Herr, 2012). Clinton also threatened Saddam Hussein to use military force when this latter tried to hinder the work of the UNSCOM, the United Nations Special Commission whose mission was to ensure that Iraq complies with the United Nations Security Resolution 687 which dictates the destruction of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons facilities as well as the nuclear weapon ones after the Gulf War.⁴ Clinton's threats were made real after Saddam's reluctance to cooperate with UN inspectors; He ordered a four-day intense air attacks on Iraqi military facilities between December 16 and 19, 1998 (Hendrickson, 2002).

September 11 was the event that marked the presidency of George W. Bush par excellence. His response to this tragic event combined international military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as strong national defensive measures. The war in Afghanistan started on October 7 with air strikes against Taliban military sites and Al Qaeda's training camps (Lambeth, 2005). The war in Iraq began on March 19, 2003 targeting military and government offices in Baghdad.

In addition to inheriting the two wars from Bush, Obama's presidency coincided with the Arab uprisings of 2010 or what some prefer to call the *Arab Spring*. Obama joined the NATO and deployed American forces to help toppling Muammar El Qaddafi, the Libyan president. However, he chose not to react to the Syrian uprisings, especially in the beginning, despite Bashar's use of chemical weapons against rebels and civilians. The rise of ISIS, or ISIL, and their beheading of the two American journalists pushed Obama to respond in September 10, 2014 stating his plan to "degrade, and ultimately destroy ISIL, through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy."⁵ He soon ordered air strikes on some of ISIS' targets in Syria (Peterson, 2013).

Just a couple of months after joining the White House, Donald Trump made many responses to events in the Middle East. He imposed additional sanctions on Iran as a response to its ballistic missile test on January 29, 2017 and threatened to use force against Iran when he was asked if a military action is possible saying that "nothing is off the table". More controversially, Trump's response to Israel's plans to build new settlements in the West Bank was both unusually late in comparison to other countries' responses which strongly denounced the new settlements. On February 2, 2017, The Trump administration called Israel to stop the new constructions; however, it was signaled that Trump would shift away from Obama's rejection of all kinds of settlements as the White House stated "while we don't believe that the existence of settlements is not an impediment to peace, the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful to achieving that goal."⁶

³ On November 4, 1979, a group of Iranian students overran the American embassy and took more than sixty of its employees hostage. They asked the American administration to return the Shah for trial.

⁴ A full text of the resolution can be found in this link <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf>

⁵ See Obama's full speech in this link <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>

⁶ The White House. The Office of the Press Secretary. Statement by the Press Secretary. February 2, 2017.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/02/statement-press-secretary>

From these examples of Trump’s responses to events in the Middle East, we can predict that the American foreign policy in the Middle East during his mandate will shift away from Obama’s focus on prioritizing diplomatic solutions over the use of force as illustrated by Trump’s warning that the US “is putting Iran on notice”. In addition, it is more likely that Trump would take a more biased stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as illustrated by his opinion on the settlement issue in the West Bank and his attempt to pressure Obama to veto a UN resolution on Israeli settlements. Few days before Obama’s official end of his mandate, the US declined to veto UN Security Council resolution for Israel to stop Jewish settlement activity as it has always done before.⁷

To recapitulate, this role illustrates how American presidents, from Truman to Trump⁸, exercised their first foreign policy role in the Middle Eastern context; that is to say, responding to foreign events, especially those that challenge US interests in the region and undermine its security. These responses reveal that US foreign policy in the Middle East has been revolving around four main axes: First, protecting Israel as the US was the first country to recognize the state of Israel and did not hesitate to intervene militarily and diplomatically to make it safe and secure. Second, these responses also disclose that the region’s oil is very important for the economic security of the US which justifies its intervention in the Yaman crisis and the Gulf War. Furthermore, the oil embargo of 1973 clearly demonstrated how the US economy depends on the region’s oil resources. Third, the US has also strived to prevent Middle Eastern states from joining the Soviet bloc and block the Soviets’ intervention in Middle Eastern affairs. Last but not least, the US has equally been committed to protecting American citizens at home, such as launching a preventive war against terrorism after 9/11, or internationally as it was the case with the Iran hostage crisis, the attacks against US Marines Barracks at Beirut airport and the beheading of American citizens in Syria by ISIS. This article also predicts the course of American foreign policy in the region during Trump’s presidency based on his responses to events just a couple of months after entering the White House. The next paragraphs discuss the second foreign policy role of the American president; that is, providing proposal for legislation. The table below sums up the main events and the presidents’ responses.

Table 1: American presidents’ responses to international events in the MENA area

President	Party	International event/motive	The President’s response
Harry S. Truman	Democrat	The Establishment of the State of Israel	At Truman’s direction, the US was the first to recognize the state of Israel.
Dwight D. Eisenhower	Republican	Nationalizing Iran’s oil industry by Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh. Risk of expansion of communism in Iran	Ordered a CIA coup in 1953 to help overthrow Mossadegh’s government and protect US oil interests in the country.
		The Suez Crisis known as the Tripartite War of 1956 launched by Israel, France and Britain against Egypt. The fear that the attacks would strengthen Nasser, which would undermine US interests in the region.	Condemned the attacks and pressured the states to withdraw their troops .
John F. Kennedy	Democrat	Nasser backed the rebels in Yemen aiming at toppling the Imamate regime. Saudi Arabia aimed at reinstalling the Imamate to power. The fear that the civil war would expand to a larger area.	Recognized the Yemeni revolutionary regime. Ordered an immediate withdrawal of Saudi forces and gradual withdrawal of Egyptian ones.
Lyndon B. Johnson	Democrat	The Six-day war in 1967	Called for ceasefire to avoid the intervention of the Soviets.

⁷See the full text of Resolution 2334 in this link <http://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>

⁸it is important to point out that the time of writing this article coincides with the first two months of Trump’s mandate.

Richard M. Nixon	Republican	The Oil Embargo of 1973	Increased domestic production to compensate for the rise of oil price. The failure of this strategy pushed Nixon to negotiate Israel's pullout from the Sinai and the Golan Height.
Jimmy E. Carter	Democrat	The Iran's Hostage Crisis (1979-1981)	Embargoed Iranian oil Applied economic sanctions A failed military liberation operation
Ronald W. Reagan	Republican	Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982	Sent US marines as a part of multinational peacekeeping force.
		The deadly attacks on US marines in Beirut in 1983.	Approved air strikes against the leaders of Hezbollah .
George W. H. Bush	Republican	Iraq's invasion of Kuwait	Economic sanctions against Iraq Deploying US forces to the region.
William J. Clinton	Democrat	Iraq remobilized its troops near the borders with Kuwait.	Deployed US forces to prevent the second Iraq aggression.
		Saddam's reluctance to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors.	Intense air strikes on Iraq military facilities
George W. Bush	Republican	9/11	Military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Strong national defensive measures.
Barrack Obama	Democrat	The Arab Spring of 2010	Deploying US forces along with the NATO to help toppling Muamar El Qaddafi in Libya. No reaction to the Syrian uprisings.
		The Beheading of two American journalists by ISIS	Ordered air strikes on ISIS targets in Syria.
		Israel's plans to build new settlements	Declined to veto a UNSC resolution to stop Israel from building new Jewish settlements
Donald Trump (The first three months of his presidency)	Republican	Iran's ballistic missile test in January 2017	Applied additional economic sanctions on Iran and threatened to use force.
		Israel's start to build new settlements	A late call to Israel to stop the new constructions

2. Proposals for legislation

Led by the president, the executive branch can sometimes propose legislation to launch a new foreign policy program. Congress' approval remains vital for the proposal's consideration. In some cases, Congress may amend the administration's bill or suggest a totally different one. As a matter of fact, there are few cases in which American presidents refer to Congress in matters related to the Middle East. The paragraphs below illustrate some of those cases. The first case occurred after the 1973 October War which involved Arab states and Israel.⁹ The Gulf oil states supported the Arab coalition through increasing the price of oil by 70 percent in an attempt to force Israel to withdraw from the territories it occupied in the Six-Day War of 1967.

