



CHAPTER 5

U.S. POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the history of U.S. foreign policy, the Middle East as a region of interest is a relative newcomer. Although many Americans have traveled to the area since the late nineteenth century, the U.S. government paid the Middle East little attention until the end of World War II. Since that time, however, the United States has played an increasing, and some would say defining, role in Middle Eastern politics.

U.S. policy in the region has focused primarily on seven objectives: ensuring the security of Israel; achieving an Arab-Israeli peace settlement; maintaining access by industrialized nations to Middle Eastern energy supplies; blocking Soviet influence in the region (until 1989); countering terrorism; stemming the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and in recent years promoting democratic transformation in certain countries. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. interest shifted toward an uneasy combination of maintaining local stability and promoting democratization. This balancing act became even more difficult when teamed with efforts aimed at securing the United States' traditional interests in the region. Since the late 1970s, U.S. policy has been complicated by Islamist political ideologies advocated by individuals, groups, and governments that challenge the paradigms through which foreign policy is analyzed and made in the United States and other Western nations.

After the al-Qaida attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States launched an aggressive campaign against Islamist groups and others alleged to be engaged in terrorism. This resulted

notably in the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It also led to the ouster of the Baathist government in Iraq, based in part on questionable allegations that under Saddam Hussein the regime supported terrorism, had connections to al-Qaida, and was determined to acquire WMD. Long the focus of U.S. diplomacy, the Middle East is now the most active arena for the U.S. military, since 2003 eclipsing the traditional post-World War II concentration on Europe and East Asia.

U.S. policy objectives in the region have often been in conflict. In particular, the relationship between the United States and Israel has at times made other U.S. policy goals more difficult to pursue and achieve. For example, U.S. support for Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war led to an Arab oil embargo against the United States. Ten years later, the United States found itself in the position of selling tens of billions of dollars' worth of advanced military hardware to the Gulf states responsible for the boycott. More recently, the occupation of Iraq has led to a surge in anti-American sentiment that has damaged the U.S. campaign to promote democracy and strengthen civil society in the region. Regardless of the inherent contradictions, successive U.S. administrations have agreed that these major objectives must all be pursued, and they have done so with public and congressional support. This chapter examines the mechanisms of the U.S. foreign policy-making process and looks at the major events in U.S.-Middle East relations, touching briefly on the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, during which the modern era

emerged, but concentrating on post-World War II events.

U.S. foreign policy formation flows from an interplay among the president and close advisers, Congress, the foreign policy and defense bureaucracies, and to a lesser extent the public. The president, dependent upon advisers, is the central figure in this process. Those who contend for the president's attention include the national security adviser, secretary of state, secretary of defense, director of national intelligence, and special interest groups outside the government. Other entities involved in the process include the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Treasury and Commerce Departments, other members of the intelligence community, and international organizations, such as the United Nations, to which the United States belongs. Foreign policy participants seldom, if ever, agree on all points at the same time and often have conflicting agendas. Enough overlap exists among their agendas to produce jurisdictional and resource conflicts, especially during the congressional appropriations process.

The Executive Branch

The Presidency

The executive branch of the U.S. government encompasses the presidency and various departments and independent agencies. Those most directly involved in foreign policy formation are the State and Defense Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence and national security agencies, and the Agency for International Development. Other foreign policy entities focusing on information dissemination and political, economic, or humanitarian development include the Department of State's Office of International Information Programs, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the Peace Corps. These agencies are more instruments of policy, but their very existence speaks to the many ways in which the United States exerts its influence

abroad. The most important foreign policy forum of the executive branch is the Office of the President, represented by the president and the National Security Council, which is headed by the national security adviser.

Presidents face many challenges in foreign policy formation and implementation. As individuals, they bring different experiences to the Oval Office that shape their view of the world, including their conception of proper foreign policy making and implementation. These experiences have rarely made them experts in the operation of the international system. The typical post-World War II president has come to the White House via a state governorship, a stint in Congress, or the vice presidency and usually has been more comfortable with domestic politics and campaigning than with the larger world.

In addition, presidents are too busy to learn the complexities of all the international issues that might command their attention. Time demands therefore, leave presidents reliant on advisers to present information that they can use without becoming experts in international relations. Advisers must summarize situations quickly and neatly, though facts on the ground are usually complex. They must also compete for presidents' attention. The secretary of state and the national security adviser are selected by the president, who tends to favor one over the other. The relationship between these two advisers often affects their reception in the Oval Office as well.

