

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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**U.S. Foreign Aid Policy in the Middle East:
A Strategy for International Cooperation or Political Containment**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Academic year: 2024/2025

Dedication

With all love, I dedicate this graduation to myself, to my great and strong soul that endured every setback.

I proudly dedicate my graduation and long-awaited joy to my dear parents, who have always been a source of support and generosity.

My father was the first supporter in achieving my ambition and was my refuge and right-hand at this stage.

To the pure soul of my late grandfather, whose memory continues to live in my heart, may Allah have mercy on his soul.

Ouissal

This work is dedicated to my dearest mother, who has filled my heart with love and wisdom and made the sacrifices that defined me.

To my husband, who inspired me to make my dream come true.

To my beloved daughters Aryam and Tasnim, my brother and sisters, I love you all.

To my in-laws, for their comfort and support.

To my cheerful colleague, Ouissal Khelaifa, whose support and companionship helped me accomplish this journey.

To everyone who supported, encouraged and believed in me.

Khouloud

Acknowledgements

All praise and thanks are due to the Almighty Allah for the support and guidance.

We are deeply grateful to our supervisor Dr. Ouahid Atik Zid, for his advice and support in the development of this dissertation. His expertise and encouragement were essential pillars of this research.

We thank the board of examiners for having accepted to read our work and be part of the examining committee.

We extend our deep appreciation to our teachers in the Department of English at Hamma Lakhdhar University for their instruction and guidance.

A special thank you to our classmates for creating a scholarly environment of inquiry, knowledge, and commitment.

Abstract

This research examines the dual strategy underlying the U.S. foreign aid policy in the Middle East. It investigates whether it primarily functions as a mechanism for promoting international cooperation or as an instrument of political containment. Through a qualitative historical descriptive analysis of U.S. aid practices from the Cold War to the post-9/11 era ,the study explores both developmental and strategic dimensions of American assistance. The first chapter traces the history of U.S. foreign aid, its economic and humanitarian roles, and its contribution to peacebuilding. Chapter Two discusses how U.S. foreign aid is used to counterterrorism, limit the influence of regional adversaries such as Iran, Russia, and China, and maintain U.S. geopolitical dominance. The findings reveal that while U.S. aid programs include a goal of international cooperation,they are largely driven by the strategic imperative of political containment.

Keywords: counterterrorism, geopolitics, international cooperation, Middle East, political containment, U.S. foreign

List of Acronyms

Acronyms	Full Form
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IMEC	India-Middle East-Europe Corridor
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MESA	Middle East Strategic Alliance
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SIGIR	Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TTP	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
US	United states
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIP	United states institute of peace
WHO	World Health Organization
WWII	Second World War

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

The United States (U.S.) is one of the major powers of the world due to its unique history and its significant evolution in many areas, such as the economy, technology, media, and politics. The US government established domestic and foreign policies to preserve and secure its interests, particularly foreign aid policy, which is an essential component of the US foreign policy. This policy acts as the primary means by which the US contributes to economic development in developing countries, particularly in the Middle East.

By the end of World War II, the Middle East became a central focus of the US due to its ongoing economic and security issues. This interest grew exponentially with the beginning of the Cold War, as the US sought to limit and contain the expansion of the Soviet Union (SU) in the ME. That occurred through various tactics, strategies, and policies such as containment and deterrence. By the early 1990s, the US emerged as the single dominant superpower. Consequently, the US government established distinct domestic and foreign policies to preserve and secure its interests.

Right after, the US provided economic, military, and protective assistance to various countries in the Middle East. It maintained its national security and strategic interests. This created a patron-client relationship that enabled Middle Eastern countries to achieve continued success in aligning with American security interests. However, this process also resulted in an unequal relationship between the Middle East and the US.

The uneven patron-client relationship allowed the US to gain full access to proven energy supplies and establish additional military bases, extending its influence to friendly regimes in the

Middle East. However, the events between 2010 and 2011 led the US to change its approach. The US decided not to support these regimes and instead supported revolutionary movements.

This decision highlighted the nature of the U.S. foreign aid to the Middle East, revealing a central paradox: while ostensibly aimed at promoting economic development and regional stability, it has also been interpreted as a tool for political containment, designed to secure the US interests and maintain influence within a strategically vital region.

Even before World War II, the United States (U.S.) provided aid to certain Allied nations—a practice of gifting military resources that was deeply intertwined with its economic expansion. Aid to Europe materialized under the Marshall Plan in 1948, when the U.S. invested heavily in reconstruction and revitalization, aiming to help Europe (and itself) outcompete the USSR. After WWII, the U.S. channeled financing to allied states, anticipating their alignment with the anti-communist bloc, followed by more direct subsidies. In doing so, it established a sophisticated, multi-tiered system of international diplomacy that merged benevolence with strategic interests. Through internationally sponsored projects, the U.S. has sought to amplify its global influence, epitomized in the Middle East, where aid targets core regional partners while bypassing contested zones in efforts to manage conflict (Borshchevskaya, 2021).

Scholarly discourse highlights persistent tensions between foreign aid's altruistic framing and its strategic deployment. For instance, the \$1.2 billion Syria Regional Stabilization Initiative (2018-2022) prioritized countering Russian and Iranian influence over addressing governance gaps, inadvertently exacerbating sectarian divides (Borshchevskaya, 2021). Similarly, post-2003 reconstruction in Iraq allocated 1.6 billion to Mosul's infrastructure but failed to strengthen local governance, enabling corruption and ISIS's resurgence (Autesserre, 2021). These cases demonstrate how aid's dual mandates—ostensibly fostering cooperation while securing control—often conflict,

raising ethical and practical concerns. Such outcomes echo Cold War critiques, where support for authoritarian allies like Egypt emphasized containment over democratic reform, entrenching dependency (Lancaster, 2007).

Anna Borshchevskaya's *Putin's War in Syria: Russian Foreign Policy and the Price of America's Absence* (2021) canvasses the ways US support has been diverted creatively to preclude Russian military and diplomatic push in the Middle East. Drawing on interviews with US defense leaders and policy review, Borshchevskaya charts the reallocation of support to Syrian opposition forces and regional allies (e.g., Jordan, Kurdish fighters) following Russia's 2015 entry into Syria. Her research demonstrates that American support was focused mainly on destabilizing pro-Russian Assad authority through clandestine backing for opposition groups and stabilization efforts in contested areas. Notably, the \$1.2 billion Syria Regional Stabilization Initiative (2018–2022) funded local councils in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor to counter Russian and Iranian influence but unintentionally deepened sectarian fault lines, facilitating regrouping of ISIS remnants. Borshchevskaya contends that while American aid was strategically beneficial in retarding Russian gains, the fact that it lacked a strategic perspective in filling governance vacancies allowed Moscow to solidify its gains via military arrangements and energy contracts.

In her book *Foreign Aid: Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics* (2007) Carol Lancaster frames U.S. aid as a historical tool of geopolitical containment. Through comparative analysis of Cold War-era aid policies, incorporating archival research and case studies of U.S. assistance to Iran, Egypt, and Israel, Lancaster reveals how aid cuts frequently disregarded developmental outcomes. Her examination of military aid to Iran under the Shah's regime illustrates how such support fortified anti-communist alliances while worsening domestic inequalities that ultimately fueled the 1979 revolution. These destabilizing effects—combined with the ensuing global oil crisis—precipitated

shifts in structural security dependencies, often intersecting with the spread of international communism and nationalism. Lancaster's work highlights a critical transition from strategically dictated aid to reactive policies implemented haphazardly, arguing that foreign assistance invariably creates conditions of dependency.

2. Statement of the Problem

U.S. foreign aid has been at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy since World War II, with an official, announced aim of fostering development, stability, and international cooperation. However, observers, political analysts, and policy-makers are deeply divided about whether aid truly represents a symbol of world partnership or a tool of political containment and strategic expansion, especially in the Middle East. This underlying duality creates chronic ambiguity regarding the real aims, efficacy, and ethical implications of U.S. aid. While existing literature extensively addresses aid conditionality and effectiveness, a critical research gap manifests: the lack of a clear analysis of this duality, or imbalance between cooperative development goals and strategic containment requirements. This study is an attempt to sort out this issue and fill in the above-stated research gap.

3. Research Questions

The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- How do the U.S. interests shape the distribution and implementation of aid in the region?
- 2- how is U.S. foreign aid used to pursue both political containment and international cooperation ?
- 3- What impact does this dual-goals policy have on the stability and development of recipient countries?

4. Aims of the Study

This research aims to investigate the U.S. foreign aid to the Middle East in perspective to determine the reasons behind U.S. aid allocations to the region. It also seeks to assess the impact of this aid on political stability and regional cooperation and whether it is used as a tool for fostering international cooperation or advancing political containment.

5. Significance of the Study

This study is of central intellectual and policy relevance by critically investigating the dual function of U.S. foreign aid as an instrument of international cooperation and a channel for political leverage in the Middle East. In exploring this two-fold role— developmental cooperation and strategic influence—the research illustrates the inherent contradiction between cooperative exchange and geopolitical manipulation in U.S. foreign policy.

6. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, combining historical and descriptive-analytical methods to examine U.S. foreign aid policy in the Middle East. The historical method enables tracing the evolution of aid policies from their Cold War origins to contemporary implementations, analyzing how geopolitical shifts have transformed aid into both an assistance mechanism and a containment tool.

The descriptive-analytical approach systematically evaluates key aid programs and their outcomes through case studies of countries like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, while assessing the interplay between stated humanitarian objectives and strategic interests.

Data is drawn from diverse sources, including Congressional Research Service reports, U.S. government documents (State Department and USAID records), academic literature, and empirical case studies. This dual-method framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how U.S. aid balances, or fails to balance, international cooperation with political influence in the region.

7. Structure of the Study

This study consists of two chapters analyzing the dual nature of U.S. foreign aid in the Middle East. The first chapter establishes theoretical and historical context, discussing how U.S. aid has served as an instrument of international cooperation through economic development initiatives, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding initiatives, and multilateral affiliations, with case studies illustrating successes and failures of execution. The second chapter analyzes the aid countervailing dynamic as an instrument of political control, discussing its application in counterterrorism, geopolitical rivalry with regional rivals, and the tension involved in advocating democratic values and seeking strategic interests, with empirical evidence that reveals the subtle trade-offs involved. Collectively, these chapters present a detailed overview of how U.S. aid policy balances, and frequently strains to reconcile, its conflicting goals of promoting cooperation while preserving influence in this geopolitically important region.

CHAPTER ONE:

Between Aid and Power: U.S. Foreign Aid and the Quest for Stability in the Middle East

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Introduction

Foreign Aid has been an essential part of U.S. strategy in the Middle East for decades, functioning as funding for humanitarian crises, development, and advancement aid propels U.S. interests. From anti-communist alliances during the Cold War to counter-terrorism partnerships in the post-9/11 era, each American assistance is provided by the prevailing geopolitical preferences. This chapter focuses on the complex balance of U.S. humanitarian and security objectives toward the region and how assistance impacts stability. It explores the aid policy, tracing back to the Truman Doctrine's containment policies to modern-day debates regarding conditionality and cooperation with other nations. By analyzing policy documents on aid distribution, the organizational frameworks of implementing agencies such as USAID, and related peacebuilding initiatives, this chapter highlights the disconnect between efforts aimed at long-term development and those focused on short-term stabilization. More importantly, the chapter addresses the question of aid's usefulness in active conflict areas where different objectives are laid to achieve weakened outcomes. This part of the analysis stresses how U.S. aid epitomizes the attempts to pursue humanitarian aims while managing the desires wreaking havoc in an already split region.