As a response, Nixon asked Congress for \$ 2.2 billion emergency aid to Israel, which prompted Arab leaders to apply a total embargo on oil export to the United States (Randall, 2016). Another case was initiated by George W.H. Bush when he turned to Congress to authorize a military action against Iraq after failing to convince

⁹This war is also called the Ramadan War or the Yom Kippur war. It took place from October 6 to 25 between a coalition of Arab states, led by Egypt and Syria, and Israel in the Sinai and Golan Heights, territories occupied by Israel since the Six-Day war of 1967. The US prevented Israel defeat through sending a large scale airlift supplies.

Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait diplomatically or through applying economic sanctions; Congress approved the president’s proposal for a military action on January 12, 1991 (Frantzich& Claude, 1995).

Similarly, George W. Bush, George H. W. Bush’s son, also turned to Congress to authorize the use of force against the same country, Iraq, after 9/11. As a result, Congress passed a resolution in 2002 allowing the President to go to war in Iraq if he found it necessary.¹⁰ Similarly, Obama also sent a draft resolution to Congress asking for authorization to use force against ISIS claiming that it poses a grave threat to US national security and the stability of the region. Although Congress rejected Obama’s request, Obama did use force against ISIS using Congress previous authorizations in 2001 and 2002 against the war on terror as a justification.

In sum, similar to the first foreign policy role of the President, the cases above illustrate that the American Presidents’ role in proposing legislations to Congress in the Middle Eastern context has been revolving around protecting Israel, securing US oil interests and engaging in preventive wars to preserve US security and maintain its effective presence in the region.

Table 2: American presidents’ preposals for legislations pertaining to issues in the MENA area.

President	Party	Reason for the legislation proposal	The Legislation proposal	Follow-up
Richard M. Nixon	Republican	Arab states increased the price of oil by70% after the October war of 1973 to force Israel to withdraw from the territories it occupied in 1967.	Nixon asked Congress for \$2.2 emergency aid to Israel.	Arab leaders applied a total embargo on oil export to the US
George W. H. Bush	Republican	Failing to force Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait using diplomatic means and economic sanctions.	Asked Congress to authorize military action against Iraq	Congress approved the president’s proposal on January 12, 1991
George W. Bush	Republican	The war on terror after 9/11	Asked Congress to authorize a military action against Iraq	Congress passed a resolution in 2002 allowing the president to go to war.
Barrack Obama	Democrat	The war on Terror against ISIS	Asked congress to authorize the use offorce against ISIS.	Congress rejected the proposal, but Obama did use force using previous Congress authorizations in 2001 and 2002 on the war on terror.

3. Negotiation of international agreements

Negotiating international agreements is one of the foreign policy roles of the American president who must get Congress consent to ratify these agreements.¹¹ Interestingly enough, American presidents, from Truman to Trump, were rarely involved in negotiating international agreements or treaties relevant to Middle Eastern states unlike other states or regions.¹² Furthermore, the US has rarely been one of the main parties in these very few relevant agreements in which American presidents were involved in negotiations; rather, the US mainly played the role of the mediator such as inCamp David Accords in 1978 and Oslo Accords in 1993.

¹⁰See the full text of resolution in this link <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-joint-resolution/114>

¹¹It is important to point out that very few agreements can be called “sole executive agreements” in which the President thinks that he can ratify the agreements without referring to Congress. Examples include the Yalta Agreement of 1945, the Vietnam Peace Agreement of 1973, the Iranian Hostage Agreement of 1981, and the Afghanistan Settlement Agreement of 1988.

¹²It is important to mention that I meant important agreements and treaties that American presidents were personally involved in negotiating not the bi-lateral agreements that take some cultural or even economic aspects and which are negotiated at a level of US embassies or departments.

The Camp David agreement was actually considered the greatest foreign policy achievement of president Carter not only in the Middle East but in his entire foreign policy. Carter was able to convince the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egypt's president Anwar Sadat to sign a historic peace agreement in Camp David, a presidential retreat outside of Washington.

After twelve days of mediation between September 5 and 17, Carter was able to persuade Begin to withdraw from the entire Sinai Peninsula and the two countries would recognize each other's governments. In return, Carter would provide financial aid to Israel for rebuilding its military bases in Negev Desert (Stein, 1999). The end of Carter's presidency also coincided with the aforementioned Iran Hostage Crisis which was ended by an executive agreement resulting in freeing the hostages in return to unblocking all Iranian funds amusing tribunal at The Hague to end their financial pretenses in addition to a US promise not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs (Houghton, 2004).

The Oslo Accords are another example in which an American president was involved in mediation between Israel and Palestine. While Norway played a crucial role in the secret negotiations, President Clinton led the open negotiations between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, which resulted in signing the agreements in 1993 on the White House Lawn. However, the Israeli atrocities precluded the success of the Oslo Accords whose main aim was establishing a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. As a matter of fact, the first strategic agreement that the US signed with a Middle Eastern state was in 2008 during George W. Bush's presidency; the agreement was called the Strategic Framework Agreement which aimed at establishing a political, economic and security relationship with the newly established government of Iraq.¹³ Additionally, Bush signed the Status of Forces Agreement which outlines the security relationship between the US and Iraq and arranges for a gradual withdrawal of US forces by December 31, 2011.¹⁴

Obama's second term started with leading negotiations with Iran, along with five other heads of states, about its nuclear weapons program. The negotiations led to an agreement in 2015 which aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons for at least ten years in exchange for clearing away its economic sanctions (Tabrizi, 2015). To sum up, the US President's foreign policy role of negotiating international agreements emphasizes the fact that Israel's security constitutes the building block of its foreign policy in the Middle East. This is illustrated by the US presidents' mediation role in the Camp David and Oslo Accords. Furthermore, the agreements signed with Iran to end the hostage crisis as well as those with Iraq in 2008 demonstrates that the region's oil and protecting US citizens are other important building blocks of US foreign policy in the Middle East

Table 3: International agreements negotiated by American presidents in the MENA region

President	Party	The agreement/Context	Main points of agreement
Jimmy E. Carter	Democrat	The Camp David Peace Accords in 1978 Between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin Iran Hostage Crisis	Israel would withdraw from the entire Sinai Peninsula. Egypt and Israel would recognize each other's government. Carter would provide financial aid to Israel to rebuild its military bases in Negev Desert.
			Freeing the hostages in return to unblocking all Iranian funds and using a tribunal at The Hague to end their financial pretenses. A US promise not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs

¹³The full text of the Strategic Framework Agreement can be found in this link <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122076.pdf>

¹⁴The full text of the Status of Forces Agreement can be found in this link <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122074.pdf>

William J. Clinton	Democrat	The Oslo Accords between Palestine and Israel in 1993.	Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed an agreement to establish lasting peace. The continuing Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians precluded this peace.
George W. Bush	Republican	Strategic Framework Agreement with Iraq in 2008.	Establishing a political, economic and security relationship with the newly elected government.
		The Status of Forces Agreement	Outlined the security relationship with Iraq and arranged for a gradual withdrawal of US forces by the end of 2011.
Barrack Obama	Democrat	Leading an International agreement with Iran in 2015 about its nuclear weapons program along with five other countries.	Preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons for at least ten years in exchange for clearing its economic sanctions.

4. Policy Statements

The president of the US can also establish the country's foreign policy through presidential statements which can be both unilateral or joint.¹⁵ These statements provide a general overview of the country's goals, especially pertaining to its foreign affairs; the contexts of such statements vary, but they are generally pronounced in the State of the Union Address, addresses to the United Nations General Assembly, the summits of other international organizations such as the NATO or specific addresses on relevant issues in the region. To examine the American presidents' priorities in the Middle East, I surveyed and analyzed their State of the Union addresses, their addresses to the United Nations and other relevant speeches from Kennedy to Trump. For this purpose, I used Miller Center's presidential speech archive to get the transcripts of these speeches.¹⁶

4.1. John F. Kennedy

The first US interest in the region focused on preventing its countries, along with African and Eastern European countries, from joining the communist bloc in addition to supporting their independence and freedom. It was President Kennedy who first pointed that out in the State of Union Address of January 11, 1963; he stated "The views of their governments may sometimes be very different from ours--but events in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe teach us never to write off any nation as lost to the Communists- That is the lesson of our time. We support the independence of those newer or weaker states whose history, geography, economy or lack of power impels them to remain outside "entangling alliances."¹⁷ This statement illustrates that the first time the Middle East, as a region, was mentioned in an American president's speech was done within a global American strategy to prevent the communist's expansion in the world.