Presidential management styles influence decisions in filling these important positions and how the individuals will fit into the decision-making process. Some presidents like to take charge of foreign policy decisions, regardless of their knowledge of international affairs. These presidents might foster a collegial atmosphere among advisers, where everyone cooperates (or respectfully disagrees) and consensus opinions emerge. Collegiality is achieved through the careful selection of advisers who share a worldview or through a clear articulation of presidential policy preferences, both of which create clarity of purpose. Presidents John F. Kennedy, George H. W. Bush,

and Bill Clinton have all employed this management style.

In an alternative scenario, presidents who want tight control over policy may select one key adviser, typically the national security adviser or the secretary of state, to consult with more so than the others when deciding on foreign policy issues. In this case, the personal relationship—perceptions of loyalty and trust—between president and adviser becomes crucial. Sometimes, however, advisers are more loyal than expert in the subjects about which they offer advice. Further, it is through this individual that policy directives get disseminated, so the adviser or senior staff manager must create a hierarchy of specialists to turn the president's directives into concrete policies and actions. The members of this hierarchy tend to share similar worldviews, as the top leadership has an interest in their activities but does not want to mediate disputes. This atmosphere fosters consensus thinking and may freeze out points of view that do not support the preferred perspective. Serious differences of opinion are likely to lead to the departure of one or more advisers, as was typical during the presidency of Richard M. Nixon from 1969 to 1974.

The alternative presidential managerial style is more hands off, allowing advisers and subordinates to handle the details of foreign policy. In some cases, a president will give only general policy directives to his staff. Presidents who adopt this style tend to be more interested and competent in domestic policy. This is hardly surprising given the career path of most presidents, but it may allow policy to drift, be paralyzed by disputes between advisers, or be driven more by those serving the president. The presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush are notable examples of this management style.

The National Security Council

The National Security Council (NSC) was established, along with the Department of Defense and the CIA, by the National Security Act of 1947. Its original purpose was as a coordinating mech-

anism for all national security and foreign policy information coming into the White House, providing comprehensive policy reviews and a structured forum for policy officials. It functioned in this manner under Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, in the late 1940s and the 1950s, with an executive secretary and a staff of twenty. The NSC became more institutionalized during the Eisenhower administration, when a staff hierarchy emerged. The policy planning and operations boards were created to formulate and implement foreign and national security policy. The executive secretary became the assistant for national security affairs, or more commonly, the national security adviser.

Bureaucratic constraints soon hampered the creative problem-solving process needed to formulate policy. Under the Kennedy administration, from 1961 to 1963, the national security advising system became more personalized. While circumventing some of the bureaucratic problems of the NSC, this personalization created new ones. President Kennedy valued direct contact with lower-level officials and interagency working groups, believing them to be more responsive to his foreign policy directives. NSC staff appointments on the basis of personal loyalty to the president, rather than expert knowledge, became more common. This trend continued under Lyndon B. Johnson, who assumed the presidency following Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and remained in office until 1969, during the period when the Vietnam War dominated U.S. foreign policy. Johnson went further outside the formal NSC system than had Kennedy, as the NSC became a body to circumvent rather than one to consult.

President Nixon came to office in 1969 with a plan to revitalize the NSC by creating a number of new committees and interagency bodies under the leadership of his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger. In effect, this system allowed Kissinger to engage or ignore the NSC as he preferred. Jimmy Carter, who spent four years in the White House beginning in 1977, replaced Nixon's system with two committees, one for long-term

projects and planning and the other for short-term work. The personal dimension introduced under Kennedy persisted, however, and over the course of his administration, Carter shifted away from the formal NSC system to weekly meetings with select advisers.

Echoing Nixon, Ronald Reagan, a two-term president, from 1981 to 1989, pledged to make the NSC system less personal but wound up with an organization that had only a small role in the foreign policy process and was difficult to monitor. The national security adviser took a back seat to the secretaries of state and defense and to the director of central intelligence. Reagan's lack of attention produced drift in the NSC, and when combined with the president's laissez-faire style of policy articulation, created conditions that allowed generally unaccountable officials to implement the illegal sale of arms to Iran and divert the profits to groups fighting left-wing governments in Latin America. At the same time, the NSC in general had become a bloated bureaucracy too occupied with procedure.

Presidents George H. W. Bush, 1989–1993, and Clinton, 1993–2001, had the most success curbing personalization in the NSC system. Both men created collegial teams of advisers who worked well together and avoided the intramural battles typical of earlier administrations. Collegiality, however, is not always amenable to creative thinking and changing times. Such a situation became a troubling aspect of the Bush administration: the president's closest advisers agreed on a particular view of the world, and they liked it so well that they could not see that it was changing. Clinton led his foreign policy team through these shifts, seemingly making policy on a case-by-case basis, without the global outlook of the cold war or Bush's "new world order."