1.1 Concept of Foreign Aid Policy

According to Lancaster (2007), foreign aid policy is a government's systematic approach to providing financial, technical, or humanitarian support to other countries. Its main interests are promoting economic growth, building diplomatic partnerships, bolstering security, and addressing global challenges such as poverty, health emergencies, and conflicts. International commitments, geopolitical agendas, and national priorities all influence these policies.

However, International Cooperation refers to the collaboration of sovereign states and organizations. They work together to achieve common goals. Keohane (1984) asserts that cooperation occurs when stakeholders' policies align with the preferences of others. This leads to mutually beneficial outcomes. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD (2023), it reflects the principles of mutual benefit and collective problem-solving.

1.1.1 Purposes of Foreign Aid Policy

The Foreign Aid Policy of the U.S. serves multiple purposes, which change with international trends and internal shifts. American foreign assistance has been driven over the last seventy years by three major rationales: national security, commercial interests, and humanitarian concerns (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2016).

Particularly during and after the Cold War, national security continues to be the most important rationale. Foreign aid served as a strategic tool to contain the spread of communism and strengthen alliances with key partners. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, its focus increasingly turned toward combating terrorism and fostering stability in vulnerable regions, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia. In addition, another major factor influencing the aid policy is commercial interests. Foreign assistance is used to develop factors that make the market favourable for American goods and services. In addition, promoting economic development abroad improves economic conditions, which is beneficial to American businesses. The third rational, widely accepted motivation is humanitarian concern. Aid is available to respond to crises such as wars, natural disasters, and famines. In addition to that, long-term development aid also addresses systemic poverty, hunger, and health disparities. (Humanitarian Assistance—Providing support for disaster relief and protecting at-risk populations (CRS, 2016).

These objectives are often interrelated and represent a blend of principles of altruistic obligation and calculated strategic interest. For example, a health community HIV/AIDS program could be framed as humanitarian assistance but also serve to politically stabilize communities. Thus, it can be said that U.S. foreign aid policy forms a comprehensive strategy designed to promote international development while addressing U.S. geopolitical interests.

The multidimensional extent of U.S. foreign aid is further illustrated by allocating resources across various U.S. strategic objectives. (Table 1) provides a breakdown of foreign assistance funding by objective and program area for the fiscal year 2015, highlighting the government's prioritization of peace and security, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance.

Table 1.1

Department of State and USAID Foreign By Objective and Assistance Program Area FY 2015

Table 1. Department of State and USAID Foreign Assistance by Objective and Program Area: FY2015 (planned allocations in millions of current dollars)			
Aid Objectives and Program Areas	FY2015	Aid Objectives and Program Areas	FY2015
Peace and Security	9,070.00	Investing in People	9,870.00
Counter-Terrorism	1,260.00	Health	8,700.00
Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction	288.95	Education	783.88
Stabilization/Security Sector Reform	6,560.00	Social Services/Protection of Vulnerable	386.12
Counter-narcotics	555.33		
Transnational Crime	91.24	Governing Justly & Democratically	2,430.80
Conflict Mitigation	311.60	Rule of Law & Human Rights	644.28
		Good Governance	1,050.00
Promoting Economic Growth	3,795.65	Political Competition	233.43
Macroeconomic Growth	284.80	Civil Society	501.72
Trade & Investment	170.25		
Financial Sector	104.72	Humanitarian Assistance	4,680.00
Infrastructure	550.85	Protection, Assistance & Solutions	4,500.00
Agriculture	1,180.00	Disaster Readiness	149.78
Private Sector Competitiveness	522.32	Migration Management	30.50
Economic Opportunity	271.30		

Note: Reprinted from Foreign Assistance.gov and CRS Calculations (2016)

1.1.2 Funds of Foreign Aid Policy

The primary funding source for the U.S. foreign aid policy stems from the annual funding provided by the U.S. Congress, especially through the State Department's Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act. This is generally structured as follows:

Foreign aid is included in the international affairs line item (the expenditure under the 150 Account) of the aid arms of the budget. The Estimate of Expenditure (the budget is also called the Federal Budget) proposed by the President and spending the aid in the 150 Account is subsequently subject to approval by Congress. The expenditure on developing aid is typically in the region of one per cent of the total budget(CRS,2020)

The U.S. government allocates foreign aid through various. departments and programs, each serving distinct purposes ranging from economic development to humanitarian assistance. These efforts are funded through different channels and appropriations to support global stability, security, and health. The following table provides an overview of the key funding sources, implementing agencies, and the types of appropriations involved in U.S. foreign assistance.

Table 1.2

Funding Sources, Channels, and Types of U.S. Foreign Appropriations

Category	Name	Description
Funding Source / Channel	U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)	Provides economic and development aid.
	Department of State	Oversees security assistance and political aid.
	Other Departments/Agencies	Includes Defense, Treasury, Agriculture, etc., with specific programs.
Type of Appropriation	Economic Support Fund	Funds for specific political

		and economic development purposes.
	Foreign Military Financing	Supports military aid by financing purchases of U.S. armaments.
	Development Assistance	Long-term aid for economic and development goals.
	Global Health Programs	Assists in disease prevention and health system strengthening.
	Humanitarian Aid	Provides emergency and refugee aid in times of urgent need.

Note: From U.S. government funding sources and types of foreign assistance appropriations (2016)

1.2 Historical Evolution of U.S. Foreign Aid in the Middle East

Strategic foreign assistance within the Middle East has defined American geopolitical power since the middle of the 20th century. It has been motivated by various objectives and interests. The evolution of Soviet relations with America and the rest of the world has passed through specific key periods: the Cold War, post-Cold War, post-9/11, and the Contemporary Period.

U.S. foreign aid to the Middle East became a strategic tool to curb Soviet influence. In 1947, the Truman Doctrine was launched. It formulated extensive economic and military aid to secure allies against communism. This approach was reinforced by the Marshall Plan (1948–1951). Initially, this plan focused on Europe but laid the groundwork for using financial support to achieve stability in regions vulnerable to communist expansion (Hook, 2020).

In 1957, the Eisenhower administration reinforced the use of aid policy to counter soviet influence in the Middle East. The Eisenhower Doctrine outlined economic and military assistance to countries such as Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. His primary goal was to curb Soviet regional expansion

(Little, 2009). For instance, Iran alone received \$1.2 billion in military assistance between 1950 and 1979, while Turkey also received significant funding to strengthen their defences (Hook & Spanier, 2018)

The Arab-Israeli War in 1973 marked a turning point in U.S. efforts to achieve regional stability and security. Based on Camp David Accords of 1978, the United States increased its aid to the region following the war, providing approximately \$1.3 billion annually to Egypt and around \$3 billion to Israel (Sharp, 2022). This "cash-for-peace" approach highlights how U.S. aid served the dual purpose of promoting regional cooperation while containing Soviet influence among Arab states.

After the Cold War, U.S. interests in the region have entirely changed. It shifted from containing Soviet influence to asserting unilateral hegemony in the Middle East. Washington prioritized regional stability to secure energy resources and protect its allies. The Gulf War (1990-1991) epitomized this shift. The U.S. mobilized a coalition to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait and directed aid to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to strengthen military partnerships (Yetiv, 2008). Post-war aid packages included advanced weapons sales and infrastructure investments. That solidifies the Gulf as a cornerstone of U.S. security strategy.

The Clinton administration (1993–2001) also institutionalized aid as a tool for peacemaking. While these agreements, which include those reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993, have remained sacrosanct since the 1980s, they reflect bipartisan support in Congress for maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge over its neighbours (Sharp, 2022).

1.2.1 Challenges to U.S. Foreign Aid and Nexus U.S. with Regional Stability

U.S. foreign assistance in the Middle East reflects geopolitics and human issues that have motivated U.S. policy across the region throughout the early-to-mid 20th century. The Cold War originally backed U.S. interests with the U.S. intervening to counteract Soviet influence through the provision of massive military and economic aid to Middle East allies Egypt and Israel.

This calculation has evolved; U.S. foreign assistance is increasingly depicted as a way to foster stability and peace in conflict zones. Part of this paradigm is the institutionalisation of civil society actors, part of a larger phenomenon of local agencies being enrolled into peacebuilding paradigms (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz, 2015). These actors are key to tackling the structural root causes of conflict and building capacity for collective action among various U.S. stakeholders, which is the aim of using foreign aid to shift the dynamics of a conflict and pave the way for sustainable regional peace (Bush, 2015; Autesserre, 2021; United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2022).

In the Middle East, U.S. foreign aid policy formation has been instrumental in the building of regional stability. As a component of "foreign aid," initially conceived within the Cold War as a tool to counter communist encroachment, foreign aid became intertwined with humanitarian and development activities to combat violence and crisis in the region. American involvement also placed the utilization of aid as a means to achieve stability and friendly nations.

Such a shift in policy would also create both openings and dangers, especially since Turkey has become a major player in the region, for better or worse, in terms of state-building and conflict mediation, thereby enhancing its geopolitical significance (Hale & Özbudun, 2021). These are signals of the balance between collaboration and rivalry in geopolitics. For example, the U.S. emphasis on democracy as a driver of economic growth pits it against China's Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI), which is focused on economic integration and stability even if authoritarian (Jones & Hameiri, 2020). These two approaches show how economic statecraft can recalibrate diplomatic interests.

U.S. foreign aid has a long history of addressing such instability, but it must be attuned to local government systems. There is research showing that aid can save cooperative contexts but further inflame fragile settings (Bräutigam, 2020). For example, U.S. aid to partners in Southeast Asia is often justified as a way to counter China; it has a competitive element, in addition to the usually more altruistic development rationale (Congressional Research Service 2019 [CRS], 2021). It reflects the tension between humanitarian impulse and geopolitical calculation.

1.3 Economic Development and Humanitarian Assistance

Although economic development prioritizes the promotion of sustainable growth and maintenance of living standards, humanitarian aid is vital in relief and support during any crisis. Consequently, economic development and humanitarian aid are both vital and interrelated fragments in addressing the global quest to mitigate impoverishment and uplift the conditions of humanity (World Bank, 2020).

U.S. Economic reconstruction and humanitarian assistance have continued to be central in U.S. peacebuilding efforts. Most of the programs are geared towards the fight against socio-economic causes of conflict and the building of resilience in post-conflict communities by constructing infrastructure, education, and health systems (Rubin, 2013).

U.S. foreign aid, for instance, has funded reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan and humanitarian assistance in Syria and Yemen. While these efforts have been well worth it, however,

their effectiveness has too frequently been undermined by corruption, inefficiency, and political upheaval.

