

THE IMPACT OF U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICY ON SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES IN THE ARAB WORLD

ВПЛИВ ПОЛІТИКИ США НА БЛИЗЬКОМУ СХОДІ НА СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПОЛІТИЧНІ ПРОЦЕСИ В АРАБСЬКОМУ СВІТІ

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U.S. policy in the Middle East has always been one of the important elements in the flow of political affairs and social changes occurring in the Arab world. Through diplomatic efforts, military activities, strategic alliances and economic cooperation, the United States has been an important influence in the political structuring of the region as well as influencing the socio-political processes within the region. These policies have had an impact on the governance models, participation of the people in politics, reform movements and the stability of many Arab states in general. The impact of US engagement can be seen in some of the developments in the region such as debates on democratization, changes to security strategies and the slow development of political institutions. At the same time, the American policies have produced varying responses from the different Arab societies that range from cooperation with political elites to criticism and resistance by a range of social and political groups. These interactions have been part of the creation of new political discourses, the change in public opinion and the shifting of balance of power in a number of states. In many cases external actors have been on ground where they have crossed with the domestic political agendas, creating complicated patterns of interaction among international strategies and internal governance structures. Understanding the impact of US Middle East policy is thus key to understanding contemporary socio-political developments within the Arab world. By examining these dynamic it is possible to understand how extra-regional, geopolitical interests interact with the evolving, domestic political affairs of a country. The interplay between international policy efforts and internal political conditions has implications not only for the stability of individual states but also for that of the political environment in a whole region. In addition, the role of external actors often has influences in the processes of institutional reforms, economic policies and the development of political participation within societies. Consequently, a broad understanding of the U.S. policy in the Middle East elucidates the process of interaction between global political strategies and local systems of governance and social transformations. Such an approach provides room for a superior understanding of the shifting political landscape of the Arab world and the factors that continue to influence its future trajectories of governance, stability and institutional evolution.

Key words: US Foreign Policy, Middle East, Arab World, Socio-political Processes, Regional Politics, Geopolitics.

Політика США на Близькому Сході завжди була одним із важливих елементів у перебігу політичних справ та соціальних змін, що відбуваються в арабському світі. Завдяки дипломатичним зусиллям, військовій діяльності, стратегічним альянсам та економічній співпраці Сполучені Штати мали важливий вплив на політичне структурування регіону, а також впливали на соціально-політичні процеси в ньому. Ця політика вплинула на моделі управління, участь народу в політиці, реформаторські рухи та стабільність багатьох арабських держав загалом. Вплив участі США можна побачити в деяких подіях у регіоні, таких як дебати щодо демократизації, зміни в стратегіях безпеки та повільний розвиток політичних інституцій. Водночас, американська політика викликала різні реакції з боку різних арабських суспільств, починаючи від співпраці з політичними елітами і закінчуючи критикою та опором з боку низки соціальних і політичних груп. Ця взаємодія була частиною створення нових політичних дискурсів, зміни громадської думки та зміщення балансу сил у низці держав. У багатьох випадках зовнішні актори діяли на місцях, де вони перетиналися з внутрішньополітичними порядками денними, створюючи складні моделі взаємодії між міжнародними стратегіями та внутрішніми структурами управління. Розуміння впливу політики США на Близькому Сході є ключовим для розуміння сучасних соціально-політичних подій в арабському світі. Досліджуючи цю динаміку, можна зрозуміти, як позарегіональні геополітичні інтереси взаємодіють з внутрішньополітичними справами країни, що розвиваються. Взаємодія між зусиллями міжнародної політики та внутрішніми політичними умовами має наслідки не лише для стабільності окремих держав, але й для політичного середовища в цілому регіоні. Крім того, роль зовнішніх акторів часто впливає на процеси інституційних реформ, економічної політики та розвитку політичної участі в суспільствах. Отже, широке розуміння політики США на Близькому Сході прояснює процес взаємодії між глобальними політичними стратегіями та локальними системами управління та соціальних трансформацій. Такий підхід забезпечує глибше розуміння змін у політичному ландшафті арабського світу та факторів, які продовжують впливати на його майбутні траєкторії управління, стабільності та інституційної еволюції.