During the presidency of President George W. Bush, 2001–, the NSC played a subordinate role to other agencies, and the national security adviser acted as a mediator between competing senior officials—particularly the vice president, the secretary of defense, and the secretary of state—and enjoyed the personal trust of the president in pro-

viding advice on the conflicting opinions among these officials.

The Department of State

The Department of State was created in 1789 as the primary foreign policy organ of the new United States of America. Its employees today retain their positions as the country's main representatives in foreign countries and international organizations, but its post-World War II role at home has shifted from policy formation to information processing and dissemination. Although the secretary of state remains an important figure in policy formation, loyalty to the president or to the department often determines his or her position in the hierarchy of presidential foreign policy advisers. The secretary's relationship with other foreign policy figures, in particular the national security adviser, also factors into the equation. When conflict occurs between these two individuals, the secretary is usually the party isolated from the decision-making process. In regard to Middle East policy, the assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs and the director of the Policy Planning Staff are the most influential advisers on a day-to-day basis. Under some secretaries of state, the deputy secretary and the undersecretary for Political Affairs—the number two and three positions at State—also have influence over Middle East policy formulation. In addition, USAID, the primary agency for providing foreign aid, has large and long-standing commitments in the Middle East. It receives guidance from the secretary of state, as does the permanent representative to the United Nations.

Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs oversees the Bureaus of Education and Cultural Affairs, Public Affairs, and International Information Programs in fulfilling what was once the mission of the United States Information Agency: explaining and advocating U.S. policy to foreign populations (as well as to domestic audiences). It carries out its responsibilities primarily through broadcasting, print material, and the Internet. It also administers the Fulbright educational exchange

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easting Board of Governors along with the
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is aimed at Iran.

Intelligence Community

intelligence community consists of several
nt agencies, some autonomous, some affili

th cabinet-level departments. They have in
n a mission to gather information consid

uable to U.S. interests, analyze it, and pre
nclusions to policymakers. Although on the

each of these agencies has a distinct role
in practice they overlap, resulting in inter

conflicts. The best known of the intelli
agencies is the Central Intelligence Agency,

has responsibility for general national secu
for gathering information on foreign gov

ernments. Among the other agencies, the National
Agency (NSA) ensures the security of

the U.S. signals traffic (cables, wires, and
adved broadcasts) and decodes and analyzes

communications. The Defense Intelli
Agency (DIA) oversees military intelli

l The National Reconnaissance Office
operates a system of reconnaissance satel

erving the intelligence community. NSA,
nd NRO are all tied to the Department of

The Federal Bureau of Investigation
a branch of the Justice Department, has

responsibility for foreign counterterrorism efforts
he United States and abroad.

goal of intelligence gathering is to fore
nment officials about events and trends

may affect U.S. interests and to supply infor
for use in formulating policy decisions.

operations, another aspect of intelligence,
closely associated with the CIA but is

carried out by a number of agencies.
overt operations, when discovered, have

in long-lasting anti-American sentiments
For example, in Iran in 1953, U.S. covert

intervention helped ensure the failure of an
attempt to replace the shah and contributed to
long-lasting hostility toward the United States by
opponents of the shah and subsequently by Iran's
revolutionary government after 1979. More
recently, as part of the George W. Bush adminis
tration's "war on terror," the CIA ran a network of
detention facilities in which detainees were held in
secret and allegedly tortured. In addition,
unmanned CIA aircraft have been used to assassi
nate leaders of groups designated as terrorist orga
nizations by the U.S. government.

In 2005 a new position of director of national
intelligence (DNI) was created to oversee the entire
intelligence community. Previously the director of
the CIA had held a supervisory role over the com
munity. This restructuring of intelligence leadership
flowed from the failure of the intelligence com
munity to ascertain that Iraq did not have weapons
of mass destruction prior to the 2003 U.S.-led inva
sion and war as well as from post-September 11 re
assessments of the role of intelligence.

Congress

The job of Congress is to make the nation's
laws. In doing so, it operates committees and sub
committees in various policy areas that allow
members to become specialists in these fields.
Most members of Congress do not sit on commit
tees dealing directly with international issues and
spend little time—less than 5 percent by one esti
mate—considering foreign policy matters before
voting on them. Foreign affairs receives little con
gressional attention in part because only a rela
tively small constituency is interested in it; some
members have considered assignment to these
committees an electoral liability. That said,
Congress does consider foreign policy legislation,
has executive branch oversight responsibilities in
this area, and controls the appropriations process
for the foreign affairs budget—also known as the
"150 account"—and, thus, is an important part of
U.S. foreign policy making.