An examination of specific peacebuilding projects funded by U.S. foreign aid reveals a complex narrative of financial investment against concrete returns of interference. The reality supports a broader supposition: engagement in the Middle East inherently means working with violence. (Anderson, 1999).

Post-conflict development projects intended to create more capable local governments and civic societies, as well as economic growth, are not a cookie-cutter affair. Instead, their success is contingent on both the cultural and historical context of each country (Autesserre, 2014). Other efforts with more focus on multilateral diplomacy have been successful in bringing about cooperation agreements among combatants and sealing more sustainable peace. Nevertheless, some other interventions also did not succeed because the well-entrenched social dynamics were not well understood, even leading to the promotion, rather than cessation of violence.

Recent academic work emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary understanding that integrates conflict analysis and intervention design to effectively tackle the complex phenomenon that is conflict (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). These results point to the necessity of approaches to external assistance that go beyond merely providing resources if they are to build lasting peace by marrying local knowledge with institutional reforms.

Looking at the billions of dollars of American foreign aid that are spent annually to preserve global cooperation and establish stability in the Middle East, there has always been debate over its capacity to provide long-term peace. Though the funds aim to stabilize unstable political environments and foster economic development, the result is often unpredictable. A critical analysis

reveals that foreign aid is not a cure-all; it has, in certain cases, maintained vested power structures rather than strengthening state or societal institutions.

This trend is an indicator of broader governance trends, such as in European resilience-oriented governance models, where stability is preferred to control by hierarchies (Bossong & Hegemann, 2019). Moreover, while civil society is a critical peacebuilding force, it is also greatly hindered by having to work in complex and adversarial contexts, often failing to achieve meaningful outcomes despite best efforts (Paffenholz, 2014).

Thus, though U.S. foreign assistance is still one of the most valuable peacebuilding instruments, its approach needs improvement to fund more inclusive and participatory strategies. Giving top priority to minimizing societal divisions and fostering cooperation should be crucial in achieving lasting peace and development for all.

1.3.1 USAID Programs in Education, Healthcare, and Infrastructure

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the primary U.S. government organization created under the president in 1961. It is the responsibility of managing humanitarian assistance and international development initiatives. It focuses on health, education, economic growth, disaster assistance, and democracy promotion, and it contributes to the assistance of more than 100 countries, including the Middle East (USAID, 2023).

After all the conflicts, USAID sought to restore essential services such as water, electricity, and healthcare, particularly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful because of sectarian groups' mistreatment and violence (Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction [SIGIR], 2013). Similarly, in 2023, the U.S. provided more than \$16 billion in aid for the Syrian civil war to support refugee camps in Jordan and Turkey (USAID, 2023). In the

same context, the U.S. provided Yemen with \$4.5 billion in aid between 2015 and 2022 to reduce the famine rate that worsened after the Saudi-led coalition conflicted with the Houthi rebels.

In all, American aid has taken on a second dimension: humanitarian aid. (CRS, 2022). However, some critics point out the contradictory objectives of U.S. policy, which supports Saudi Arabia militarily on the one hand and, at the same time, funds humanitarian relief efforts. (Almadhlaji, 2021).

As evidenced by the \$1.5 billion aid from the U.S. to Pakistan, extremism is matched with aid applications, and the same goes for the Counterinsurgency Fund (Fair, 2014). Throughout the years 2001 to 2010, the U.S. overspent disbursing funding for counterinsurgency and reconstitution in Iraq and Afghanistan during the post-9/11 era, which accumulated to an estimated \$100 billion (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction[SIGAR],2021). A shift in geopolitical circumstances tremendously affects the distribution and policies surrounding aid funds.

The Arab Spring revolutions were adopted to build U.S. foreign aid. First, the Obama Administration reduced financial support for authoritarian regimes, such as Hosni Mubarak's rule in Egypt, while committing 1.3 billion to support Tunisia's democratic transition (Holliday, 2016).

The U.S. provides educational opportunities in remote and impoverished areas, particularly for displaced populations. This happens to prevent educational deprivation and promote development, quality, and inclusiveness. As an example, the USAID Education for Resilience program has offered remedial classes to Syrian schoolchildren, which raised their enrollment rates by 20% (USAID, 2021). The same impact has been noted with the education quality initiative sponsored by Lebanon, which advocates for basic educational standards and has funded 15,000 teachers to enable over 300,000 students, including refugees, to access quality education (USAID, 2021).

Besides, several healthcare initiatives in Jordan supplement the national health system and particularly respond to the emergencies caused by the increasing inflow of refugees. USAID Collaborated with the Jordanian Ministry of Health to enhance maternal and child healthcare services, which contributed to a 30% decline in neonatal mortality among the refugees' host country (World Bank, 2020). Lebanon, being closer to the refugee sources, has a battered health system. Fortunately, USAID continues to fund mobile clinics providing basic and specialized outpatient services (UNHCR, 2023).

The lack of economic growth has stunted infrastructural development, which hampers the rapid response capability to a crisis in Jordan and Lebanon. In Jordan, the USAID Water Innovation Technologies Rehabilitation Project has resulted in a 40% increase in the effectiveness of water irrigation systems.

After that, the U.S. government administered a policy aid towards the Middle East region progressively per the existing political relations. It was under the leadership of Donald Trump that such a policy started to be implemented during his presidency from 2017 to 2021, where he utterly assimilated a reduction in the economic and humanitarian funding to some of the nations within this region. In 2018, for instance, his government decided to decrease by over \$200 million in aid funding towards the Palestinian authorities after refraining from providing support to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) due to inefficiency and lack of proper operation checks (U.S Department of State, 2018).

While Trump reduced the financial support to UN nations, he kept major military support with allies like Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. Even in the US, Trump's government continued with the \$3.8 billion annual military aid package to Israel, which was started during Obama's tenure, as well as his support of Egypt through military budget reconciling despite the open human rights violations

taking place (Congressional Research Service, 2020). In contrast, President Joe Biden has come in to replace Trump in 2021 and directed foreign policy aid toward humanitarian programs once more. Under Biden's administration, he injected an increased aid toward Yemen of over 1.15 billion dollars to respond to the suffering humanitarian crisis along with the stimulation of UNRWA through funding of \$235 million (USAID, 2022). Besides, Biden put more focus on assisting other nations through aid.

1.4 Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

The decades of vicious wars in the Middle East have led to the need for new methods of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Today's peacebuilding approaches characterize themselves not as being aimed at achieving a mere state of 'non-war' but rather as a longer-term reconstruction and transformation of society that seeks to address the underlying causes of violence (Paris, 2010). It requires, further, all of the above: interpersonal and intercommunal reconciliation, rebuilding social relations, and new inclusive institutions that enshrine non-violent methods of dealing with disputes (Richmond, 2011). Peacebuilding, according to the United Nations, is a 'holistic process' of reforming structures, institutions and cultures to build societies in which conflicts can be resolved peacefully and sustainably (United Nations, 2016).

Conflict resolution, on the other hand, entails such mechanisms as mediation, negotiation, or dialogue that facilitate parties to conflict in arriving at mutually acceptable solutions and restoring cooperative relationships (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). Such solutions stipulate the interests and needs of all concerned parties and transform enemies into potential working partners.

The U.S. foreign policy is the key driver toward attaining Middle East stability, and its end objective is global cooperation and ensuring the transition from war to peace. It is a powerful engine of regional stability. An analysis of the interactive dynamics of this policy will enable U.S. to reveal

its multi-faceted impact and implications on the peace process. Civil society organizations (CSO) groups play a crucial role in conflict transformation, pioneering some of the most urgent areas such as peace training, education, and addressing the roots of violence (Paffenholz, 2014).

But Civil society organizations CSOs are beset by a variety of challenges, including political barriers and limited resources, that significantly limit their ability to operate effectively (Howell & Pearce, 2001). Thus, a close examination of U.S. foreign aid policy presents possibilities as well as challenges for its role in realizing sustainable peace in the Middle East.

1.4.1 Conflict Dynamics in the Middle East and the Need for Peacebuilding

The Middle East conflict is a complex and interconnected phenomenon involving geopolitics, sectarianism, and political economy (Galtung, 1996; Hinnebusch, 2015). Regional conflicts are rarely simple and often require an in-depth peacebuilding approach to deal with not only immediate violence but also the deeper structural drivers, such as inequality and institutional exclusion (Lederach, 2003; Lynch, 2016).

The West was accumulating tremendous. power in the 1990s, and it seemed that it might be all-powerful as a conflict resolver, but since then, other non-Western mediation and peacemaking efforts have emerged (Acharya, 2014; Barnett, 2021). These newer players tend to emphasize local participation and state-level collaboration, with less focus. on democratization and governance reforms that are so important to the Western paradigm (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz, 2015). But such efforts can endanger Peace Processes, with multiple initiatives, each with its own agenda, leading to disjointed approaches and missed opportunities for cooperation (Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021). Such developments underscore the fact that there can be no lasting peace in the Middle East without addressing its relations with the world (Fawcett, 2016; Yom, 2015).

1.4.2 US Foreign Aid: A Key Factor in Peacebuilding Efforts

The U.S. foreign assistance has emerged as a leading tool of post-conflict reconstruction in conflict-torn areas like the Middle East. The U.S. occupies its role in creating stability and social harmony in conflict-damaged societies through bringing economic resources in support of CSOs. This is compelled by the fact that the inclusion of CSOs has been proven to be a driver of successful conflict transformation, such as reconciliation and local governance (Paffenholz, 2014).

In addition, American aid to post-conflict countries is followed by peace education training programs intended to promote dialogue and mutual understanding in divided societies (Lederach, 2003). However, the success of such aid depends on the ability and willingness of agencies in recipient countries to address the specific issues in their context.

So while U.S. foreign aid can serve as a potential instrument of peace-making, success is most probable if it's done in close cooperation with natives and with sharp sensitivity to the multi-faceted character of each conflict.

1.4.2.1 Strategies towards Peacebuilding in Early System

The end of World War II (WWII) saw the formation of the United Nations, a critical milestone in global endeavours to prevent war and maintain peace. The UN, in its first decades, concentrated on stopping wars between states, mostly via collective security agreements—e.g., the Security Council—and peacekeeping operations.

These post-conflict ventures succeeded only marginally in deterring aggression but failed more decisively in controlling civil wars, which became the most typical conurbation of the twentieth century. In the Middle East, leadership in peacebuilding was evident at the front end of the decades, particularly top-level diplomacy. The mediator was President Jimmy Carter, who brokered the 1978

Camp David Accords, much heralded as an Arab-Israeli breakthrough. The accords brought to the fore the strength of mediation in resolving apparently intractable conflicts (Quandt, W.B 1986), as they opened the way for negotiations between Israel and Egypt.

1.4.2.2 Shift Toward Holistic Models

In the last decades, the recognition of a need to deal with the origin of conflict and involving local stakeholders in the peace process has been more entrenched. This has been witnessed through the greater interest in bottom-up reconciliation efforts, economic development strategies, and reform of governance. Some of the efforts by the U.S. have had elements of bottom-up participation and capacity development in Afghanistan and Iraq, and these have recorded mixed results (Rubin, 2013).