Ключові слова: зовнішня політика США, Близький Схід, арабський світ, соціально-політичні процеси, регіональна політика, геополітика.

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Introduction. The Middle East is an important part of international relations because of its geopolitical importance, large energy reserves, and historical role in the world's political affairs. As one of the most significant strategic regions in the world, it has always been a subject of interest by the main world powers. Among these actors, the United States has played an influential role in shaping the political, security and economic dynamics of the region. Over the past several decades, U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East has undergone changes that were interrelated with changes in the international situation, the conflicts in the region, and the changing American strategic interests [1].

The Arab world, which includes a huge part of the Middle East as well as North Africa, is a diverse political and social environment. Arab states are quite different politically, economically and in their level of institutional development. Despite these differences the region has faced similar geopolitical pressures and outside influences. In this context, the U.S. engagement has become an important factor in understanding the development of political processes and state institutions and social movements across many Arab societies.

Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has slowly increased its presence in the Middle East since the formation of diplomatic initiatives, security partnerships and economic cooperation programs. Strategic alliances with a number of Arab governments, the setting up of military bases and participation in regional security arrangements have enhanced Washington's position in the region. These forms of engagement have resulted in longstanding political relationships, which still have implications on decision-making processes within the region.

Another key part of U.S. policy has been the country's role in regional conflicts and crisis management. American diplomatic and military activities have frequently been linked to attempts to ensure regional stability, and provide for international economic interests, especially those linked to global energy security. Within this framework, the policies of the U.S. have influenced the political environment in which the Arab governments are operating, shaping the domestic political agendas, as well as the regional diplomatic relations.

Degree of Research on the Problem. The effects of foreign powers in political processes of the Middle East have been extensively studied in the scholarly literature. Scholars have examined different facets of U.S. involvement in the region, which involves security cooperation, political reform efforts and economic interaction. Researchers emphasize that external actors play an important role in shaping the structure of governance and the development of institutions in the Arab states.

For example, studies by Marc Lynch point to the political transformations and uprisings in the region that have caused changes in the political landscape of the Arab world and have impacted on the interaction of domestic political actors with international powers. [2]. Other scholars stress the importance of international alliances and geopolitical strategies in the development of the political order of the Middle East and governing systems throughout the region.

Existing research focuses as well on the role of external pressure and international cooperation in pushing the political process towards modernization and institutional reform. Economic assistance programs, diplomatic initiatives and accession to collaboration with international organizations are in many way associated with the discussions on governance reform and political transformation in Arab societies. These researches show that inter-play between domestic political activities and external geopolitical strategies have complex consequences which are different in various countries and political settings [3]

At the same time there are growing academic discussions of the role of public opinion and political discourse in developing perceptions of international involvement. Media narratives, intellectual debates and political activism often focus on the impact of global powers in regional developments. Such discussions help shape the attitude of various social groups towards political institutions, foreign policy orientations and forms of regional cooperation.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study. The general aim of the present study is to analyse the influence of the U.S. Middle East policy on socio-political processes in the Arab world. The research aims to explore the role of diplomatic initiatives, security cooperation and military involvement as well as economic engagement on political institutions, governance practices and the social dynamics of Arab societies. In order to attain this goal, a number of precise objectives are established:

1) to clean up the principal directions and instruments of the policy of the USA in the Middle East;

2) to explore the interaction of the impact of external geopolitical strategies with domestic political developments in Arab states;

3) to assess what impact the U.S. engagement has had on governance structures, political stability and institutional reform;

4) to examine the importance of public perceptions and political discourse for responses to international involvement in the region,

Through dealing with these goals, the research is expected to add to the better understanding of the complex relationship between external geopolitical strategies and internal political transformation in the Arab world.