4.2. Lyndon B. Johnson

The second president who mentioned the Middle East in one of his speeches, in a relatively more elaborate and specific manner than Kennedy, was President Lyndon B. Johnson. In his State of the Union Address of January 10, 1967, President Johnson stated that the US was trying hard to ameliorate the relations between the countries of the region.

Indeed, he referred to the relation between Israel and some Arab States. Johnson stated "In the Middle East the spirit of good will toward all, unfortunately, has not yet taken hold. An already tortured peace seems to be constantly threatened. We shall try to use our influence to increase the possibilities of improved relations among the nations of that region. We are working hard at that task."¹⁸ Reading this speech reveals that this paragraph in

¹⁵ Joint statements are issued with other states' leaders.

¹⁶ The Miller Center is a nonpartisan affiliate of the University of Virginia that specializes in presidential scholarship, public policy, and political history. The presidential speech archive can be found in this link <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches>

¹⁷ John F. Kennedy. State of the Union Address. January 11, 1962. <http://millercenter.org/president/kennedy/speeches/speech-5742>

¹⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson. State of the Union Address. January 10, 1967 <http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-5665>

which the Middle East was mentioned remains insignificant compared to other foreign policy issues tackled in the same speech such as the Soviets, Eastern Europe and Africa. To illustrate, the paragraph above makes up 53 words taking into consideration that the speech's total number of words is 14 400. This makes it the shortest paragraph talking about an issue of foreign policy compared, for example, to 173 words paragraph talking about Africa and 513 words dealing with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Clearly, the Middle East was not a priority for the US during Johnson's presidency.

The same conciseness is noticed in Johnson's State of the Union Address of January 17, 1968 and January 14, 1969 in which he supported the UN's efforts and resolutions to mediate between Israel and Arabs after the Six-Day War.¹⁹

4.3. Richard Nixon

While there was no mention of any issue related to the Middle East in President Nixon's state of the union addresses of 1970, 1971 and 1972, he examined a couple of issues in his state of the union address of January 30, 1974. First, he reiterated his intention to help settling the Arab-Israeli conflict in a just and lasting manner through implementing the Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 which require the disengagement of the Egyptian and Israeli forces. In the very same paragraph, he related this issue to the oil embargo crisis of 1973 stating "it should be clearly understood by our friends in the Middle East that the United States will not be coerced on this issue. Regardless of the outcome of this meeting²⁰, the cooperation of the American people in our energy conservation program has already gone a long way towards achieving a goal to which I am deeply dedicated. Let us do everything we can to avoid gasoline rationing in the United States of America."²¹ This statement draws America's first priorities in the region; namely, protecting Israel and securing the flow of oil from the region. The Oil Embargo Crisis of 1973 was a dilemma for the US in the sense that its priority to protect Israel could have been compromised by the other priority; that is to say, the US energy security. This is why President Nixon, as stated above, made it clear that the US "will not be coerced on this issue" and urged all Americans to ration their consumption of gasoline.

4.4. Gerald Ford

President Gerald Ford inherited Nixon's attempt to settle the conflict between Egypt and Israel. In his address on US foreign policy on April 10, 1975, President Ford clearly stated that the tension in the Middle East in this period did not affect the US vital interests only, but it also threatened its allies and the stability of the world economy due to the Oil Embargo Crisis, which he called 'intolerable risks'.²² As a response, he stated that "we will not accept stagnation or stalemate with all its attendant risks to peace and prosperity and to our relations in and outside of the region."

4.5. Jimmy Carter

In his state of the union address of January 19, 1978, President Jimmy Carter highlighted three main goals of US foreign policy.²³ First, strengthening US security through fortifying the country's military might, modernizing that of its European allies and boosting agreements with possible opponents, especially with the Soviets. Second, creating a peaceful world through promoting harmony between conflicted countries in the Middle East and supporting their negotiations. In the same speech, President Carter described the role of the US in the Arab-Israeli conflict as "difficult and sometimes thankless and controversial"²⁴ implying the Arabs' discontent with this role which culminated in the oil embargo crisis of 1973.

The third major goal of US foreign policy was to maintain an international economic growth and stability, which, according to Carter, affects the daily life of American citizens. A close look at the order of these goals reveal that

¹⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson. State of the Union Address. January 17, 1968. <http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-5666> ; Lyndon B. Johnson. State of the Union Address. January 14, 1969. <http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-5667>

²⁰ An urgent meeting was scheduled with the Arab oil producing countries to discuss the possibility of lifting the oil embargo.

²¹ Richard Nixon. State of the Union Address. January 30, 1974. <http://millercenter.org/president/nixon/speeches/speech-3887>

²² Gerald Ford. Address on US Foreign Policy. April 10, 1975. <http://millercenter.org/president/ford/speeches/speech-5500>

²³ Jimmy Carter. State of the Union Address. January 19, 1978. <http://millercenter.org/president/carter/speeches/speech-5537>.

²⁴ Ibid

peace in the Middle East comes before maintaining international economic growth and stability, which directly affects the lives of all Americans. This is because the oil resources of the region are crucial for preserving this economic growth and stability. In so saying, we can consider this state of the Union speech the first of its kind, up to this period, in terms of not only putting peace in the Middle East as one of the top priorities of US foreign policy, but it also implied the importance of the region's resources in fulfilling another major foreign policy goal; that is to say, achieving a world economic growth and stability.

Carter's state of the union address of 1980 was similar to that of 1978 as he highlighted three challenges to US foreign policy: The international growth of the Soviet military might, the increasing dependence of the West on Middle Eastern oil, and the revolution in Iran which was an unpredicted new development in the region.²⁵ To meet the oil challenge, Carter emphasized the importance of having "a national will, diplomatic and political wisdom, economic sacrifice and, of course, military capability." Again, it is clear from this statement how important is the region's oil for America and what it might take for the American president to meet this challenge. In the same speech, Carter related the oil challenge to the one of hindering the Soviet military expansion and made it very clear that "any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of American and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."²⁶

It is important to point out that President Carter was the first American president to dedicate an entire speech of almost a thousand words to talk about the Arab-Israeli conflict at the Camp David Summit.²⁷ Similarly, he devoted another speech to Iran rescue mission in which he informed the nation of the failed attempt to rescue the American hostages using a military intervention.²⁸ Carter was also the first American president who clearly expressed his support to Israel in his state of the union address of January 23, 1979. He stated "Our firm commitment to Israel's survival and security is rooted in our deepest convictions and in our knowledge of the strategic importance to our own nation of a stable Middle East."²⁹ He did the same thing in the state of the union address of 1980 when he stated "let no one doubt our commitment to the security of Israel."³⁰ In sum, there were many challenges to US foreign policy in the Middle East during Carter's presidency, which include the oil crisis, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Camp David negotiations as well as the Iran hostage crisis. This explains Carter's numerous statements on the Middle East compared to his predecessors. In fact, it is safe to say that it was during Carter's presidency that the Middle East started to become more vital in US foreign policy, and it was also during his presidency that main guidelines of US foreign policy in the Middle East were defined and followed by his successors starting with President Ronald Reagan.