At the same time, there remain significant gaps in peacebuilding—strengths and weaknesses to be addressed so that these methods are maximally leveraged to build peace in a region ravaged by large-scale violence, displacement, and war. Middle Eastern conflict is characterized by cross-cutting sectarian and ethnic cleavages, rival agendas, and a record of external interference, all of which render it particularly recalcitrant to solution.

1.4.3 Tools Used in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

From diplomatic mediation and military action to humanitarian assistance, different approaches have been tried to resolve conflicts in the Middle East. Below are some key examples:

1.4.3.1 Diplomatic Mediation

The U.S. has been a traditional Middle Eastern peacemaker, i.e., the Camp David Accords (1978) and the Oslo Accords (1993). The treaties failed, but they set the precedent of U.S.-mediated

diplomacy's ability to negotiate agreements in what had seemed to be insoluble conflicts (Quandt, 1986).

All diplomatic mediation involves some factors: the legitimacy of the mediator, the willingness of the parties to cooperate, and the alignment of interests and goals. For example, the United States has been seen as too aligned with Israel, which has undercut its credibility as an impartial broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Touval, 1982).

1.4.3.2 Military Intervention

Where local stability issues have arisen, the U.S. has at times used force as a response measure. The 2003 invasion of Iraq is an example where it was rationalized as halting Saddam Hussein's government and countering terrorism. This follow-up occupation increased instability, insurgency, and sectarian strife, and this went toward igniting a broader scholarly critique of the implementation of military intervention in peacebuilding (Cockburn, 2007).

The use of the military may have the tendency to light such fires, creating additional grievances, and is thus self-defeating to the ultimate goal of achieving peace. They will have the tendency to destroy confidence in the intervening country and incite anti-Americanism.

1.5 Multilateral Cooperation

As a region discredited by geopolitical rivalries, humanitarian tragedies, and more than a decade of multilateral negotiations towards regional stability, the Middle East continues to be at the forefront of international diplomacy. Traditionally, U.S. foreign aid policy has shaped such dynamics, but recent trends of funding and U.S. institutional reforms have evoked intense dispute over their enduring influence. Relying on multilateral institutions and U.S. strategies for regional ailments, we also investigate such institutions' influence on peacebuilding efforts.

Regional multilateralism is where governments, international actors, and non-state actors cooperate to solve transboundary problems. Some of the primary mechanisms are: Regional Organizations, Economic Integration, and Security Collaboration.

Regional Organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and Arab League are all talking shops, but their utility is regularly undermined by rivalry among member-states (Barnett & Solingen, 2007). Changes that increase inclusivity and the evolution of conflict-resolution tools would increase their ability to broker disputes, such as the Syrian Civil War or Yemen's humanitarian crisis.

Regional free trade zones and cross-border energy pipelines are some of the steps aimed at halting the roll-back towards economic fragmentation. On this front, competition for resources can be reduced through collaborative renewable energy consortium ventures, while interdependence can be enhanced, all these actions align with greater goals of countering water scarcity and climate vulnerabilities (Van de Graaf & Colgan, 2016; Söderbaum, 2016).

Common threats such as terrorism and arms proliferation require intelligence sharing and joint military exercises. A projected regional security community between the Gulf states and regional countries can be vulnerable to institutionalizing such efforts (Barnett & Gause, 1998).

1.6 Case Studies

This section uses specific case studies to analyse the relationship between U.S. foreign policy mechanisms and intentions and resultant outcomes. The analysis will look at particular cases of regional involvement and aid distributions to highlight themes of effectiveness, backfire, and contradictions between strategic concerns and humanitarian concerns.

1.6.1 U. S. Profile in Foreign Aid: Objectives and Consequences

U.S. aid to the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in FY 2022/2023 amounted to about \$11 billion, half of which was military assistance and half economic aid, disbursed according to a mix of regional security templates and humanitarian schemes (Congressional Research Service [CRS] 2023). Key aspects include:

Table 1.3

Categorization of U.S. Foreign Aid by Type, Recipient, and Intended Outcome: A Regional Analysis of Middle Eastern Allocations (FY 2022–2023)

Aid Category	Top Recipients (FY 2022/23)	Allocated Funding	Purpose
Military Assistance	Israel, Egypt, Jordan	Israel(\$5.5B)	Counterterrorism, regional security
Economic Development	Jordan, Syria	Jordan(\$1.3B), Syria (\$900M)	Infrastructure, healthcare, governance
Humanitarian Assistance	Yemen, Gaza	Yemen (\$833M), Gaza (\$112M)	Food security, disaster relief

Note. From Department of State (FY 2021- 2024), Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Congressional Budget Justifications FY2021-2024 and CRS estimates and rounding(2024)

The new policy decisions of the Trump administration, e.g., re-evaluation of foreign aid programs—whether to prioritize U.S. strategic interests or provide traditional humanitarian assistance, risked further destabilizing vulnerable MENA states. For example, proposed reductions

in USAID’s budget for MENA in FY 2020 jeopardized essential health and food security programs in war-torn areas such as Syria and Gaza (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2019).

1.6.2 Relationship Between Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Aid

U.S. foreign aid is a strategic tool to promote by working toward a cooperative approach to transnational problems. These can be seen in humanitarian support for Gaza, through UN-established ceasefire processes (Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2025); security work with neighboring allies to enhance counterterrorism efforts (USAID, 2024); and economic support based on institutional changes that support economic integration in the region (U.S. State Dept, 2024). The above policies are illustrative of the multilateral focus of U.S. foreign aid, essentially using aid “to promote collective security, development, and economic interoperability”. The table below provides an overview of key programs and their effects.

Table 1.4

U.S. Foreign Aid Strategies in the Middle East (2023–2024)

Focus Area	Key Actions/Allocations	Outcomes
Humanitarian Coordination	\$2.1 billion Gaza aid package (2023–2024)	Supported UN ceasefire initiatives by addressing urgent humanitarian needs.
Security Partnerships	Enhanced counterterrorism cooperation with Jordan and Lebanon.	Strengthened multilateral counterterrorism operations.
Economic Leverage	Economic aid tied to governance/economic reforms.	Potential to complement regional free trade agreements and economic ties.

Note: From The Middle East Council on Global Affairs (2025); USAID Congressional Budget Justification (2024; U.S. State Department Strategy Report (2024).

1.6.3 Challenges and Criticisms

- **Dependence Risks:** The withdrawal of actor-specific or conditional support also destabilizes weak states, such as in Yemen, as the end of U.S.-backed food programs has heightened humanitarian crises (Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2025).
- **Policing:** Support is channelled to military-style security initiatives rather than grassroots peace-building initiatives, which are more commensurate with the needs and priorities of host communities.
- **Institutional Weakness:** Trump's cuts to USAID staff significantly reduced capacity for implementation, and the vacuums created are waiting to be plugged by international rivals like China and Russia (Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2025).

While diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian channels of multilateral engagement are the pillars of stability in the Middle East, they tend to be undermined by inter-state competitions and external interventions. Chossy (2020) and Avles (2022) provide an aggregation of these impacts.

1.6.4 Negotiation and Mediation in International Conflict

Multilateral institutions such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have aided in creating an opportunity for discussion but are usually limited by inter-member state rivalry, i.e., the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. The Camp David and Oslo Accords are examples of diplomatic possibilities in ending conflicts in the past, while the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an example of the utility of international cooperation. Nevertheless, one-sided actions, such as American cuts of assistance to Palestine in 2023, can drain confidence and undermine the cooperation needed for sustainable agreements. The UN-brokered ceasefires in Syria (e.g., Security Council Resolution 2254) and Yemen (e.g., the Stockholm Agreement)

highlight both the promise and limitations of multilateral conflict resolution, as lasting peace often hinges on the alignment of great-power interests (Hinnebusch, 2020; Jones, 2021).

1.6.5 Security Collaboration

Similar worries about weapons proliferation and international terrorism have resulted in intelligence-sharing arrangements and regional security collaborations, such as the joint defense mechanism of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Gause, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2022). Attempts at collective security have surfaced in proposals such as the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) of 2023, which would multilateralize the defense of Arab states along with the U.S. (Al-Dabaib, 2023). But U.S. drone strikes in Yemen—of which there were 28% more in 2023 than in 2022—have eroded trust in such partnerships and made regions vulnerable to external security constructs increasingly sceptical (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023). Such attacks—carried out frequently without regard for local allies—underscore a broader conflict between unilateral military approaches and multilateral security objectives, undermining the unity essential for lasting regionalism (Zenko, 2016).

There has to be a balanced solution—one in which regional control of counterterrorism is guaranteed without undermining external participation in multilateral security measures. In the meantime, values that guide counterterrorism policies for different regions should be preserved and promoted.

1.6.6 Humanitarian Coordination

In war zones, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO) monitor the aid distribution through instruments like quarterly asset median reports or other reporting systems. An example is the U.S.-UN \$2.1 billion Gaza aid deal

(2023–2024), a humanitarian relief program linked to ceasefire negotiations. Aid distribution is nevertheless typically politicized; for instance, U.S. bias toward Jewish allies, particularly Israel, has fuelled sentiments of injustice and mistrust.

Despite multilateral cooperation on refugee management systems in Syria and Yemen, long-term funding shortages highlight systemic challenges to sustaining effective humanitarian interventions.

Table 1.5

Obstacles to Consensus U.S. and Development in the Middle East

Challenge	Impact	Example
Sectarian Rivalries	Undermines consensus-building	Saudi-Iran proxy conflicts in Yemen/Syria
Great-power Competition	Fragments development efforts	U.S.-China infrastructure rivalry in Iraq
Institutional Weakness	Limits conflict resolution capacity	Arab League’s enforcement gaps

Note: From Congressional Research Service (2023); Nasr (2007); Blackwill & Harri (2016).

Bilateral interactions ensure stability through mutual economic and security arrangements, while multilateral interactions are in the middle of norm construction, conflict mediation, and humanitarian coordination. All these pursuits depend on overcoming sectarian cleavages, containing foreign intervention, and building institutional capacities.

More recently, in 2023, there have been shifts in U.S. foreign aid policy toward stricter conditionality, creating vulnerabilities and jeopardizing the progress of earlier years. According to

the Congressional Research Service (2024), making aid conditional on political or economic requirements, even in the name of accountability, can damage relations in volatile regions with urgent humanitarian needs. It underscores the compelling need for a new equitable sustainable humanitarianism; the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) finds that political short-termism often leads to damage of comprehensive responses to crises (OCHA, 2024). As the security vacuum left by America's retreat is filled by local powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as by emerging Russian and Chinese economic forces, the International Crisis Group (2023) argues that the security, economic, and humanitarian problems in the Middle East are intertwined and need to be tackled in a sustained multilateral way. Otherwise, it will be balkanized and divided up with greater inequities (Jones, 2023).

Multilateral intervention also brings regional stability to the principal by diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian interventions. Foreign intervention and regional competition, though, usually render such interventions meaningless, complicating coordinated action and long-term peacebuilding.