Methods. The research is based on methods of qualitative analysis which enables to research processes of complex socio-political nature within the context of international relations. The study is based on the analysis of academic literature, policy reports and scholarly works pertaining to the U.S. foreign policy, Middle Eastern geopolitics and political transformation in árabe countries. A qualitative method of content analysis is used to explore the predominant mechanisms through which and by which U.S. policies affect regional political developments. Comparative analysis is also used in order to assess differences in political response between different Arab countries in light of variations of political systems, institutional structures and socio-economic conditions. In addition, the broader geopolitical environment in which these processes take place is understood by means of a contextual analysis. This method enables the study to address the regional conflicts as well as global power role competition and economic changes that determine the interaction of the international policy strategies and domestic political developments. The application of these methodological approaches offers an extensive scheme for the analysis of the multifaceted relation between the US Middle East policy and socio-political processes in the Arab world.

Materials and Methods. This investigation is realized with a qualitative analytical approach seeking to find out the effect of United States Middle East policy on socio-political process in the Arab world. [18] The research is based on the systematic analysis of academic literature, policy reports and scholarly works addressing the issues of foreign policy strategies of the USA, regional geopolitical developments and political transformations in the Arab states. By concentrating on theoretical interpretations and empirical observations presented in the existing research, the study aims to identify the major mechanisms of resort of external political strategies interacting with domestic political dynamics. The methodological framework combines elements of the comparative political analysis and geopolitical evaluation in order to better understand the relationship between the international policy initiatives and the internal socio-political developments in the region.

The main materials employed in the research are the modern academic publications and international relations studies/analytical works developed by the scholars specialized in the Middle East politics and the foreign policy of the globe. [5] These sources yield precious information on the development of both single and multilateral (two, three, or many years) programs of diplomatic engagement and security cooperation and economic initiatives of the US, and how these influenced political institutions within Arab societies. Particular attention is given to studies that address the topics of governance reforms, regional security structures and the role of external actors in

shaping political decision-making processes. The use of a range of scholarly sources enables the research to take into account different perspectives and interpretations, thereby adding to the overall number of parts in the research effort. well

The research method is primarily the qualitative content analysis method. Through the in-depth analysis of relevant academic texts and policy analyses the study identifies the key instruments in U.S. policy in the Middle East, including strategic alliances, military and security cooperation with the region, diplomatic initiatives, as well as economic assistance programs. Each of these dimensions of policies is discussed in light of its possible contours in relation to political institutions and state governance, as well as social dynamics in the Arab countries. By assessing the workings of these policy tools in particular political settings, the research aims to identify patterns of influence and common features in the dynamic of interaction between the external policy strategies and domestic political systems.

Along with content analysis, the research takes a comparative approach, i.e., it examines different cases in the Arab world. Since Arab states vary greatly in their political systems, institutional capabilities and historic experiences, comparative analysis helps to better understand how the same external policy initiatives may have different impacts in different environments. This method is helpful in identifying the similarities and variations in the effects of US engagement across the region. Through such comparisons, the research shows how the domestic political condition, the governance structure and socio-economic conditions affect how the external policies are interpreted and implemented.

Another significant methodological aspect of the study is an analysis of the context. This approach allows to consider the general historical and geopolitical framework in which socio-political processes in the area of the Arab world develop. [17] Factors such as regional conflicts, movements for political reform, economic transitions, international power competition are considered in order to explain political developments at a deeper level. By locating US policy procedures in these wider regional forces the research is in a position to consider not merely direct political effects but in addition indirect effects such as public discourse, institutional change and political stability. Overall, the methodological framework selected makes it possible to conduct a fully integrated assessment of the complex nature of the relationship between the U.S. Middle East policy and the socio-political developments in the Arab world. The use of qualitative content analysis, comparative political assessment, and contextual interpretation enables the study to analyze the topic from various points of analysis. This integrated approach is useful in exposing interaction between external geopolitical strate-

gies and domestic political structures and social conditions to contribute for a better understanding of the changing political structure of the Arab region.