4.6. Ronald Reagan

One of the first speeches of President Ronald Reagan to the nation was dedicated to US policy in the Middle East. In this speech, he reiterated his predecessor's main goals and challenges in the region. First, he emphasized America's and his commitment to supporting Israel stating "America's commitment to the security of Israel is ironclad, and I might add, so is mine."³¹ Second, Reagan restated Carter's resolve to deter the Soviets' further expansion in the region as well as to strive to find a final settlement to the Arab Israeli conflict through carrying out the Camp David negotiations. Last but not least, Reagan echoed Carter's premise that the region's oil resources remain strategic to the stability of the world economy stating "we can't ignore the fact that the well-being of much of the world's economy is tied to the stability in the strife-torn Middle East."³²

²⁵ Jimmy Carter. State of the Union Address. January 23, 1980. <http://millercenter.org/president/carter/speeches/speech-3404>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Jimmy Carter. Remarks on Joint Statement at Camp David Summit. September 17, 1978 <http://millercenter.org/president/carter/speeches/speech-3401>

²⁸ Jimmy Carter. Statement on the Iran Rescue Mission. April 25, 1980. <http://millercenter.org/president/carter/speeches/speech-3936>

²⁹ Jimmy Carter. State of the Union Address. January 23, 1979. <http://millercenter.org/president/carter/speeches/speech-5533>

³⁰ Jimmy Carter. State of the Union Address. January 23, 1980. <http://millercenter.org/president/carter/speeches/speech-3404>

³¹ Ronald Reagan. Speech to the Nation on US Policy in the Middle East. September 1, 1982.

<http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-5856>

³² Ibid

Reagan also addressed the nation on the repercussions of the Lebanese civil war calling Israel to withdraw from Beirut and allying with France and Italy to form a multinational force in an attempt to help the Lebanese government to have full control of the capital.³³ One year later, another speech to the nation on Lebanon was delivered by Reagan after the deadly attack on US marines killing more than 200 and injuring many others. This huge loss required Reagan to address all Americans and answer two important questions he highlighted in this speech: “Why should our young men be dying in Lebanon? And why Lebanon is important to us?”

The answers to these questions were just another opportunity to restate the importance of the Middle East to the US and the West in general and the danger it might cause America in case a *hostile* power takes control of the region. Reagan pointed out “The area is key to the economic and political life of the West. Its strategic importance, its energy resources, the Suez Canal, and the well-being of the nearly 200 million people living there—all are vital to us and to world peace. If that key should fall into the hands of a power or powers hostile to the free world, there would be a direct threat to the United States and to our allies.”³⁴ In addition, the answers to the aforementioned questions were also another chance to display the ‘moral obligation’ of the US in guaranteeing the existence of Israel as Reagan said “We have another reason to be involved. Since 1948 our nation has recognized and accepted a moral obligation to assure the continued existence of Israel as a nation.”³⁵ The third point Reagan provided to justify US involvement in Lebanon, which relates to the second point, was the Soviet presence in Syria which, as he put it, occupied a large part of Lebanon. Reagan expressed his fear that the Soviet help to Syria in developing weapons could endanger the security of Israel saying “Syria has become a home for 7,000 Soviet advisers and technicians who man a massive amount of Soviet weaponry, including SS-21 ground-to-ground missiles capable of reaching vital areas of Israel.”³⁶

President Reagan was the first American President to order air strikes against an Arab country, Libya, on April 14, 1986; the attacks targeted some installations of President Mu’ammār Qadhafi who, according to Reagan, was involved in bombarding a nightclub in Berlin patronized by American servicemen. In a speech to the nation on these strikes, Reagan announced the success of the mission and made it clear that the US reserves all rights to defend itself against terrorist attacks using a preemptive action. He stated “We had done what we had to do. If necessary, we shall do it again.”³⁷ It is worth noting that the phrase “preemptive action” was used for the first time by Reagan to refer to a military action against an Arab country claiming that its leadership is involved in terrorists attacks against American interests.

4.7. George H. W. Bush

The tradition of devoting an entire speech to the nation to examine a problem in the region continued with President George H. W. Bush, Reagan’s former Vice-President. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait was the subject of one of his first speeches in which he ordered an embargo of all trade with Iraq as well as freezing all Iraqi assets in the US in addition to sending American troops to Saudi Arabia to deter potential attacks from Iraq. In the same speech, President Bush highlighted the importance of Iraqi oil to the US and to the world and asked other oil-producing countries to increase their production to curtail any possible impact this crisis might have on the world economy.³⁸ The same emphasis on the importance of Iraq’s oil was noticed in another Bush’s speech on Iraq’s invasion to Kuwait, which he delivered before a joint session of Congress on September 11, 1990, about a month after the first speech.³⁹ Less than a month later, President Bush gave another speech in the United Nations, in which he examined many issues the most important of which was the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait; in this speech, he clearly stated the American policy vis-à-vis this issue saying “Let me take this opportunity to make the policy of my government clear.

³³Ronald Reagan. Address to the Nation on Lebanon. September 20, 1982. <http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-5453>

³⁴Ronald Reagan. Speech to the nation on Lebanon and Grenada. October 17, 1983.

<http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-5860>

³⁵Ibid

³⁶Ibid

³⁷Ronald Reagan. Speech to the nation on air strikes against Libya. April 14, 1986.

<http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-5864>

³⁸George H. W. Bush. Address on Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. August 8, 1990. <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>

³⁹George H. W. Bush. Address on Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. September 11, 1990. <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3425>

The United States supports the use of sanctions to compel Iraq's leaders to withdraw immediately and without condition from Kuwait. We also support the provision of medicine and food for humanitarian purposes, so long as distribution can be properly monitored.”⁴⁰ After exhausting all diplomatic means and economic sanctions to convince Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, an international coalition led by the US used force and invaded Iraq. This decision was communicated by President Bush in an address to the nation in which he also mentioned destroying Iraq’s chemical and nuclear weapons facilities as one of the invasion’s goals.⁴¹

The State of the Union address of 1991 further emphasized the aforementioned policy objectives in Iraq and briefly mentioned protecting Israel as one of these objectives; he states “if he (Saddam) thinks that by targeting innocent civilians in Israel and Saudi Arabia, that he will gain advantage he is dead wrong.”⁴²

The end of the Gulf War and the success of the Operation Desert Storm was announced by President Bush in an address before a joint session of Congress on March 6, 1991. In this address, he outlined four important goals to be attained in the region. These include maintaining a capable US naval presence in the region, control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the missiles used to deliver them, settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and fostering economic growth in the region through redirecting its wealth to peaceful aims rather than military ones.⁴³

Clearly, President George H. W. Bush’s foreign policy in the Middle East revolved around Iraq and the Gulf War. His statements on this issue emphasized the traditional US interests in the region such as its oil resources and the protection of Israel; To achieve this, President Bush argued that the US should establish a military presence in the region and prevent its states from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

4.8. Bill Clinton

The security of Israel continued to be a focal point of US foreign policy in the Middle East during President Clinton’s presidency. After the bombings targeting Israel in January 22, 1995, which killed 19 Israelis, Clinton signed an Executive Order which aimed at blocking the assets in the United States of what he referred to as *terrorist* organizations which, according to Clinton, “threaten to disrupt the peace process.”⁴⁴This was communicated in the State of Union Address of 1995.

4.9. George W. Bush

It is undoubtedly true that 9/11 was the most challenging event for President George W. Bush. In his response to these attacks, President Bush summed up his future foreign policies saying “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. ... Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. ”⁴⁵Indeed, it did start with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and then moved to Iraq and now with ISIS in Syria.

To achieve this, President Bush outlined, in the same speech, a series of policy plans stating “We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.... And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰George H. W. Bush. Address to the United Nations. October 1, 1990. <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3426>

⁴¹George H. W. Bush. Address to the Nation on the Invasion of Iraq. January 16, 1991. <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3426>

⁴²George H. W. Bush. State of Union Address.. January 29, 1991. <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3426>

⁴³George H. W. Bush. Address before a joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War. March 6, 1991.