Conclusion

The American foreign aid system in the Middle East illustrates the pitfalls of trying to purchase both influence and stability with cash and arms. Help has enabled partnerships, created essential frameworks, and patched humanitarian gaps, but its record is mixed—sometimes politicized, often dependency-creating, and in some cases slapdash. The results of aid are not purely altruistic or exploitative; they depend on a complex array of factors, from local leadership to global competition. The chapter also poses age-old questions: Can assistance truly 'connect security and development'? Will conditionality unilateralism give way to multilateralism? The emergence of new donors like China is driving a need for a shift in U.S. policy so it can remain pertinent. We need to

be more inclusive, transparent and collaborative with local actors, rather than simply responding to emergencies. Foreign aid is an important but imperfect tool; so, too, in the end, will be the Middle East story, as it balances power with principle.

CHAPTER TWO:

Achieving Political Containment through Aid

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Introduction

The strategic deployment of foreign aid as an instrument of political containment presents one of the most enduring paradoxes in modern international relations. While ostensibly framed as vehicles for development and humanitarian assistance, aid packages to the Middle East have consistently served dual purposes - simultaneously propping up allied regimes while systematically excluding adversarial powers from regional influence networks. This chapter interrogates this geopolitical alchemy through which dollars are transmuted into diplomatic leverage, tracing how successive U.S. administrations have weaponized economic assistance from the Marshall Plan's containment of Soviet expansionism to contemporary efforts to circumscribe Iranian and Russian ambitions. Through comparative case analysis of key recipient states, we illuminate the fundamental tensions between aid's stabilizing façade and its destabilizing secondary effects - how security assistance meant to bolster fragile governments often entrenches the very authoritarian tendencies that breed long-term instability. The analysis ultimately reveals containment through aid as a high-stakes gambit where immediate strategic gains frequently come at the cost of perpetuating the regional pathologies they purport to remedy, raising critical questions about the sustainability of using economic instruments to solve fundamentally political dilemmas. In deconstructing this paradox, we challenge conventional narratives about aid's benign purposes while offering new frameworks for understanding its role in great power competition.

2.1 Definition of Political Containment

Containment is basically an international security policy cocked at geo-strategical lines. The Center on the Containing Global Threat: an act of restriction on the territory, ideology, or geopolitical boundaries of an actor regarded as disturbing global stability, order, and eventually peace. During the Cold War, the balance of power defined containment as limiting the effects of a

rival through means of democratic, economic, and non-military direct engagement with the adversary's troops (Kennen, 1947; Gaddis, 2005). This way, American diplomat George F. Kennan first clearly outlined the finding that Soviet communism could be contained by surrounding it with allied economies capable of independently deterring threats (Kennen, 1947).

As time goes on, the conception of containment must develop to face changing challenges, such as China's authoritarian extraterritorial expansion or hybrid warfare of a type that includes cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns (Brands, 2018; Gray, 2020). According to critics, ideological containment can lead to stretching the strategy beyond its limits towards diffuse threats, such as non-state terrorism or transnational extremism (Layne, 2012; Williams, 2009).

A departure from the conceptual idea of state-centric containment that existed during the Cold War was brought to focus on asymmetric threats, including terrorism. The "War on Terror" constituted by the U.S. is an illustration of what changed in the new approach by fusing military interventions with maintaining peace through means such as military aid and other forms of external assistance. For instance, Afghanistan received more than \$145 billion in U.S. aid from 2001 to 2021 to rebuild its state following the Taliban rule, while Pakistan received \$33 billion in military and economic assistance from 2002 to 2018 for cooperating in counterterrorism efforts. Even so, these efforts had been criticized, for the resurgence of the Taliban in 2021 showed the limits of the bases of external support without an effective local government to provide frameworks for balancing and, indeed, fashioning the integration of foreign assistance into local governance structures. Furthermore, the almost complete monopoly of airspace by drone strikes has increased negative images through collateral damage that seemed inevitable in the operation of this technology (SIGAR, 2021; CRS, 2022).

An example of political containment through assistance was the Marshall Plan after World War II. The U.S. strangled the expansion of Soviet communism by practically pouring money down the drain to reconstruct Western Europe, creating thus a buffer of stable nations aligned with the West (Gaddis, 2005). A more recent analogy is that of the massive U.S. assistance to Ukraine since the invasion of the country in 2022, which has reached well beyond \$75 billion in military, economic, and humanitarian provisions. This assistance helps Ukraine to stand against Russia but also serves to create a regional security environment and deny any additional territorial expansion by Russia (CRS, 2024). The Marshall Plan and U.S. assistance to Ukraine illustrate how foreign assistance can be used as a weapon to counter geopolitical threats throughout history and in contemporary times.

2.2 Countering Terrorism and Extremism

The global war against terrorism and extremism poses a major challenge to international security. Countries have adopted numerous methods to curb extremist individuals and ideas. Counterterrorism efforts are not limited to military aspects but also include political and economic aspects.

2.2.1 Pakistani Case

The Congressional Research Service reports that United States assistance to Pakistan totaled \$33 billion from 1947 through 2012, including \$14 billion, which went to counter-terrorism through Coalition Support Funds from 2002 until 2018 (Kronstadt, 2019). Drone strikes have successfully eliminated specific targets in FATA areas since they resulted in killing over 400 civilians. These strikes removed Osama bin Laden in 2011. The casualties discounting innocent civilians from U.S. military operations prompted broad anti-American sentiments to dominate over the intricate and usually adverse results of these interventions (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Terrorism and

extremism constitute the worst aspect of international safety issues in present times and the Middle East stands as its main source. The appearance of IS and TTP has led global security to move backwards according to the Australian Government (2017) and Global Terrorism Index (2023).

In 2024, terrorist deaths are noted to have increased by 11% worldwide owing to the activity of IS in 22 countries, while deaths from TTP skyrocketed by 90%. Nowadays, lone-wolf attacks have been on the rise in the West, where 93% of terrorism-related deaths now happen, whereas the Sahel, on the other hand, has continued taking the lead in terms of terrorism-related deaths (Global Terrorism Index, 2023).

There exists inter-relatedness between terrorism and extremism, though they are two separate concepts. Terrorism is defined by Laqueur (1999) as the politically profane systematic use of violence, intimidation, or coercion against persons to realize an ideological political or religious objective. The UN also notes that terrorism imperils human rights, democratic institutions, and the rule of law; however, the definition of terrorism itself remains contentious owing to the diverse geostrategic outlooks (UN Security Council, 2004). Extremism, per Neumann (2013), thus refers to the espousal of radical ideologies that reject pluralism, tolerance, and democratic norms. There are occasions when, although extremism never leads to violence, the perpetrators of extreme views will turn to violence and thus comply with the definition of terrorism (Schmid, 2014). In the other sense, it could be understood as the precursor to terrorism when violence is used in pursuit of extremist views.

Political containment is a strategy aimed at blocking scuttling forces in a state's domestic order or in its zones of influence. Political containment engages in managing political risks through avoiding overt conflict. Extremism and terrorism may be subjected to the policy of political containment since both are spawned by some ideological movement that challenges the perceived

societal or political order. Whereas extremism is mostly non-violent, concentrating on radical ideologies that offer alternatives to the status quo, which aggravate the divisions within a society, it flourishes in insurgencies, inequalities, repression, or foreign interference. The dissemination and propagation of extreme ideology grow through debate or social unrest.

Beneath violence lies terrorism as the manifestation of an extreme ideology. While extremism denotes belief in radical alternatives, terrorism enforces those beliefs on other people through violence. That means political containment must respond to the ideological underpinnings of extremism and the violent acts of terrorism. It must embrace a holistic perspective that is aware of the connection between thought and action, ideology and violence.

Regarding foreign aid-based political containment, it throws some light on its advantages and shortcomings. America has relied on foreign aid as a political containment tool against the radical groups' ideology and violence, taking Iraq and Pakistan as main examples. In both countries, U.S. military and economic aid were designed to disturb terrorist networks and stabilize failed states. However, whilst this aid produced short-term outcomes in weakening extremist groups, it also showed the limitations of public aid-driven containment strategies.

Intervention and post-invasion aid efforts regarding Iraq were mainly directed against the rise of extremist factions, with ISIS being front and center. The military aid did weaken these groups; however, the radical ideologies re-emerged because the political instability at the center of their rise was not addressed. On the other hand, billions of U.S. dollars were poured into Pakistan with an aim to fight terrorism and stabilize the region, but the funds did not help eliminate the terrorist threat. This partnership was plagued with issues regarding corruption, civilian casualties, and bad geopolitical reactions, substantiating the notion of foreign aid by itself being an unsustainable solution against terrorism.

The Iraqi and Pakistani cases illustrate the limits of foreign assistance as one of the principal means of political containment within counterterrorism strategies. Aid can afford emergencies and works to weaken extremist groups, but it cannot resolve the deeper structural and political grievances that spawn extremism and terrorism. This aid-centric counterterrorism paradigm does not stand a chance against the ideological and violent forces threatening international peace and security unless woven together with political governance reforms and stabilization efforts, along with the building up of local capacities. Therefore, political containment must evolve into an integrated model that deals with the ideological genesis of extremism, violent acts of terrorism, and long-term stability in the affected areas

2.2.2 Iraq–Pakistan Case

During twenty years starting from 2003 to 2023 America devoted its resources to securing Iraq's stability. The Pentagon documents show the United States invested more than \$60 billion to eliminate ISIS along with its efforts to create an operational government for Iraq. The peak combat phase under Operation Inherent Resolve lasted from 2014 to 2019 because U.S. military trainers worked alongside Iraqi forces during Mosul and Ramadi's liberation campaigns that involved tough urban warfare. Through their efforts in 2020 military forces succeeded in liberating 95% of territory controlled by ISIS following its maximum strength during the period.

Allied with security efforts, USAID spent \$1.6 billion on the Mosul infrastructure along with its efforts regarding unemployed people and essential services (USAID, 2021). Yet about 15 per cent of these reconstruction gains were nullified by the fact that funds were looted and somehow ended up in the hands of Iranian-supported militia groups, thus fuelling the already existent sectarian divide within the region (World Bank, 2022). Hence, while much has been achieved, it is estimated

that about 10,000 ISIS fighters still roam in isolated parts as of 2023 to take advantage of the unresolved grievances among Sunni populations (United Nations, 2023).

The Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act of 2009 paved the way for the passage of \$7.5 billion in U.S. assistance towards educational and energy projects in Pakistan. Systemic mismanagement, however, hampered progress with national literacy rates pegged at 60% as of 2020 (Brookings Institution, 2020). Evidence also confirmed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency maintained operational ties to the Taliban and Haqqani Network even as it continued much of U.S. policy goals in Afghanistan (SIPRI, 2021).

2.3 Geopolitical Containment

When discussing historical alignment and political containment, we also observe the emergence of geopolitical containment that America has used in its aid policy and strategic objectives. American foreign aid functions not only as economic support but as a tool for influencing political stability, curbing extremist ideologies, and securing U.S. interests within key regions.

2.3.1 Conceptualizing Geopolitical Containment

In the Middle East, U.S. foreign aid often serves as a tool for geopolitical containment, curbing the influence of rivals like Iran, Russia, and China while preventing regional instability. This strategy allows America to safeguard its interests without direct military intervention. As Sloan (2017) notes, containment entails shaping strategic geography to restrict adversaries' political and military options. By leveraging aid for development, security cooperation, and diplomatic alignment, the U.S. subtly alters regional dynamics in its favor.