The table summarises the main mechanisms by which the U.S. policy in the Middle East influences socio-political processes in the Arab world. [16] Each dimension presented in the table is a form and standing for a specific channel of interaction between external geopolitical strategies on the inside of the real and societal background (political structures, social dynamics and interactions on operative mechanisms in Arab states). By considering these dimensions, it is possible to understand better how international policy initiatives affect patterns of governance, political stability and discourse across the region.

One of the most important mechanisms displayed in the table is the role in strategic alliances between the United States and some Arab governments. Such long-term partnerships for diplomatic and security reasons are almost always predicated by co-existing strategic interests, such as regional stability, energy security and mutual defense cooperations. Through bilateral agreements, military cooperation, and political dialogue the United States has close relations with key countries in the region. Such alliances tend to reinforce the existing political institutions and to give backing to the political elites, and this may create continuity of political leadership. At the same time, these partnerships might lead to effects on domestic political priorities, as governments often decide to tie some policy

decisions to larger strategic partnerships in an effort to preserve international support.

Another critical element is security and counterterrorism co-operation. U.S. policy in the Middle East focuses strongly on fighting terrorism as well as bolstering regional security frameworks. Through such mechanisms as military assistance, intelligence co-operation, training schemes, and joint security operations, the United States plays a role in the development and modernisation of national security institutions in a number of Arab countries. This type of cooperation tends to make governments focus on domestic political stability and counterterrorism approaches as a key element of their internal political agendas. As such, national security issues are key components of governance and policy making in many states across the region [6, p. 145 – 162].

The military presence of the United States and its involvement in regional conflicts are also an influential factor in delivering the political development in the Middle East. U.S. Military bases, security missions and being part of international coalitions have played a role in the transformation of the regional power relations. These actions often create political debates in Arab societies about issues such as national sovereignty as well as issues about foreign intervention and issues related to security structures in the Middle East. Often political elites, opposition movements and civil society actors will represent these developments in distinct ways and this may affect domestic political discursive and

Table 1

**Key Dimensions of the Impact of U.S. Middle East Policy
on Socio-Political Processes in the Arab World**

Dimension of U.S. Policy	Policy Instruments	Influence on Political Systems in the Arab World	Socio-Political Consequences
Strategic Alliances	Diplomatic relations, defense agreements, security partnerships	Support for allied governments and reinforcement of existing political leadership	Political stability in allied states but also debates about external influence
Security and Counterterrorism Policy	Military aid, joint operations, intelligence cooperation	Strengthening of security institutions and expansion of state security structures	Increased focus on internal stability and counterterrorism strategies
Military Presence and Interventions	Military bases, regional operations, coalition campaigns	Alteration of regional power balances and influence on domestic political agendas	Political polarization, debates on sovereignty, and regional tensions
Economic Engagement	Development assistance, trade partnerships, investment programs	Support for institutional reforms and economic modernization initiatives	Potential economic growth, institutional development, and social change
Diplomatic Mediation and Peace Initiatives	Negotiation processes, mediation in regional conflicts, international agreements	Influence on regional diplomatic alignments and interstate relations	Formation of new political alliances and regional cooperation frameworks
Public Diplomacy and Political Narratives	Cultural exchange programs, educational initiatives, international communication	Shaping perceptions of international actors among political elites and societies	Diverse public attitudes toward globalization, foreign policy, and political reform

Source: Ten Years After the Arab Spring

frame public attitudes with respect to international involvement in regional affairs.

In addition to security issues concerning, economic engagement is another major channel of influence. The United States has been a supporter of a variety of economic cooperation initiatives that have sought to foster trade, investment and economic modernization in the region. Programs related to economic development, technological cooperation, and institutional reform can contribute to building up administrative capacity as well as improving economic management in some Arab states. Economic partnerships could increase the likelihood of specific governance transformations, such as higher levels of transparency or regulatory modernization, especially in the context of international frameworks of economic cooperation [7].