<http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3430>

⁴⁴Bill Clinton. State of the Union Address. January 24, 1995. <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3440>

⁴⁵George W. Bush. Address on the US Response to the attacks of September 11. September 21, 2001.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/address-on-the-u.s.-response-to-the-attacks-of-september-11>

⁴⁶Ibid

Such a strong statement was put into practice through launching many policy initiatives and establishing new laws. For example, the USA PATRIOT Act,⁴⁷ an act of Congress which was signed by President Bush on October 26, 2001, was criticized for giving too much power to the government which sometimes infringe on civil liberties. These include surveying a suspect's cell phone, PC and other devices without separate court authorizations, allowing sharing information from criminal probes with intelligence agencies and other parts of the governments, having easy access to business records in foreign intelligence investigations, easing up the barriers to launching foreign intelligence wiretaps, and searching the suspect's home without immediate notification, to name a few.⁴⁸ Bush asked Congress to reauthorize the PATRIOT Act in the State of the Union Address of January 31, 2006.⁴⁹ Additionally, the 9/11 commission recommended freezing and seizing the assets of suspicious organizations and tracking their financial networks all over the world.⁵⁰ Furthermore, one of the pretexts given by the Bush administration to invade Iraq was Saddam's relations with Al Qaeda and Usama Ben Laden. Clearly, Bush's statement right after 9/11 was translated into policy initiatives that take legal, financial or military aspects.

Bush's first State of the Union Address reiterated America's goals vis-à-vis the war on terror and summed them up in two main objectives as president Bush stated : "Our nation will continue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world."⁵¹ This is a statement which illustrates Bush's belief in preventive war and his determination to launch endless battles in the Middle East and elsewhere. In fact, Bush, in the same speech, named his targets, Iraq, Iran and North Korea, characterized them as the axis of evil and claimed that they own weapons of mass destruction or support terrorist groups as it is the case with Iraq.

The belief in preventive war was clearer in another statement in an Address to the Nation on the Department of Homeland Security in which Bush stated "The first and best way to secure America's homeland is to attack the enemy where he hides and plans, and we're doing just that."⁵² In the same speech, President Bush announced the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security which would unite several agencies in order to closely work together. These agencies include the Coast Guard, the Border Patrol, the Customs Service, Immigration officials, the Transportation Security Administration, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This new department was created as one of the mechanisms to pursue the war on terror and was charged with several tasks. First, to control America's borders, block terrorists and their explosives and hinder their entrance into the country. Second, to react swiftly and efficiently, in coordination with state and local authorities, to emergencies. Third, to safeguard Americans through assembling the best scientists and experts to create technologies in an attempt to descry biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. Last but not least, to take care of reviewing intelligence and law enforcement information from other governmental agencies so as to uncover potential threats to the country and counter them. Following this statement which was policy oriented, as the previous statements of all American presidents mentioned in this chapter, President Bush delivered a speech at the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002, a year after the events of 9/11. The whole speech was about Iraq and Bush's claim that it supports terrorist groups and develops weapons of mass destruction. It was clear from Bush's speech to the General Assembly with statements such as "Iraq's government openly praised the attacks of September the 11th.

⁴⁷This is the ten-letter abbreviation of the title of the law "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorist Act of 2001."

⁴⁸See the full text of the USA PATRIOT Act: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-107hr3162enr/pdf/BILLS-107hr3162enr.pdf>

⁴⁹George W. Bush. State of the Union Address. January 31, 2006.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/speech-4461>

⁵⁰Martin A. Weiss. CRS Report for Congress. Terrorist Financing: The 9/11 Commission Recommendation.

<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RS21902.pdf>

⁵¹George W. Bush. State of Union Address. January 29, 2002. <http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/speech-4540>

⁵²George W. Bush. Address to the Nation on the Department of Homeland Security. June 6, 2002.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/address-to-the-nation-on-the-department-of-homeland-security>

And al Qaeda terrorists escaped from Afghanistan and are known to be in Iraq,” or “the history, the logic, and the facts lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger. To suggest otherwise is to hope against the evidence. To assume this regime's good faith is to bet the lives of millions and the peace of the world in a reckless gamble. And this is a risk we must not take,”⁵³ that America's next target after Afghanistan was Iraq and that the US was determined to go to Iraq even without the consensus of the international community, especially the Security Council.

President Bush continued making policy statements concerning the war on terror. In his State of the Union Address of January 28, 2003, he proposed to the Congress the creation of Project BioShield which aimed at countering bioterrorism through making effective vaccines and treatments against some agents that might be used by terrorists such as anthrax, botulinum toxin, Ebola and plague.⁵⁴ In this same speech, Bush commanded the FBI, the CIA, the Homeland Security and the Department of Defense to create Terrorist Threat Integration Center to combine information from these entities and analyze them in a single location. Furthermore, Bush made it clear saying “We will consult. But let there be no misunderstanding: If Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him.”⁵⁵ This indicates that America was determined to invade Iraq with or without the agreement of the Security Council, especially that the American forces were already assembling in or near the Middle East at the moment of pronouncing this statement. Indeed, this is what Bush announced in the next speech to the nation on Iraq in which he stated “The United States of America has the sovereign authority to use force in assuring its own national security. That duty falls to me, as Commander-in-Chief, by the oath I have sworn, by the oath I will keep.”⁵⁶

He continued in the same speech saying “The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, so we will rise to ours.” This clearly confirmed Bush's previous hints to using force without the consent of the Security Council. Two days after this statement, Bush addressed the nation to announce the start of the war in Iraq. Surprisingly enough, there was no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which was the main reason why the US invaded this country according to many of Bush's statements. After the war, the same person, George W. Bush, addressed the nation to say that America did not find what it went for in Iraq “It is true that Saddam Hussein had a history of pursuing and using weapons of mass destruction. It is true that he systematically concealed those programs, and blocked the work of U.N. weapons inspectors. It is true that many nations believed that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. But much of the intelligence turned out to be wrong. As your President, I am responsible for the decision to go into Iraq. Yet it was right to remove Saddam Hussein from power.”⁵⁷ All in all, it was during George W. Bush's mandates that the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East was intensified with the launch of the *War on Terror* resulting in establishing many new policies towards the region. These policies were characterized by military intervention, stricter intelligence measures and the belief in unilateral action and preventive war. The question is: would Bush's successor, Barack Obama, follow Bush's path?

4.10. Barack Obama

Unlike his predecessors, Obama was the first American president to give a speech at an Arab and Muslim institution of higher education few months after entering the White House. The speech took place at Cairo University and, just like the other speeches, was an opportunity to make policy statements pertaining to America's

⁵³George W. Bush. Remarks to the UN General Assembly. September 12, 2002.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/remarks-at-the-un-general-assembly>

⁵⁴George W. Bush. State of the Union Address. January 28, 2003.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/speech-4541>

⁵⁵Ibid

⁵⁶George W. Bush. Address to the Nation on Iraq. March 17, 2003.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/address-to-the-nation-on-iraq>

⁵⁷George W. Bush. Address on Renewal in Iraq. December 18, 2005.

<http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/speeches/address-on-renewal-in-iraq>

future plans in the region. The first observation is Obama's conviction that "Military power alone is not going to solve the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan."⁵⁸

In so saying, Obama stated his five-year plan to invest \$1.2 billion each year to build schools, hospitals, roads and businesses in Pakistan and \$2,8 billion to help improve Afghan's economy. The second remark was Obama's belief in the importance of diplomacy and multilateral decision making in solving international problems. He stated "Although I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, I also believe that events in Iraq have reminded America of the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible."⁵⁹

In so doing, Obama promised, in the same speech, to withdraw all American troops from Iraq and close Guantanamo Bay. Indeed, he did announce the end of the combat mission in Iraq in address to the nation in August 2010.⁶⁰

As far as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is concerned, Obama reiterated America's "strong and unbreakable" bonds with Israel. However, he asked Israel to stop its continuous settlements because they are not legitimate and they undermine peace.⁶¹ In this same speech, Obama also discussed America's relations with Iran and its nuclear program. Obama seized this opportunity to briefly highlight some of the most important issues that mark America's relations with Iran which include the US involvement in overthrowing a democratically elected government in Iran as well as Iran's Hostage Crisis and bombings of American targets. Obama made it clear that the US is "prepared to move forward" regarding Iran's nuclear program without clarifying how would the US do so.⁶² This is in addition to other issues such as America's willingness to partner with Muslim countries to expand girls' literacy and women's employment through micro-financing as well as to expand exchange programs and increase scholarships like the one that brought Obama's father to the US. From these statements extracted from Obama's speech at the Cairo University, it seemed that Obama's policies in the region would be different from his predecessor's whose policies had revolved around militarism and unilateralism in solving international problems. To illustrate, in addition to his focus on diplomacy and multilateral decision making pertaining to problems in the Middle East, Obama was the first American president to clearly talk about other aspects that would characterize American foreign Policy in the region, especially the cultural and educational exchange programs and the promotion of women's education and employment.