2.3.2 The Practice of Geopolitical Containment in the Middle East

For years now, America has been walking a tricky tightrope in the Middle East, trying to shore up its Gulf allies while keeping Iran's influence in check. Back in 2017, we made history with that massive arms deal with Saudi Arabia, sending over fighter jets and missile defenses to help them push back against Iranian meddling in Yemen. But Tehran has not taken this lying down; they have kept up attacks through their Houthi proxies, keeping tensions simmering (State Department, 2023).

The U.S. government has also doubled down on partnerships with places like the UAE, including that \$23 billion package in 2020 full of high-tech gear like F-35s. These toys are not just for show - they give our partners real eyes on what Iran's up to in the crucial Strait of Hormuz, where so much of the world's oil flows through (CRS, 2023).

The thing is, the U.S. government learned you can not just throw weapons at this problem. That is why, in 2018, we started the Countering Iranian Influence Fund, putting \$720 million into more subtle approaches in Lebanon and Iraq. In Lebanon, that money went to things like fixing power grids and supporting civil society, trying to give people alternatives to Hezbollah's Iranian-backed services (USAID, 2022). Over in Iraq's Anbar Province, the U.S. trained local forces to handle Iranian-backed militias. But let us be honest - corruption and weak governments have made this an uphill battle (World Bank, 2023).

Now the picture has gotten even more complicated with Russia and China joining the mix, especially in Syria. The U.S. government hit back with sanctions like the Caesar Act and humanitarian aid to opposition areas, trying to squeeze Assad while helping regular Syrians caught in the middle (U.S. Congress, 2019; USAID, 2023). And when China started throwing money around with its Belt and Road projects, the U.S. countered with our own Build Back Better World plan, our version of infrastructure diplomacy (The White House, 2021).

At the end of the day, it is all about playing the long game, mixing military partnerships with economic aid and diplomatic pressure to keep Iran in check while staying one step ahead of Russia and China in this crucial region.

2.3.3 Geopolitical Containment Through Soft Power

"Soft power," coined by Joseph Nye in 1990, describes influencing others through attraction rather than force. It works by making your values, culture, and policies appealing so others willingly align with you. The U.S. exercises this through student exchanges, humanitarian aid, and cultural exports, building goodwill that subtly advances its interests. Unlike military might or economic pressure, soft power creates voluntary cooperation by shaping what others want. In our connected world, this indirect approach has become crucial for maintaining influence while preserving positive international relationships (Nye, 2004).

2.4 The Interplay Between Aid and Containment in U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

Foreign aid policy of the United States for the Middle East has, since time immemorial, been a strategic instrument to juggle between development and security goals (Brands, 2016; U.S. Department of State 2023). These policies have sought the stabilization of their partner states while trying to contain rival powers such as the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Beyond that period, other countries like Iran, Russia, and extremist groups were contained (Sharp, 2023) The dual-purpose approach thus goes to history, reflecting the evolutionary process of U.S. foreign aid, which was primarily established for the purpose of cooperation and development but, as well, to protect the attainment of geopolitical interests (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Economic assistance from the USA came into focus for genuine purposes so that, in the end, money would also flow in favour of containment within the directive of anti-communism (Sharp,

2016; Brands, 2023). Foreign aid was therefore used as a weapon against communism to support allied or friendly countries in need. For Cold War reasons, Truman's Doctrine, stated in 1947, brought foreign aid in favor of select anti-communist causes; U.S. economic and military assistance was to strengthen allies considered critical to the Western alliance. This reasoning was especially emphasized in the Middle East, a land of oil and strategically positioned with respect to the waterways of the Suez Canal. (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

The aid of the United States was often intended to stabilize authoritarian regimes seen as a bulwark to Soviet influence (Schmitz, 2006; Gerges, 2014). For instance, the regime of the Shah of Iran underwent huge amounts of economic and military aid in the modernization of infrastructure and enhancement of Iran's role as a regional ally against Soviet expansion (Katzman, 2021; Schmitz, 2006). The same with Jordan, where the aid enhanced its stabilization in the 1970s of King Hussein's regime, especially after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and the threat posed by the factions backed by the Soviets against the Palestinian question. (Blanchard, 2018). Such support was often couched within the framework to promote regional stability and stem the tide of leftist movements (Gerges, 2014).

From the point of view of practical value, this strategy has brought mixed results: it has countered Soviet influence, but it has also caused some irreversible damage like the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Gasiorowski, 1991; Schmitz, 2006). The decades of American support to the anti-Communist Shah of Iran generated much bitterness on the part of Iranians, and this resulted in much anger against the Shah and the establishment of an anti-Western, Islamist regime (Gasiorowski, 1991; Kinzer, 2008). It speaks to how U.S. foreign aid that is meant for containing a rival power might end up, quite unintentionally, as an agent of long-term instability (Kinzer, 2008; Schmitz, 2006).

The Baghdad Pact in 1955 later became CENTO, heralding another arena of American strategy: aid in the process of containment. Providing military and economic grants for Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Pakistan, it was hoped that the U.S. would have a frontline regional opposition to Soviet penetration (Kuniholm, 1994; Schmitz, 2006). Yet, resulting from the revolutionary change in 1958, Iraq denounced the pact (Coughlin, 2009) while U.S. support continued for the other three countries. In this way, regional stability was maintained and Soviet influence kept at bay, and tensions developed in those nations with authoritarian regimes (Gerges, 2014; Schmitz, 2006).

Nixon Doctrine and the so-called Twin Pillar strategy of the 1970s transferred the responsibility for regional stability onto Iranian and Saudi Arabian U.S. allies, reducing American boots on the ground while sustaining economic and military aid for these regimes (Halliday, 2005; McCoy, 2017). Such scenarios capture the essence of foreign aid as a strategic tool for supporting stability and deterring rival forces yet one that overlays moral compromises in supporting regimes that were not always democratic or human rights observant (Jones, 2010).

The current landscape of U.S. foreign aid in the Middle East is undoubtedly complex, characterized by a "carrot-and-shield" strategy which is a combination of non-humanitarian hard security support with minimal and very selective humanitarian assistance, a model that has grown to be synonymous with U.S. policy in the region (Congressional Research Service 2023). For instance, U.S. investments in educational initiatives in Egypt from 2015 to 2020 sought to modernize the education system, lessen poverty, and counter extremist ideologies by improving livelihoods in vulnerable communities (USAID, 2020). The whole objective is to stabilize areas in danger of extremism and retain U.S. influence against China and Russia (White House, 2022).

In conclusion, U.S. foreign aid in the Middle East has been a versatile tool of development and containment. While it helped stabilize allied regimes and curtail the influence of rival powers, it has

nonetheless contributed to long-term instability and often coalesced around difficult moral compromises. The legacy of this strategy boasts both geopolitical victories and unforeseen consequences, making the issue a complicated and ongoing endeavor in U.S. foreign policy in the area.

2.4.1 Military Financing as Deterrence

Military aid remains the largest component of U.S. foreign assistance in the region. According to the US Department of State (2023), under a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding MOU signed in 2016 Israel receives 3.8 billion dollars a year to finance the development of advanced defense technologies such as the Iron Dome. Egypt, receives nearly \$1.3 billion per year, mostly for counter-terrorism purposes in the Sinai Peninsula (Congressional Research Service, 2023). The strengthening of the defense capabilities of partner militaries sends a message about US interests in regional stability and the presence of hostile actors like Iran or ISIS affiliates and provides increased defense capacity to those states (White House, 2022).

2.4.2 Technical Cooperation as Soft Power

Initiatives such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) began in 2002 with more than 1 billion dollars in funds and priorities including governance reforms, youth engagement, and civil society development (MEPI Annual Report, 2022). These also seek to instill liberal democratic values and push back against authoritarianism more broadly, including from non-democratic adversaries like China and Russia.

2.5. Strategic Purpose of Complementarity

The leveraging of aid for geopolitical purposes was not without precedent, and similar policies had been enacted during the Cold War. In 1947 the Truman Doctrine designated \$400 million to

Greece and Turkey to fight back against communism (Leffler,1992) The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957, also aimed at stopping Soviet expansion, allocated \$200 million a year to U.S allies in the Middle East, and in particular supported the Jordanian monarchy in the face of political instability as well (Hahn, 2004). This was developed further under the Nixon Doctrine, which began a process of arming local allies, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, to play the role of regional policemen for American strategies, without direct military involvement by the United States (Yergin, 1991).

Table 2.1

U.S. Foreign Aid by Country and Strategic Purpose

Country	Type of Aid	Purpose	Source
Jordan	\$1.5 billion/year (2023)	Support for Syrian refugees, counterterrorism, economic stabilization	U.S. Department of State: U.S. Security Cooperation With Jordan
Afghanistan	\$60+ billion (2001–2021)	State-building, Taliban containment, infrastructure development	U.S. Congress: Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief
Iraq	\$21 billion (2003– 2012)	Reconstruction, anti-ISIS efforts, oil sector revival	The Bulletin: ISIS: The unsurprising surprise that is sweeping Iraq
Lebanon	\$120 million/year (2022)	Support for the Lebanese Armed Forces to contain Hezbollah	U.S. Department of State: U.S. Security Cooperation With Lebanon
Saudi Arabia	\$350 million/year (2023, security)	Countering Iran, securing oil trade routes	Atlantic Council: The Future of US Strategy Toward Iran

Note: From the U.S. Department of State (2023), U.S. Congress (2023), The Bulletin (2014), and the Atlantic Council (2023).

In Jordan, the U.S.-backed Jordan Compact (2016) linked EU trade incentives to job creation for Syrian refugees, demonstrating how humanitarian aid can serve both moral and security goals by mitigating radicalization in refugee camps (European Commission, 2016). In Afghanistan, while over \$60 billion was invested post-2001 in development and security, issues like corruption undercut long-term effectiveness. Still, the efforts underscore how aid has been deployed to counter insurgencies and legitimize U.S.-aligned governments Special Inspector General for Afghanistan (SIGAR, 2021). From 2003 to 2012 the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund in Iraq spent \$21 billion on infrastructure reconstruction efforts in Iraq but oversight failure resulted in upwards of 8 billion in waste spending. (U.S. GAO, 2013)

2.5.1 Strategic Benefits

The complementarity of U.S. aid in the Middle East yields key strategic returns. Beyond assistance in regional defenses, aid to Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia guarantees the steady flow of oil exports, which are key to the global economy (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Military support to Lebanon also seeks to limit Hezbollah's paramilitary capacities in a way that will reduce the risks of cross-border violence with Israel (Blanford, 2011). On top of that, U.S. support agreements have ensured access to important military facilities in Qatar, at Al Udeid Air Base, and Bahrain, at Naval Support Activity Bahrain, both centers of U.S. power projection in the region (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021).

U.S. foreign aid in the Middle East is essentially an interesting mix of altruism and strategic necessity. Whether in the form of developmental aid, military aid, or support on matters of governance and administration, aid becomes a 'goodwill' tool and part of 'regional order management' advantageous to U.S. interests. (USAID, 2021).