These economic interactions can have implications on wider social and political conditions in Arab societies in an indirect manner. For example economic development initiatives can create opportunities for employment, investment, and institutional modernisation which can affect public expectations for governance and political accountability in affected nations. At the same time, economic relation with external actors may also produce debates related to economic dependency, national economic sovereignty and share of development benefits within the society. On the whole, the dimensions highlighted in the table have shown that US Middle East policy is impacting upon the Arab world in a multiplicity of inter-dependent ways. Strategic alliances, security cooperation, military involvement, and economic partnership are together the environment of operation for political institutions and changing public perceptions. The better understanding of these mechanisms is vital to analyze the interplay of external geopolitical strategies with domestic political mechanisms to

contribute to the broader area of socio-political dynamics in the Arab region.

Figure 1 shows the public's perception about the political situation in selected Arab countries according to the data gathered from the survey. The results show considerable variation in the extent to which citizens in the region assess the political situation in their respective states. [14] Using categories ranging from "very good" to "very bad" respondents were asked to describe the overall political situation in their country. The figures reveal that countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt exhibit comparatively positive degrees of positive evaluation. In Saudi Arabia, for example, a majority of respondents (67%) characterize the political situation as "very good" and a smaller percentage rate the situation negatively. Egypt also has a relatively positive perception, with a majority saying that the political situation is "good." These responses may be due to relatively strong central political institutions and state authority in such countries.

Several countries on the other hand show significantly more negative public assessments. Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan and Tunisia have high percentages of respondents describing the political situation as "bad" or "very bad". In Tunisia, almost half of respondents view the political situation as "very bad" which indicates high public dissatisfaction with political governance and institutional performance. Similar trends are seen in the cases of Sudan and Lebanon, where political instability, economic pressures, and long-term governance problems have had an impact on the perception of the public.

The aggregated results, shown at the bottom of the figure, have a more regional viewpoint. Only a small percentage of the respondents describe political conditions as "very good," while many more rate them as "bad" or "very bad." This overall distribution points to the fact that in many societies the Arab world

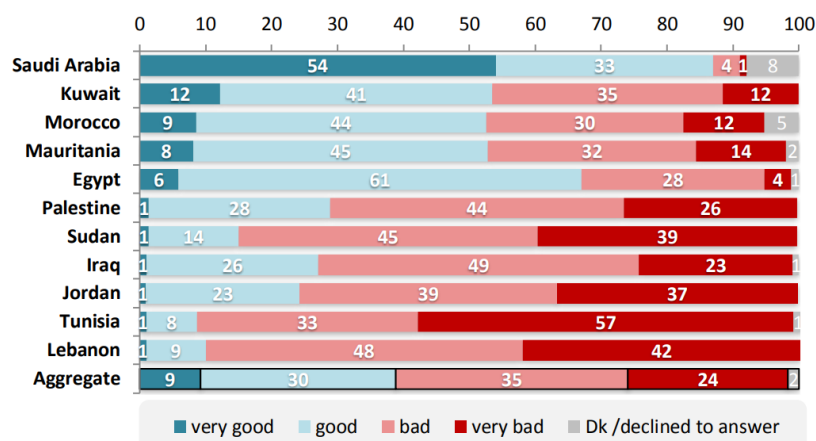


Fig. 1. Public Perceptions of Economic and Political Conditions in Selected Arab Countries

Source: [23 pp 2]

experiences concerns about the political governance of the country, the effectiveness of institutions and political stability. [15] These findings are especially relevant for understanding the overall socio-political environment in which outside actors such as the United States are involved with the region. U.S. Middle East policy often centers around such concerns as political stability, security cooperation and institutional reform. Therefore, differences in the public's perception of political conditions offer important insight to the domestic political environments that influence the impact of external policies and international partnerships in the Arab world.