President Obama's first mandate coincided with the so called *Arab Spring* which started in Tunisia. Obama's response to the events in Tunisia was so brief in his 2011 State of the Union Address. The whole response was as follows: "And we saw that same desire to be free in Tunisia, where the will of the people proved more powerful than the writ of a dictator. And tonight, let us be clear: The United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia, and supports the democratic aspirations of all people."⁶³ Such a statement cannot be considered a policy statement because it is vague. In fact, it is normal and wise to be vague in a moment of uncertainty such as the time that follows the Tunisian uprising, especially that this State of the Union Address was given few days only after the uprising in Tunisia.

About two years after his speech at Cairo University, which was delivered before the Arab uprisings, Obama gave a speech on American diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa to highlight the most important aspects of his future policies in the region few months after the outset of the uprisings in the Arab world. In this speech, Obama talked about a *shift* in American foreign policy in the MENA area. The first drastic *change* one can notice in this speech is how Obama talked about the situation in the Arab world. He stated "The story of this revolution [Tunisian], and the ones that followed, should not have come as a surprise.

⁵⁸Barack Obama. Address at Cairo University. June 4, 2009. <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/speeches/speech-5502>

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Barack Obama. Address to the Nation on the End of the Combat Mission in Iraq. August 13, 2010. <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/speeches/address-on-the-end-of-the-combat-mission-in-iraq>

⁶¹Ibid

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Barack Obama. State of the Union Address. January 25, 2011. <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/speeches/2011-state-of-the-union>

The nations of the Middle East and North Africa won their independence long ago, but in too many places their people did not. In too many countries, power has been concentrated in the hands of a few. In too many countries, a citizen like that young vendor had nowhere to turn -- no honest judiciary to hear his case; no independent media to give him voice; no credible political party to represent his views; no free and fair election where he could choose his leader.”

Indeed, no American president, including Obama, has described the countries in the region in this manner before the fall of the Egyptian and Tunisian leaders, Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, after thirty and twenty years in power respectively. The important question one might ask is why American presidents have never spoken about such anomalies in the region before the so called *Arab Spring*? Why it has taken Obama six months since the beginning of the uprisings to pronounce such a statement?

Apart from the *shift* in describing the situation in the MENA area, it seemed that Obama’s policies would be a discontinuation of his predecessor’s as he stated in the same speech “The question before us is what role America will play as this story unfolds. For decades, the United States has pursued a set of core interests in the region: countering terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons; securing the free flow of commerce and safeguarding the security of the region; standing up for Israel’s security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace. We will continue to do these things.”⁶⁴Obama added that he would support the democratic transitions in some countries through military intervention with the NATO such as the case in Libya or with Arab and international coalitions in Syria with ISIL, strategic and political tools such as the case in Egypt and Tunisia, or economic sanctions on the Syrian regime. The military intervention in Libya with the NATO was a good illustration of Obama’s promise to engage in multilateral decision making pertaining to military interventions in the region. Furthermore, Obama reiterated what he mentioned in his speech at the Cairo University concerning other alternative means of foreign policy he would adopt in the region. Such means include expanding educational exchanges, establishing entrepreneurship networks, improving health and access to technology as well as helping civil society. Obama has also launched some new programs such as the Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative.

However, Obama could not resist military intervention longer and decided to intervene in Syria, especially after the alleged use of chemical weapons by Assad’s regime against the Syrians. This military intervention, as Obama clarified in an address to the nation on Syria, came after exhausting diplomatic negotiations and economic sanctions and would not be as the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan in terms of the scope and length; the intervention in Syria will be precise and specific and aims at destroying Assad’s chemical weapons capabilities. Obama justified this decision saying “it is not only a violation of international law, it’s also a danger to our national security.”⁶⁵Indeed, Obama was referring to the possibility of terrorist groups acquiring these kinds of weapons and using them against America’s allies in the region, especially Israel. Again, Israel’s security was the most important reason behind Obama’s decision to intervene in Syria.

4.11. Donald Trump

Trump’s inauguration speech did not include anything about the president’s future policies in the Middle East, except pursuing *the war on terror*:“ we will reinforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth.”⁶⁶ Israel’s security continued to be a priority in US foreign policy with Trump. Netanyahu was one of the first head of states hosted by Trump in the White House less than a month after entering the White House.

⁶⁴Barack Obama. Speech on American Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa. May 19, 2011.

<http://millercenter.org/president/obama/speeches/speech-on-american-diplomacy-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>

⁶⁵Barack Obama. Address to the nation on Syria. September 10, 2013.

<http://millercenter.org/president/obama/speeches/address-to-the-nation-on-syria>

⁶⁶Donald Trump. The Inaugural Speech. The White House. January 20, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address>

The joint press conference, which reunited the two heads of states, was an opportunity for Trump to reaffirm America’s “unbreakable bond with our cherished ally, Israel,”⁶⁷ while Netanyahu assures Trump that ‘the United States has no better ally than Israel.’ Trump did also reiterate his plan to move the US embassy to Jerusalem saying “I’d love to see that happen. We’re looking at it very, very strongly. We’re looking at it with great care -- great care, believe me. And we’ll see what happens.” Indeed, this remains an unprecedented statement by an American president, which might aggravate the conflict in case it is really put into practice. In a very friendly statement, which sounds like a polite request rather than an official warning, Trump stated “I’d like to see you hold back on settlements for a little bit.”⁶⁸

It is important to mention that this statement was made after the Security Council passed a resolution against the settlements against which the US veto was, surprisingly, not used during the last days of Obama’s presidency.

In this joint press conference, Trump discussed other issues that relate to Israel’s security such as Iran’s nuclear program. Trump described Obama’s deal with Iran along with other six world powers as ‘one of the worst deals I’ve ever seen,’ and said that he “ would do *more* to prevent Iran from ever developing- I mean ever developing- a nuclear weapon.”⁶⁹ Trump was referring to the sanctions applied on Iran after the missile test on January 31, 2016.

These few statements from Trump’s first couple of months as the president of the US, which coincides with writing this paper, reveal that his foreign policy in the Middle East will take supporting Israel as his first and foremost priority; significantly enough, it was during a press conference with Netanyahu that Trump discussed other issues in the Middle East such as Iran’s development of new weapons and his potential change of policy towards this country; a change which seems to focus on non-diplomatic means to deal with Iran, which breaks with Obama’s policies of focusing more on diplomatic means. This is clear from Trump’s America First Foreign Policy plan as stated “peace through strength will be as the center of that foreign policy; this principal will make possible a stale, more peaceful world with less conflict and more common ground.”⁷⁰ The same statement takes defeating ISIS and other radical Islamic groups as Trump’s top foreign policy priority and “will pursue aggressive joint and coalition military operations when necessary.”⁷¹

Table 4: American presidents’ policy statements pertaining to the MENA area

President	Party	Context/motives	Potential policies conveyed by the statement
John F. Kennedy	Democrat	State of the Union Address January 11, 1963	Preventing Arab countries from joining the Soviets and supporting their independence.
Lyndon B. Johnson	Democrat	State of the Union Address January 10, 1967.	Improve relations between Israel and Arab states
		State of the Union Addresses January 17, 1968 and January 14, 1969.	Supported the UN’s efforts to mediate between Israel and the Arab states after the Six-day War.
Richard M. Nixon	Republican	State of the Union Address January 30, 1974.	Reiterated his intention to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict through supporting UNSC resolutions 248 and 338 and related this issue to the 1973 oil crisis
Gerald R. Ford	Republican	Address on US foreign policy April 10, 1975.	Reacted to the oil embargo of 1973 saying that he would not accept its “intolerable risks”.