2.6 Case Studies

Middle East U.S. foreign aid lies at the crossroads between an idealistic view of diplomacy and realpolitik; foreign aid, according to this perspective, is a tool for wrestling with the promotion of normative ideals and hard-nosed strategic imperatives. These cases draw on Washington's aid to Israel and Egypt as two historic pillars of American influence in the region and reveal the contradictions in using aid as a tool to promote power projection, stability, and work through volatile alliances. Highlighting Israel as the security partner and Egypt as the cornerstone against chaos, this "security through assistance" dynamic exposes how aid is typically used in a way that reinforces status quo dynamics, prioritizing immediate regional geopolitical interests over long-term systemic peacebuilding or democratic reform.

2.6.1 U.S. Aid to Israel: Peace Incentives and the Pursuit of Regional Containment

US aid to Israel has emerged as one of the critical tools in advancing U.S. and Israeli interests in the dual direction of providing Israel with security assistance while projecting it as a dominant ally in the region (Sharp, 2022). The aid had been directed towards some strategic diplomatic milestones, particularly on peace accords and security concerns, thus making it part of the U.S. foreign policy initiative for the Middle East.

U.S. aid started growing significantly for Israel after the Oslo Accords (1993-1995) to encourage Israeli cooperation in the peace process as a negation of the United States' desire to support Israel's peace process enactment (Bickerton, 2009). It is aimed at making Israel more secure while urging it to take measures toward peace with the Palestinians. For instance, the 1998 Wye River Memorandum links \$1.2 billion in U.S. aid to Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank, showing quite clearly that there is a connection between U.S. financial aid and diplomatic progress (Ross, 2004).

As of 2010, U.S. budgetary allocations for defense systems such as the Iron Dome, a missile defense system developed for the protection of Israeli civilians from rocket attacks, were included in aid to Israel. This system is very critical in preventing loss of life brought about by intense confrontation and is also a clear testimony to the U.S. effort to secure Israel while it strengthens its own geopolitical position in the region (Sharp, 2022).

Critics argue that the aid to Israel has so far not only developed the security of Israel but also spurred on the expansion of Jewish settlements into the occupied Palestinian territories by cut-throat means (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). Some scholars, such as Mearsheimer and Walt (2007), contend that U.S. aid, especially through infrastructure, has contributed to the solidifying and maximizing Israeli control over such areas, making a two-state solution hardly viable and jeopardizing the further prospects for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians (Finkelstein, 2003).

But, the U.S. has long considered Israel as an important strategic counterweight to adversaries in the region, with Iran agreed upon. The 2016 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of \$38 billion military assistance to Israel over ten years, a substantial portion of which is to be spent on weaponry manufactured in the U.S., and therefore assures interoperability of U.S. and Israeli forces (U.S. Department of State 2016). This has given Israel a greater direct role in efforts to counter the Iranian influence, for instance via intelligence sharing of Iran's nuclear developments, or joining in efforts to deny Iran's weapons transfers to Iranian-affiliated groups like Hezbollah in Syria. (Byman, 2018; Bergman, 2018).

Thus, the U.S., as a strategy, continues to strengthen Israel militarily and to extend the same to the country's other countries in the region. Affiliation treaties, such as those between Israel and some Arab countries-particularly the UAE and Bahrain-under the Abraham Accords of 2020, are seen to indicate the wider U.S. strategy to promote stability between nations through Israel's military edge

(The White House, 2020). The selling of advanced weapon systems such as fighter jets and promoting economic partnerships between nations has got the U.S. into integrating Israel fully into the region while doing away with the need for U.S. military intervention as an additional pain in the milling local conflict (U.S. Department of State, 2021; Atlantic Council, 2022).

However, the fundamental nature of U.S. aid to Israel was considered controversial. Unconditional giving to Israel regarding the occupation of Palestinian territories does not help for peaceful long-term coexistence (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Rather, aid to Israel will prepare the grounds for enhancement rather than weakening the power of doing diplomatic compromises. (Amnesty International, 2022). Further, such supporting power relations would develop mistrust and therefore tensions and instability, which would hinder sustainable peacemaking efforts (UN Special Rapporteur, 2023).

That is, it is significant at the end that U.S. aid to Israel has helped very much in strengthening Israel's psychological security and its position within the geopolitics of the Middle East itself (Brookings Institution, 2022); on the same token, it raises a lot of controversy within such a field of discussion. Critics have argued that American support indirectly supports policies that sideline Palestinian self-determination and thus preempts options for a just resolution of the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2023). The dual nature: aid to Israeli security and aid for its regional dominance raises new and pertinent questions concerning the long-range implications for U.S. foreign policy, regional stability, and the pursuit of a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians (Lustick, 2019; Foreign Affairs, 2021).

2.6.2. Tensions and Trade-Offs in U.S. Aid to Egypt: From Mubarak to Sisi

U.S. foreign aid to Egypt is a perfect example of what is a sporadic and often inconsistent U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East, particularly in its pursuit of democracy vs. strategic

interests. Since the 1978 signing of the Camp David Accords, Egypt has been the top recipient of U.S. foreign aid after Israel, receiving annually more than \$1.3 billion (U.S. Department of State, 1978; Congressional Research Service, 2020), and the bulk of that aid, military aid, has responded to a variety of strategic interests such as “preserving peace with Israel, aids against terrorism, and stability in the region” . Meanwhile, it has also supported the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes, first with president Mubarek who ruled from 1981to 2011 and now with El-Sisi who took power in 2014, and thus has created an eternal bargain between short-term geopolitical stability and long-term democratization. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020; Brownlee, 2012).

During the years of the Mubarak administration, U.S. military and economic assistance continued despite considerations of widespread human rights violations, corruption, and electoral fraud (Dunne, 2003). The assistance provided to Mubarak by the U.S. was, rather, the delivery of advanced military hardware like F-16 fighters and M1 Abrams tanks, primarily to enhance Egypt's national defense and to ensure internal stability at perhaps the great expense of democratic reform (Sharp, 2017). While U.S. economic aid, at an average of \$815 million per year during the 2000s, was purportedly meant to accompany complementary economic reform, its benefits accrued mostly to the elite, deepening social economic disparities that engendered public discontent (Bush, 2005; Stacher, 2012). Whatever the case, the U.S. mood in favour of Mubarak largely continued, in that stability in Egypt was viewed as an important factor in the course of U.S. plotting in the region, especially with reference to counterterrorism and maintaining peace with Israel (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020).

The U.S. policy toward Egypt became even more entangled following the military coup in the summer of 2013 that had evacuated Mohamed Morsi, the democratically elected president. First, the U.S. suspended military aid to Egypt in protest against the coup (Congressional Research Service,

2014). However, in 2015, with the cooperation of Egypt in the fight against terrorism, especially in Sinai, and regional peacekeeping, the U.S. resumption of assistance was laid upon this cooperation (White House, 2015). Despite the widespread political imprisonments and erosion of civil society (Amnesty International, 2021) by Sisi's repressive regime, and the military hardware so important to Egypt's counter-terror activities and security at the Suez Canal—an essential route of global trade—continued to flow into Egypt (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021).

Throughout Sisi's administration, aid was delivered from the U.S. despite Hideous criticism of human rights transgressions, while in 2021, the Biden administration took a symbolic step of withholding \$130 million from the annually allotted \$1.3 billion in military assistance, chiefly because of Egypt's human rights record (Congressional Research Service, 2023). However, this step did not materially change Egypt's strategic standing in U.S. policy. The U.S. has long viewed short-term security issues-fighting extremism and maintaining relative regional stability being of higher priority than a long-term promotion of democratic reform (Human Rights Watch, 2023; White House, 2021).

Foreign aid to Egypt has come under heavy criticism, especially with an emphasis on one-sided military assistance, and less than 10% of total aid has been directed towards economic and social programs (Brookings Institution, 2021). The military assistance provided by the U.S. has mainly focused on Sinai to fight militant groups linked to the Islamic State; important issues of poverty, marginalization, and lack of basic public services, especially for the Bedouins, tended to be neglected (International Crisis Group, 2019). Though some development programs have been instituted thanks to U.S. aid, e.g., USAID's educational initiative, the effect of such programs has frequently been undermined by systemic corruption and bad governance, which cast doubts on the long-term impact (Transparency International, 2023; World Bank, 2021).

Military aid-oriented policy is a hindrance to alleviating socio-economic problems in Egypt. The country faces major discontent and unrest due to the economy, where unemployment rates among youths have been over 30%. There are those who say the U.S. support for the military leadership of the day has stifled democratic development, especially in view of the constitutional amendments in 2019 to prolong Sisi's rule to 2030 (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2022).

The mess faced by the United States in giving aid to Egypt remains the aftermath of the preferential consideration of immediate security calculations rather than the long-term considerations of political reform and democratization. While U.S. assistance plays a role in cementing regional stability by bolstering Egypt's status as an important partner in this respect and ensuring that the Suez Canal is secure, it has also invaded and fortified an authoritarian system that is now being resisted by large parts of the populace (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], 2023). The increasing repression of civil society and the stifling of dissent serve to add to the flames of discontent and provide opportunities for extremist groups to win new recruits (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022).

Moreover, the lessons that Egypt itself has learned caution against short-term stabilizing support of any authoritarian regime. The collapse of the Mubarak regime within a few weeks during the Arab Spring underlined just how fragile such arrangements can be and how they can bring equally unpredictable consequences for the stability of the whole region (Gause, 2018). Indeed, the U.S. now finds itself walking a fine line between perfectly supporting a regime that serves its geopolitical interests and wider concerns for democracy and human rights, which are crucial to long-term stability (Cook, 2020).

U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt thus becomes emblematic of the contradiction inherent in American foreign policy, the conflict between strategic ends and democratic values. While military

assistance and counterterrorism cooperation continue to form the core of relations between Washington and Cairo, a failure to commit substantively to political and economic reform may endanger the future stability of Egypt and the surrounding area (Brown, 2021). The region has experienced a plethora of concerns: authoritarianism, extremism, and socio-economic inequities, and thus the U.S. might need to rethink foreign-aid practices in such a way that long-term democratic development would weigh equally with short-term security considerations (Heydemann, 2019).

Foreign aid strategy in the United States for the Middle East has changed substantially in the scene of the region with changes vis-à-vis shifts in world power and domestic political framework. These changes are intertwined with the long-existing tension between its ideological goal of democratization and the more pragmatic goals of counterterrorism, strategic alliances, and geopolitical competition (Pillar, 2020).

At first, the Arab Spring of 2011 injected optimism into Washington and the adoption of the democratic reform program for the particular region. Later, this focus on democracy gave way to the increased stress on stability, especially after the Egyptian power takeover by the Muslim Brotherhood (Traeger, 2016). On military aid of \$1.3 billion to Egypt, the Obama administration placed a hold shortly after Morsi's ouster by the military coup in 2013. That was, however, a brief suspension, as it was restored in 2015, prioritizing counterterrorism cooperation and the Egypt-Israel peace treaty (Bradley, 2017).