The data indicated in Table X basically gives an overview about the main factors contributing to extremist recruitment in several Arab countries. The table describes these categories into several large groups such as domestic structural reasons, personal motivation, response to external threats, propaganda factors, religious justifications. Examining these variables makes it possible to better understand the conditions in which radicalization and recruitment by extremist organizations by socio-political conditions within Arab societies could take place.

One of the most important results in the table is as regards domestic structural. In the aggregate results, the domestic reasons make up about 42% of the explanations of extremist recruitment. Among these, economic difficulties, including unemployment and poverty, are cited as the most common cause and 24% of respondents found economic hardship among the most important causes. Countries such as Tunisia (40%) and Jordan (35%) have particularly high levels of concern when it comes to economic factors. These figures lead to a conclusion that socio-

economic instability across and lack of employment opportunities might lead to the vulnerability in getting attracted to extremist narratives, especially amongst younger population parts dealing with economic marginalization.

Political concerns within domestic systems are also apparent as an important factor. In several countries, respondents link extremist recruitment to the themes of discontent with political rule, absence of political representation, and low institutional accountability. [11] For example, domestic political concerns are somewhat acute in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt. Such patterns suggest that poor political institutions and governance problems could lead to a situation in which extremist groups seek to capitalize on political frustration and public discontent.

Another dimension that is pointed out in the table has to do with social inequality and marginalization. Although the numbers of respondents pointing to these factors are lower than those that cite economic problems, social marginalization is nonetheless relevant when it comes to understanding the dynamics of radicalization. Feelings of exclusion, discrimination or lack of social mobility can lead to grievances that may be exploited by activists and organizations for extremism through ideological narratives and the recruitment process. The table also mentions personal motivations as an element which can be considered. Although personal reason contributes a smaller proportion of the share of responses compared with structural factors, it is not insignificant in explaining the individual with choices to join groups that are extremist. Motivations such as being influenced by extremist individuals, personal identity or for adventure are experienced throughout

Table 2

Socio-Political Factors Influencing Extremist Recruitment in Selected Arab Countries

Explanations for ISIL recruitment		Tunisia	Jordan	Palestine	Lebanon	Egypt	Morocco	Iraq	Sudan	Kuwait	Mauritania	aggregate
Domestic Reasons	Economic: unemployment, poverty	40	35	27	26	24	19	18	18	18	11	24
	Domestic political concerns	2	4	18	15	24	6	10	16	14	9	12
	Social reasons: inequality, marginalization	2	5	7	11	6	8	5	4	10	7	6
	Domestic Reasons	44	44	52	52	54	33	33	38	42	27	42
Personal Reasons	Extremist individuals	2	3	2	5	8	12	8	7	10	6	6
	Sense of adventure	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	1
	Personal Reasons	3	4	2	5	8	14	10	8	11	7	7
To Combat External Threats	To fight foreign powers	0	2	4	6	3	5	4	5	12	4	5
	To fight local sectarian militia in those countries	2	0	1	3	1	4	2	2	3	1	2
	External Threats	2	2	5	9	4	9	6	7	15	5	7
Propaganda reasons		17	25	19	15	13	19	23	14	23	9	18
Religious reasons		17	17	18	14	17	13	25	19	7	18	16
Others		3	2			0	1	1			0	1
Don't know/declined to answer		14	6	4	5	4	11	2	14	2	34	9
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: [23 pp. 33]

the various countries. While these factors are not as dominant statistically, they raise the issue of the importance of psychological and social factors at the individual level.

A further category includes those motivations which relate to external threats and regional conflicts. Some respondents attribute extremist recruitment to attempts to fight foreign forces or local sectarian militias who work in the region. [12] This factor is especially observable in a conflict affected environment where the military presence of foreigners or regional proxy conflicts are perceived as a threat. In such contexts, extremist groups tend to present their activities as defensive movements or resistance movements, and in this way try to legitimize recruitment efforts among the local population.