The committees most responsible for foreign
affairs legislation are the House Foreign Affairs

Committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, and all of their regional and functional subcommittees. The House Foreign Affairs Committee in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) has a subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has a subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs.

Most policy initiatives originate in the executive branch. Congress, through the appropriate committee or subcommittee, deals with the legal details of proposed initiatives. Throughout this process, politics may be close to the surface, forcing participants to consider factors not directly related to the appropriateness or efficacy of the policy in question. Political factors include electoral considerations, public interest and perceptions, symbolic politics, and such domestic concerns as the locationing of military personnel or manufacturing that might be affected by a policy. Political considerations are often an essential element in building public consensus for a policy and being able to implement it.

Relations between the legislative and executive branches also play a role in foreign affairs. During the Clinton administration, a time of acrimonious executive-legislative relations, Congress on various occasions affected the foreign policy process by drawing out the confirmation hearings for ambassadors-designate and other appointees. For instance, the confirmation of Richard Holbrooke as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations resulted in a year-long delay and included an ethics investigation from which no charges arose. With the Republican-led Congresses during the administration of George W. Bush, the opposite occurred, some observers claim, with little or no meaningful oversight over such critical policies as the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq.

Institutional factors help and hinder Congress's ability to handle foreign policy issues. One is simply the volume of work that any Congress faces. No member can be an expert in all the areas on which representatives vote, so most rely on their leadership, colleagues on specialized com-

mittees, and committee staffs and specialized agencies to provide guidance.

Congress plays other roles in the foreign policy process. The Constitution grants it the power to regulate foreign commerce, impose import taxes, and declare war. The last matter has been a continuing source of contention between presidents, who assert their right to commit U.S. military forces as part of their power as commander in chief, and Congress, which has sought ways to limit this assertion, particularly since the Vietnam War.

The president has the right to enter into treaties, but these agreements become U.S. law only with the "advice and consent" of two-thirds of the Senate. This constitutional requirement allows the Senate to amend treaties and permits it to reject a treaty negotiated by the president. The League of Nations treaty, negotiated by President Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I, stands as a notable example of the latter. In practice, the executive branch has devised ways to circumvent the treaty clause. Because no constitutional definition of a treaty exists, presidents have asserted the right to negotiate other types of international agreements. In some cases, the president receives prior approval to negotiate what is known as a statutory agreement. Congress has fulfilled its duty of providing advice and consent, but it has no say in the content of the agreement arrived at, and the agreement has the force of U.S. law. In other cases, the president will arrive at an executive agreement with a foreign power without the prior approval of the Senate. Most of these agreements have dealt with diplomatic issues or administrative concerns surrounding prior military commitments. However, this is an area in which the Senate has been trying to win back control, so far with little success.

The Public and Foreign Policy

American citizens and residents are primarily involved in foreign policy making in two ways: through public opinion and through lobbying. Although the foreign policy position of a candidate may influence a voter's choice, it rarely is of

primary concern, as domestic issues tend to take precedence. The public appears to have limited interest in or knowledge of foreign policy matters except when it involves particularly overriding issues, such as the Vietnam War in the 1960s or the Iraq War in the 2006 midterm elections. Others may have an interest in foreign policy when it involves other areas of concern to them, such as the environment, local jobs, or human rights abuses.

By the time a foreign policy matter ultimately catches the broader public's attention, Americans tend to look for policies that will produce immediate results. Although leaders can attempt to shape public opinion if they choose, the degree of public indifference is often such that an issue only receives sufficient attention at the point that considered policy debate and options get lost in the crises of the moment.

Lobbying plays a much larger role in the foreign policy process than does public opinion polling. Important lobbies on Middle Eastern issues include the American Jewish community, which focuses intensively on Israel's security and well-being, the energy industry, evangelical Christians, and increasingly the Arab American and Muslim American communities. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—founded in 1954 with the express purpose of lobbying Congress on behalf of Israel—is the best-known of the Jewish American lobbies. It is widely regarded as the most powerful ethnic lobby in Washington, D.C., and is also active on a grassroots level in every state. It provides timely, concise information to members of Congress, proposes legislative action, channels financial support to pro-Israel candidates for office, and lobbies the executive branch.