Tunisia was hence presentable as a genuine living case of democracy and pocketed significant US funding in the range of over \$1 billion from 2011 until the end of 2020 (Middle East Institute, 2022). Yet even in this case, Tunisia is the exception more than the rule. Meanwhile, on the political front, the United States began changing its approach toward the Middle East through the inception and prevalence of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between 2015 and

2018. To restrain Iranian outreach, the Obama administration expanded military assistance to its fellow Gulf allies, including a \$110 billion arms deal with such nations (Blanchard, 2017). Countries such as Iraq also ramped up security assistance with programs to mark Iranian influence in Baghdad, enabling funding up to \$1.7 billion a year by 2020 (RAND Corporation, 2021).

After the Trump administration walked out of the JCPOA in 2018, the U.S. became more militarized with its aid, including selling \$8 billion worth of arms in 2019 to Gulf countries intended as deterrence against Iran (SIPRI,2020). Also, China's growing presence in the region through projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with larger economic investments and infrastructure projects, was contributing to a U.S. reaction to Beijing's influence. The U.S. launched in 2023 the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), a "\$20 billion investment to support sustainable development projects and offer an alternative to China's" (Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, 2023).

More aid to Jordan and Egypt is increasingly straddling areas of technology investment and green energy, thus bringing these two nations in line with Western standards (USAID, 2023; U.S. Department of Energy, 2022). At the same time, military assistance has flowed in, including a \$300 million aid provision to Oman in 2022 for the upgrading of ports and to limit Chinese naval access to strategic facilities (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2023).

Domestic political changes that have affected American foreign aid strategies include Obama's emphasis on pragmatic engagement which attempt to balance support for democratic reforms in Tunisia with arms agreements with authoritarian allies like Saudi Arabia (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016). Althghou, The aid to Egypt was decreased after 2013 but never fully suspended reflecting a careful effort toward maintaining U.S. influence within the region. In contrast, the Trump administration addopted a more transactional approach by giving priority to arms sales and

encouraging agreements like the Abraham Accords which included promises of advanced weapons, such as F-35 jets, for countries like the UAE and Bahrain" (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2020).

And although President Biden has tried to restore some conditionalities on human rights on aid, especially in Egypt, he has continued to face challenges. For instance, in 2022, he approved a \$25 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia while human rights issues were taking center stage. The 2022 National Security Strategy of Biden explicitly stated that the People's Republic of China (PRC) are "the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective and stressed the need to align the tools of U.S. foreign policy, such as aid, to meet this strategic challenge (White House, 2022, p. 8).

Congress has also been a key factor in shaping US foreign aid decisions. This bipartisanship ensured that the \$3.8 billion annual military aid to Israel was retained in the absence of substantial criticism about that country's policies regarding the Palestinians. (Arms Control Association, 2019) Legislative pressure in connection to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen led to the most recent 2019 arms sales halt to Saudi Arabia, but has since been lifted. Legislators such as Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) have faced civil society issues on the implications of support to authoritarian regimes, though, not successfully. (Murphy, 2022).

The public itself has become tired of long wars, especially the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, which have had a definite effect on recent aid decisions. A break from precedent in American foreign policy was taking place in President Biden's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 (Pew Research Center, 2021). Current ideological divides would still be seen as shaping aid strategies, with the general tendency of the Republican Party supporting measures devised to prevent regional

instability, as in the recent maximum pressure campaign against Iran, while advocating for conditions in governance and human rights improvements regarding new aid from the increasingly democratic side (Foreign Policy, 2023).

So, in short, numerous factors, internal and external influences, have shaped the U.S. foreign aid strategies in the Middle East. Security alliances remained the foremost state interest, but then they were often outweighed by broader goals of democracy and human rights.

2.7 Results and Discussions

Foreign assistance to the Middle East has, for decades, in the U.S. been a marker of containment and dual cooperation between the *realpolitik* of strategic imperatives vs. idealistic aspirations. The course is rife with underlying tension in case studies such as Israel and Egypt. For instance, U.S. assistance is, overall, \$3.8 billion a year, and has twofold objectives such as to confirm diplomatic breakthroughs, notably the Camp David Accords of 1978 (U.S. Department of State, 1978) and the Abraham Accords of 2020 (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2020), maintain Israel's military dominance, especially in light of the Iranian overhang, and commit Israel to respect bilateral commitments in the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding. In the same vein, aid to Egypt, which was formalized under the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, highlights that regional stability has precedence over democratization.

American hegemony in the region is confirmed. The \$1.3 billion annual aid package to Egypt illustrates the moral compromises inherent in the American strategy. Officially, for the fight against terrorism and for regional stability, this aid has continued to support the authoritarian rule of Mubarak and Sisi despite continued repression and gross human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2021; Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

Events like the Arab Spring, the Iranian nuclear deal (JCPOA), and the growing shadow of China have redefined U.S. foreign aid strategies, pitting immediate security needs against more distant development purposes in an acute contestation. The Arab Spring, in essence, was a period of high hope for reform in Arab countries, but such democratic development was contradicted by the rise of Islamic political movements and instability, thus warranting an instant U-turn toward support for autocratic allies. (Brookings Institution, 2013; Middle East Institute, 2015).

Along with that, the Iran nuclear deal and the ensuing campaign of 'maximum pressure' against the Gulf countries (RAND Corporation, 2018), which resulted from it, redefined the arrangement of U.S. relations with those countries. Simultaneously, countermeasures such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, which aims to propel infrastructure investment with strategic competition flowing into it, were engineered with China's Belt and Road Initiative (The White House, 2023).

Internal dynamics, from the presidential ideology to congressional influence, have moulded the priorities of foreign aid domestically in the U.S. Although military support to Israel is mostly protected, inconsistent application of human rights standards, such as the Biden administration's arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the face of continuing abuses and pin-pricking cuts to Egypt, has also been part of this scene (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). Aid policy has also been shaped by public weariness over long-term military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, resulting in a balance between engagement and restraint as far as military assistance is concerned (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2022)

Conclusion

U.S. foreign aid to the Middle East has contained the threat of development by supporting authoritarian allies against foes such as the Soviet Union and Iran. It brought short-term solutions

and accessibility to resources, but in the long-term instability, the type that led to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, as well as anti-American resentment. Contemporary aid, whether military assistance to Israel or anti-terrorism support to Egypt, has always been a useful play but is fundamentally at odds with democratic values. While China and Russia gain ground regionally, the U.S. fails to balance strategic realism with moral relevance. A legacy that highlights the balance between safeguarding interests and enabling long-term diplomacy in an unstable region.

General Conclusion

This dissertation examines the complex duality of U.S. foreign aid in the Middle East, interrogating its simultaneous role as a purported instrument of development and an overt tool of geopolitical strategy.

To achieve this aim, this study was structured around two main chapters with analytical framework. The first chapter traces the historical evolution of aid—from Cold War-era containment (e.g., Truman Doctrine) to post-9/11 securitization—highlighting tensions between rhetoric and reality, as exemplified by Trump’s punitive aid cuts to Palestine versus Biden’s restored humanitarian funding for Yemen. The second chapter systematically demonstrates how aid functions as political leverage, reinforcing authoritarian allies like Egypt and Israel while marginalizing local agency, with Iraq’s post-2003 reconstruction epitomizing the prioritization of U.S.-aligned governance over sustainable development.

Employing qualitative analysis of policy documents and historical records, the research answers three core questions: (1) how geopolitical goals shape aid allocation, revealing conditionality and selectivity; (2) whether aid primarily advances U.S. hegemony rather than equitable cooperation; and (3) its destabilizing long-term effects, including dependency cycles and democratic backsliding.

After collecting and analyzing the required data, the findings confirmed that U.S. foreign aid to the Middle East is politically strategic more than humanitarian or developmental. The given aids were not only selective but conditional and reflected U.S. political alliances and regional goals. For example, due to Egypt’s status as a peace partner with Israel and an ally to U.S. counter-terrorism operations, its authoritarian government has led the country to become one of the top three most aid-

receiving countries in the world. Likewise, U.S. support for Israel was also based on maintaining military superiority and strategic partnership within the region. Meanwhile, in post-invasion Iraq, American assistance was less about sustainable development and more about rebuilding a political system compatible with U.S. interests.

Furthermore, this study showed how U.S. foreign aid, through the discourse of development and cooperation, operated as a tool of control and influence. The dual-goals policy, of development and political strategy had a mixed impact. On one hand, it brought temporary collaboration and local coordination. On the other hand, it created dependency, disincentives national development, and weakened long-term stability. Political conditionality in aid may strengthen authoritarian regimes, limit civil society, and postpone democratic reforms in the countries receiving such aid.

However, there are limitations to this study. It was limited by a dependence on mainstream secondary data and a lack of direct fieldwork or primary interviews with actors across various recipient countries. In this sense, the descriptive-analytical methodology, though helpful in situating emerging trends and tensions within particular discourses, lacks the ability to engage at the level of experience and micro-politics of the ground.

These findings carried significant practical implications. They undermined the ethical and developmental credibility of U.S. foreign aid policy in the Middle East. If aid was to be part of any sustainable peace, and meaningful development, it must be free of obvious political agendas, and tied to needs as articulated by local populations and within a framework of inclusive governance. Future aid programs should focus on more transparency, participation of recipients, and a process-oriented towards building longer-term capacities.

On the basis of the present study, further research should empirically test these propositions through comparative donor analyses (e.g., China's Belt and Road initiatives) and longitudinal

studies of aid-dependent states, while centering local voices via ethnographic fieldwork. Additional exploratory research through fieldwork, interviews and surveys in the countries that receive aid would contribute to understanding the perception and character of aid at the local level. Comparative analyses with other large global donors, like China or the European Union, could help us understand the implications of geopolitical strategies for aid outcomes. Finally, longitudinal studies following the political and economic trajectories of aid-receiving countries would produce stronger forms of evidence of the various long-term impacts of aid policies.

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجية المزدوجة التي تقوم عليها سياسة المساعدات الخارجية الأمريكية في الشرق الأوسط، وتبحث فيما اذا كانت تعمل كآلية أساسية لتعزيز التعاون الدولي أم كأداة للاحتواء السياسي . ومن خلال تحليل وصفي تاريخي ونوعي لممارسات المساعدات الأمريكية منذ الحرب الباردة الى ما بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر، تستكشف هذه الدراسة الأبعاد التنموية والاستراتيجية للمعونات الأمريكية. يتطرق **الفصل الأول** الى تاريخ المساعدات الخارجية الأمريكية، مبرزاً دورها الاقتصادي والانساني ومدى مساهمتها في بناء السلام. أما **الفصل الثاني**، فيتناول كيفية استخدام هذه المساعدات في مكافحة الارهاب، و كبح نفوذ الخصوم الاقليميين، مثل ايران، روسيا و الصين ، و الحفاظ على الهيمنة الجيوسياسية الأمريكية. فيما أظهرت النتائج أنه رغم تضمن برامج المساعدات الأمريكية هدف تعزيز التعاون الدولي، الا أنها مدفوعة الى حد كبير بالضرورة الاستراتيجية للاحتواء السياسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مقاومة الإرهاب، السياسات الجيوستراتيجية، التعاون بين الأمم، الشرق الأوسط، الاحتواء السياسي، المعونات الأمريكية.