Propaganda and ideological messaging is another aspect that the data indicated. Propaganda In: Mosh, G. (2016) Propaganda – An Unor Media channels, ideological messaging and terms recruitment campaigns enable these organizations to work on existing grievances and strengthen radical narratives in vulnerable communities. Closely related to propaganda is the role of religious justification, that represents about 16% of the aggregated responses. While extremist groups often give a religious framework to their actions, according to the data, purely religious motives do not appear to be the dominating factor that leads to recruitment. Instead, the rhetoric of religious groups often joins the broader political, economic and social grievances to build ideological narratives which justify extremist activity.

Overall, the data show that extremist recruitment in the Arab world is affected by a complex array of structural, political, social and ideological factors. [13] Economic hardship, governance issues, conflict dynamics in the global system and propaganda mechanisms combined constitute the conditions in which radicalization may take place. Understanding these interconnected drivers is especially important in analyzing the more general socio-political arena of the Middle East. External policies and regional conflicts, international security strategies such as those taken by the United States, interact with these internal factors and can have an indirect impact on the dynamics of radicalization and political instability throughout the region.

Main Part. Strategic Alliances and Political Influence in the Arab World

Strategic relationships between the United States and several Arab states form one of the most lasting of American Middle East policies. These alliances have been formed over decades of diplomacy and have evolved into complex systems of political, military and economic cooperation. From the perspective of international relations theory, such partnerships could be seen to form part of larger strategies of balancing attempts to keep the region stable and to preserve

access to key resources and the geopolitical influence of great powers within a highly competitive international context [1; 18].

Since the mid-twentieth century, the United States has gradually institutionalized its relations with key Arab governments through the use of bilateral security agreements, defense cooperation programs and economic partnerships. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan have become central players within this network of strategic relations. These partnerships are usually based on a mix of some common security interests, economic interests, and geopolitical interests. Energy security, as well as the protection of coastal trade routes and the containment of regional conflicts have even been fundamental motivations behind the formation and maintenance of such alliances.

From the political perspective, strategic alliances have helped consolidate the institutions of the state within a number of Arab countries. Military cooperation programs often contain training programs, technological assistance and institutional modernization of defence structures. These processes lead to strengthening the administrative and operational capacities of national security institutions, thus strengthening the authority of existing political systems. In many cases, the availability of external security support has helped governments to increase their internal stability and their ability to react to regional threats and domestic challenges.

At the same time, strategic alliance affects the internal political power configuration of the allied states. External partnerships can impact on the sharing of political resources between governing elites, bureaucratic institutions and security establishments. Governments with strong relations to the United States often receive international diplomatic support, economic aid and military technology and all of this may be used to strengthen their political legitimacy at the domestic level. This dynamic explains how international partnerships may have an influence on the internal balance of power within the political systems by an indirect effect. However, political consequences of such alliances go beyond institutional strengthening only. Cooperation with the major world actors often sparks complex debates in the domestic political fields. In a number of Arab societies, strategic alliances with outside powers are subject to competing political interpretations. Some political elites underline pragmatic benefits of international cooperation pointing at role of alliance in promoting economical developments, technological modernization and national security. Others express concern about the possibilities that outside influence will have for national sovereignty and independent policy-making.