⁶⁷Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press. Inference. The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. February 15, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation>

⁶⁸Ibid

⁶⁹Ibid

⁷⁰The White House. President Donald Trump. Issues: America First Foreign Policy. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-foreign-policy>

⁷¹Ibid.

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Jimmy E. Carter	Democrat	State of the Union Address January 19, 1978.	Referred to the Arabs' discontent with the US role in the Arab Israel conflict, which culminated in the oil embargo of 1973. Putting achieving peace in the Middle East as his top foreign policy goals
		State of the Union Address January 23, 1979.	Clearly expressed his support to Israel
		State of the Union Address January 23, 1980	Asked Americans for economic sacrifice to surpass the repercussions of the 1973 oil crisis. Warned the Soviets of using force in case of an attempt to take control of the Gulf region because this would be a direct threat to US vital interests. Reiterated his unconditional support to Israel
Ronald W. Reagan	Republican	Speech to the nation on US policy in the Middle East	Emphasized America's commitment to Israel's security. Reiterated America's determination to deter the Soviets' further expansion in the region. Strive to settle the Arab-Israel conflict through carrying out Camp David negotiations. Reiterated the strategic importance of the region's oil to America's and the world's economy.
		Address to the nation on Lebanon. September 20, 1982.	Called Israel to withdraw from Beirut Forming multinational forces along with France and Italy to help the Lebanese government take full control of the capital. Preventing a <i>hostile</i> power from taking control of Lebanon and the region.
		Speech to the nation on air strikes against Libya. April 14, 1986.	Expressed his determination to use "preemptive actions" against an Arab country alleged to have a relationship with terrorism.
George W. H. Bush	Republican	Address on Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. August 8, 1990.	Ordered an embargo of all trade with Iraq. Froze all Iraqi assets in the US. Sent American troops to Saudi Arabia to deter potential Iraqi attacks. Asked other oil producing countries to increase their production to compensate for the absence of Iraqi oil. Invading Iraq to destroy its alleged chemical and nuclear weapons facilities.
		Address to the UN. October 1, 1990.	
		Address before a joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War. March 6, 1991.	Maintaining US naval presence in the region. Controlling the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region Settling the Arab Israeli Conflict Fostering the region's economic growth through redirecting its wealth to peaceful aims rather than military ones.
William J. Clinton	Democrat	State of the Union Address. January 24, 1995.	Signed an executive order to freeze the assets of what he referred to as 'terrorist groups' after bombings against Israel in 1995.

George W. Bush	Republican	Address on the US Response to the attacks of September 11. September 21, 2001.	Use diplomatic, military, intelligence, legal, financial means to defeat global terrorism. Pursue nations that help terrorists Created the US PATRIOT ACT Freezing and seizing the assets of suspicious organizations.
		State of Union Address. January 29, 2002.	Shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. Prevent terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world
		Address to the Nation on the Department of Homeland Security. June 6, 2002.	Attack the enemy where he hides and plans to secure America. Announce the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security.
		Remarks to the UN General Assembly. September 12, 2002.	Gave strong signals on potential attacks on Iraq.
		State of Union Address. January 28, 2003.	Proposed to Congress the creation of Project Bioshield to counter bioterrorism.
		Address to the Nation on Iraq. March 17, 2003.	Announced the war in Iraq
Barrack Obama	Democrat	Address at Cairo University. June 4, 2009	Emphasized the importance of diplomacy and multilateral decision making in solving international problems. Promised to withdraw all American troops from Iraq and close Guantanamo Bay. Partner with Muslim countries to expand girls' literacy and women's employment. Expand exchange programs and scholarships for Middle Eastern people.
		Speech on American Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa. May 19, 2011.	Countering terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. Securing the free flow of oil Standing up for Israel's security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace. Support the democratic transitions of Arab countries through military, diplomatic or economic means. Expanding educational exchange programs. Establishing entrepreneurship networks. Helping Civil Society Improving health and access to technology Launching Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative.
		Address to the nation on Syria. September 10, 2013.	Ordered attacks on Syria to destroy the regime's chemical capabilities.
Donald Trump	Republican	The Inaugural Speech. The White House. January 20, 2017.	Eradicating radical Islamic terrorism from the earth
		Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press. Inference. February 15, 2017	Announced his plan to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. <i>Would do more to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.</i>

5. Policy Implementation

This foreign policy role of the American president involves shaping the foreign policies established by Congress legislation through interpreting and applying the various provisions of law. Arms sales remains a good illustration of this role. Congress established a legislation in 1976 called the Arms Export Control Act which authorizes the president to control the export and import of defense articles and services provided that the president notifies Congress in advance. Although Congress has the power to halt a sale it disapproves, the president still hold the daily decision making power in terms of making arms sales. The first arms sales deal an American president made with a country in the Middle East was Ronald Reagan with Iran despite the US arms embargo with this country. In fact, this deal was a highly controversial political scandal because it started secret before it went public and was referred to in various ways such as Iran-Contra affair, Iran gate, or Iran-Contra Scandal. The major issue was that Reagan and senior officials in his administration were accused of authorizing a secret arms sales deal with Iran in exchange for releasing many American hostages held by Hezbollah, a Lebanese group with strong ties with Iran.

The embarrassing thing for Reagan was that although he promised Americans not to trade arms for hostages, he took responsibility for any actions he claimed to be unaware of saying “what began as a strategic opening to Iran deteriorated, in its implementation, into trading arms for hostages. This runs counter to my own beliefs, to administration policy, and to the original strategy we had in mind. There are reasons why it happened, but no excuses. It was a mistake. I undertook the original Iran initiative in order to develop relations with those who might assume leadership in a post-Khomeini government.”⁷²

Reagan’s successor, George H. W. Bush, orchestrated a similar arms sale to Saudi Arabia, but this time, it was not secret. President Bush informed Congress of his plan to sell 72 F-15 fighter aircraft to Saudi Arabia. The deal proceeded after the expiration of a 30-day congressional review period. Obama authorized arms deals more than any other American president since the Second World War. The surge in arms sales to the Middle East during Obama’s presidency was driven by his new foreign policy philosophy which focused on arming allies rather than putting American troops on the ground, especially with the rise of ISIS in the region. This includes sending Apache Helicopters to Qatar and “bunker buster” bombs as well as cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia. It is important to point out that deciding on arms deals, as an aspect of foreign policy implementation, has been exercised mainly with countries in the Middle East taking into consideration that there are three Arab countries among the top five customers; these are Saudi Arabia, UAE and Iraq in addition to Israel and Australia. Trump seems to follow Obama’s policy to authorize more arms sale. In the very first day of Trump’s Administration, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of its plans to sell \$1.3 billion in weapons systems in four contracts the largest of which was with Saudi Arabia followed by Kuwait.⁷³ Apart from the overall strategy of protecting oil-producing countries through authorizing arms sales, we can say that this very early authorization of arms sale from the part of Trump can be read in the light of his promise of a historic increase in the US military budget and a “great rebuilding of the Armed Forces,”⁷⁴ which necessitates producing new ships, planes and weapons and the modernization of US nuclear arsenal. In fact, it will be a waste to modernize weapons or re-build the military without dispensing with the current capabilities.

From these examples, which illustrate how some American presidents practice their role in policy implementation through authorizing arms deals, we notice that this role has mainly been exercised to support Arab oil-producing countries, especially Saudi Arabia which remains the first arms customer of the US and the second arms importer in the world after India.⁷⁵ Additionally, this role was also exercised secretly in order to release American citizens who were held hostage by an alleged terrorist group.

⁷²Ronald Reagan. Address to the Nation on Iran Contra. March 4, 1987. <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3414>

⁷³See more details on the contracts in the official website of the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency. January 2017 Archive. <http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/archives/201701>

⁷⁴The White House. President Donald Trump. Issues: Making our Military Strong Again. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/making-our-military-strong-again>

⁷⁵See the Stockholm International Peace Institute Fact Sheet. Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2015. February 2016. Table 2. p. 2. <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1602.pdf>

Furthermore, authorizing arms sale was also exercised as a new US foreign policy strategy in the Middle East during Obama’s presidency; this strategy focuses on combating terrorism in the Middle East through arming the region’s countries and minimizing the physical presence of US forces in the region.