AIPAC has been successful in its lobbying efforts for a number of reasons: it has ample funds for campaign contributions and advertising, access to the offices of the majority of members of Congress, and understands the power of Jewish history, the Holocaust, and sensitivity about anti-Semitism to influence public opinion and decisions of elected officials. Moreover, AIPAC lever-

ages the influence of highly developed local Jewish community networks well-versed in political action. AIPAC is aided additionally by the interests it represents. Israeli and Jewish issues are easily focused, whereas evangelical or Muslim and Arab Middle Eastern issues span a range of religious and regional variables. Since the early 1990s, other American Jewish organizations have tried to promote a more progressive agenda on Middle East policy issues, viewing AIPAC as dominated by conservative voices out of sync with the liberal leanings of most American Jews.

There are Arab lobbying organizations also, the best-known of which is the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee—National Association of Arab Americans. Originally two separate organizations, the two merged in 2001. The NAAA was founded in 1972 as a response to AIPAC and served as a lobbying group and a political action committee. It did not, however, have the financial resources of AIPAC and proved to be less successful in getting its members out in shows of support (or criticism) for Middle East policies. The ADC started as a grassroots organization drawing attention to issues affecting Arab Americans, and it continues to act as a watchdog group in addition to presenting Arab concerns before the executive and legislative branches. The Arab American Institute, founded in 1985, has become a vocal advocate on behalf of Arab Americans.

A problem for the Arab lobby is the diversity it represents. The Arab world comprises twenty-two states (including the North African countries and the Palestinian territories), all with their own interests that often do not coincide. One might say that they are united behind the Palestinian cause or in opposition to U.S. policy in Iraq, but concerning most issues, each country pursues its own agenda. Arab Americans are even more diverse than their countries of origin; there are Christian and Muslim Arabs, recent immigrants and third- and fourth-generation Americans. The Arab lobby does not and cannot speak with one voice, a fact that greatly diminishes its effectiveness in lobbying Congress. Among Arabs in the United States, Lebanese Americans would likely be considered the

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most successful, as they are more effectively organized than other immigrant communities from the region. In some cases, large numbers of people from Arab, Iranian, and Muslim communities may be refugees or exiles who are either hostile or indifferent toward the governments in their home countries, a situation distinct from Jewish communities, which usually tend to have positive attachment to Israel. Energy companies and Iranian Americans have interests in the region, but they are not represented by the Arab or Jewish lobbies.

U.S. Middle East Policy

The Wilson Administration (1913–1921)

President Woodrow Wilson set the framework for U.S. policy in the Middle East when he endorsed a 1917 letter from British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Lionel Rothschild, a British Zionist leader, pledging that Britain would support the establishment in Palestine of a “national home” for the Jewish people on the understanding “that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” The U.S. Congress adopted a resolution approving the declaration in September 1922.

Wilson also strongly influenced the post-World War I peace settlement that established national boundaries for the Middle East, conceiving of the interim League of Nations mandates that led to the formation of most of the countries in the Middle East today. In July 1922, the League of Nations approved giving Great Britain a mandate over Palestine that went into force September 22, 1923, and contained a preamble incorporating the Balfour Declaration and stressing the Jews’ historical connection to Palestine. The mandate made Britain responsible for placing the country under such “political, administrative, and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of a Jewish National Home.” For the most part, however, the Middle East failed to hold the United States’ attention during the interwar years. This

situation would change with World War II, the importance of Middle Eastern oil, the establishment of Israel, and the cold war. In relatively short order, the region’s status shifted from a backwater to a strategic priority for Washington.

The Truman Administration (1945–1953)

The United States led the post-World War II effort to lift restrictions on Jews entering Palestine. In August 1945, President Harry S Truman called for the free settlement of Palestine by Jews to a point consistent with maintaining civil peace. He also suggested in a letter to British prime minister Clement R. Attlee that an additional hundred thousand Jews be allowed to enter. In December, both houses of Congress adopted a resolution urging U.S. aid in opening Palestine to Jewish immigrants and in building a “democratic commonwealth.”

Meanwhile, Britain, eager to have the United States share responsibility for its Jewish immigration policy, joined with the United States in November 1945 to establish a commission to examine the admission of European Jews to Palestine. Britain also agreed to admit an additional fifteen hundred Jews each month. In April 1946, the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry recommended the immediate admission of a hundred thousand Jews into Palestine and continuation of the British mandate until a UN trusteeship could be established. Truman endorsed the proposal, but Britain stipulated that before it would agree to continue its mandate, underground Jewish forces in Palestine would have to disband.

On October 4, 1946, Truman released a communication sent to the British government in which he appealed for “substantial immigration” into Palestine “at once” and expressed support for the Zionist plan for creating a “viable Jewish state” in part of Palestine. Britain expressed regret that Truman’s statement had been made public at that time, fearing that the unqualified expression of U.S. support for a Jewish state would reduce the chances of a compromise between indigenous Arabs and Jewish immigrants. Britain, tired of