Table 5: American presidents’ implementation of policies pertaining to the MENA area

Congress established Legislation	President	Party	How the legislation was implemented?
Arms Control Export Act of 1976	Ronald W. Reagan	Republican	Authorized secret arms sale with Iran in exchange for releasing American Hostages.
	George W. H. Bush	Republican	Authorized arms deal of 72 F-15 fighter aircraft to Saudi Arabia
	Barak Obama	Democrat	Authorized arms deal with Saudi Arabia & Qatar.
	Donald Trump	Republican	Authorized arms deals with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the first day of his presidency.

6. Independent Action

The American president can sometimes ‘go it alone’ and take an expected decision or undertake a striking action concerning foreign or domestic policy issues without informing Congress. These actions are usually controversial as they are not constitutionally supported; foreign policy independent actions are mostly taken in a state of war and emergency, which involves military operations or the creation of new agencies and policies. In this case, Congress can either support the president or undermine him before the world. However, Congress rarely falters, opposes or restricts such independent actions. For example, when President Reagan commanded the bombing of Lybia in 1986 because of alleged state-supported terrorism, the American public supported the President’s action, which obliged Congress to do the same. The aforementioned Iran-Contra Affair is another example of Reagan’s independent action which started secret before it went public. President George W.H. Bush unilaterally sent large numbers of troops to the Persian Gulf before asking Congress to greet his plans to wage war in the region. His son, President George W.Bush pushed the limits of presidential power after 9/11 through many independent actions which include authorizing air strike to hunt down hijacked civilian aircrafts, creating military courts to try enemy combatants, and surveying people’s electronic communications without the permission of the court. Obama’s controversial unilateral actions were mostly related to domestic affairs and very few of them had to do with foreign affairs, especially in the Middle East. One of the first controversial independent actions of Trump was his executive order to ban entry of immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries which include Iraq, Iran, Lybia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.⁷⁶ This action was halted by a US federal judge who called the order “unconstitutional”. Few weeks later, Trump revised his order by removing Iraq from the list, exempting permanent residents and current visa holders, and replacing the indefinite ban on refugees from Syria by a 120-day freeze that necessitates review and renewal, to name a few.⁷⁷

All in all, it is important to point out that the American President’s independent actions remain a highly debatable legal issue on which many scholars of constitutional law shed light.⁷⁸Our purpose in this article is not to argue the constitutional legality of such actions; rather, our purpose is to find out how and in what way this particular role is exercised by some American presidents in the context of US foreign policy in the region.

⁷⁶Donald Trump. Executive Order: Protecting the nation from foreign terrorist entry into the United States. January 27, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>

⁷⁷Donald Trump. Executive Order: Protecting the nation from foreign terrorist entry into the United States. March 6, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>.

⁷⁸ The prominent scholars who examine the constitutional legality of presidents’ independent actions are Terry M. Moe and William G. Howell from Stanford University; in their article “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory”, they attempt to outline a theory of this aspect of Presidential power which is not specified in the Constitution. See the article in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (1999). V. 29. Issue. 4. p. 850-873.

From the examples mentioned above, we can say that this controversial role is mainly used in a state of emergency like waging war to counter alleged terrorist attacks or prevent potential ones as well as protecting American civilians. This was also used as a means to limit Muslim immigrants from entering the US claiming that it would protect the nation from foreign terrorist entry.

Table 6: American presidents’ independent actions pertaining to the MENA area

President	Party	Independent action
Ronald W. Regan	Republican	Commanded the bombing of Lybia in 1986 because of alleged state-supported terrorism. The Iran-Contra Affair
George W. H. Bush	Republican	Sent large numbers of troops to the Persian Gulf before asking Congress to greet his plans to wage war in the region
George W. Bush	Republican	Authorizing air strike to hunt down hijacked civilian aircrafts. Creating military courts to try enemy combatants. Surveying people’s electronic communications without the permission of the court.
Barack Obama	Democrat	Obama’s independent actions were mostly related to internal affairs
Donald Trump	Republican	Signed an executive order to ban entry of immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries which include Iraq, Iran, Lybia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Conclusion

This article examined the foreign policy roles of the the American president in the Middle Eastern context in order to find out how they establish and shape foreign policies in the region and what are the pivotal and continual interests of the US in the areain addition to the degree of change of US foreign policies in moments of crisis. This was done through analyzing presidents’ speeches, statements, policies, and actions from Truman to Trump. This article reveals that the American president is the main architect of foreign policies which are established and shaped through exercising six roles: Responding to foreign events, proposing legislations, negotiating international agreements, making policy statements, implementing policies and taking independent actions.

There are many conclusions to be drawn from this article. The first of these conclusions relate to America’s constant interests in the region. The early interest revolved around preventing the Soviets’ expansion in the region. However, Israel’s security comes on top of these interests which are manifested through the foreign policy roles of American presidents. First, the US was the first country to respond to the establishment of the state of Israel as it was the first country ever to recognize it at Truman’s direction. Second, the American presidents have also shown their support to Israel through proposing legislations such as Nixon’s proposal to Congress to authorize \$2.2 million emergency aid to Israel after the October War of 1973 with some Arab states which decided to raise the price of oil by 70% to force Israel to withdraw from the territories it occupied in 1967. Third, protecting Israel was also done through mediating international agreements such as Carter’s Camp David Accord and Clinton’s Oslo Accords. Last but not least, almost all American presidents have expressed their concern about Israel’s security and their commitment to protecting itin their policy statements.

The analysis of American presidents’ foreign policy roles in the MENA area reveals the fact that the region’s oil is another pivotal interest for the US. To protect this interest, American presidents have done everything from ordering a CIA coup to overthrown Iranian government which threatened to nationalize its oil resources, intervening to cool off regional conflicts, proposing legislations to protect oil-producing countries using military means, and authorizing arms sales to some of the oil-producing countries. In moments of oil crisis, the American presidents have responded in various ways which include increasing domestic production or asking oil-producing countries to increase production to compensate for the rise of the pricein addition to asking Americans to change their consumption habits. In addition to protecting Israel and the region’s oil, which have been considered constant and historic US interests in the MENA area, this article’s analyses reveals another US interest which remains relatively nascent. Indeed, I am talking about preventing fundamentalist or terrorist groups from taking over power in the region through launching the *war on terror* which started after 9/11with George W. Bush war in Iraq and Afghanistan against Al Qaeda; this was carried on by Obama against ISIS and will be pursued by Trump as he expressed many times before and after becoming the president.

This goal or interest seems to join the first two in becoming a constant and historic one as it has been running for about 15 years now and it is very likely to continue during Trump's presidency. The questions that necessitate further research are the following: Is there a relationship between the war on terror and other US interests in the region? Namely, protecting Israel and oil. Could these latter be the real driving forces behind the war on terror?

In addition to the pivotal interests of the US in the MENA region, analyzing the foreign policy roles of American presidents reveals some other conclusions. The first of these conclusions is the extent to which foreign policy in the region changes in moment of crises. In other words, American presidents deal with and react to events that have challenged or threatened US interests in the region. We notice that these changes include launching military actions, establishing stricter defensive and security measures, authorizing arms sales, applying economic sanctions, increasing or decreasing foreign aid, leading diplomatic negotiations and mediatory interventions, making supportive or opposing political statements or taking positions on the event that triggers the change.

Other related conclusions which can be deduced from the summary tables above is that republicans tend to be more responsive to international events in the MENA area than democrats; republicans are also more likely to use force to deal with critical issues in the region than democrats who are more inclined towards diplomatic means and negotiating agreements; additionally, republicans tend to be more productive than democrats in proposing legislations pertaining to US foreign policy in the region. Furthermore, republicans exhibit more inclination to implement legislative policies in the region than democrats through authorizing more arms deals. Last but not least, republican presidents have used more independent actions than democrats pertaining to Middle Eastern issues.

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