These debates become often visible within the public sphere through media discourse, academic discussion and political activism. Public perceptions

of international partnerships are based on historical experiences, ideological viewpoints and the overall geopolitical setting of the region. In societies, where the historical memory involves experiences of colonial influence and or external intervention, foreign power cooperation might be viewed with more skepticism. Consequently, both the domestic reception of the use of strategic alliances varies significantly within different types of political environments. Another aspect of strategic partnerships is the impact of these partnerships on regional diplomatic alignments. Alliances with the United States often influence a foreign policy orientation of Arab states on a wider scale in Middle Eastern geopolitics. Governments with close relationships with Washington often join regional security initiatives, international coalitions and diplomatic frameworks aimed at solving problems such as terrorism, regional conflicts and nuclear proliferation. These forms of cooperation play a role in building larger geopolitical blocs in the region. At the regional level, strategic alliances are also involved in the power games between actors in the Middle East. The presence of external security guarantees and defense cooperation programs can affect the strategic calculations of the states of the region. From a geopolitical point of view, alliances are entities that are not only used as tools for bilateral cooperation but also mechanisms by which global powers try to stabilize or manage political dynamics in a region [1; 7].

Furthermore, strategic alliances often are in contact with larger processes of political modernization and institutional reform. External partnerships sometimes spice up administrative reforms, improvements in governance practices and the acceptance of international standards in economic management and administration. In some spheres, international cooperation has been in favor of activities that seek to strengthen regulatory regimes, improve economic transparency and boost institutional effectiveness. Nevertheless, the results of such processes are very much dependent on domestic political circumstances. In some political systems with high levels of centralized authority or low institutional accountability, external support can be used to shore up existing political power structures rather than to produce political transformation of any serious magnitude. In contrast, where institutional reforms and participation are actively encouraged, international partnerships may help bring gradual socio-political change.

In addition, strategic alliances are part of the larger architecture of regional security cooperation. Through joint military exercises, intelligence sharing and coordinated Counter Terrorism efforts, the United States with its regional partners attempt to solve common security problems. These cooperative mechanisms provide channels of information exchange, as well as operational coordination and collective strategic planning. Such frameworks are especially important

in an area where threats such as terrorism and organized violence have to be addressed on a transnational basis [2; 15].

Security Cooperation and Military Involvement as Drivers of Political Transformation

Security cooperation is now one of the most visible magnitudes of US engagement in the Middle East and has a crucial role in the socio-political dynamics in the Arab world. Since the end of the twentieth century, American policy toward the region has focused increasingly on cooperation in counterterrorism, military assistance programs, and institutional development of national security sectors. These initiatives developed especially in response to the rising concerns about terrorism transnational links, regional conflicts and the spread of non-state armed actors. From a strategic standpoint, security cooperation between the United States and Arab governments has multiple and inter-related goals. For Washington there is a benefit in bolstering the defense capabilities of regional partners in the maintenance of stability in a geopolitically sensitive region with critical energy resources and important maritime routes. For the Arab governments, the cooperation with the United States serves as an access to advanced military technology, intelligence sharing and training programs that strengthen their ability to respond to their security challenges both internal and external [11; 19].

One of the most obvious expressions of this cooperation is the creation of military assistance programmes. Through programs such as arms transfers, defense modernization projects, and joint military exercises, among other activities, the United States has helped to bolster national defense infrastructures of several Arab countries. Military aid programs are often used to provide training to officers and to modernize defense equipment and the development of professional military institutions. These initiatives can make a huge difference to the operational capabilities of national armed forces and security agencies. The strengthening of security institutions, however, has important implications for domestic political structures as well. In many states of the Arab world, security establishments are a central part of political systems work. Ministries of defence, intelligence and internal security services have often a great influence in the overall framework of governance. External security cooperation can thus help strengthen the institutional weight of these organizations in the state apparatus. This process is sometimes a factor in the consolidation of state authority, especially in a region with internal instability or external threats that governments may face. Enhanced security capabilities may allow governments to preserve control of their territories, fight internal conflicts and improve government administration. In this context, security cooperation may have the indirect benefit of supporting political stability and continuity of the governing institutions [8].

At the same time, the growth of security institutions can have complex socio-political consequences as well. In political systems with limited oversight mechanisms to control the role of security sectors, the strengthening of security sectors could lead to the expansion of power to military or intelligence institutions. This dynamic can affect the dynamic between civilian structures of governance and security establishments. As a result, debates on the role of security institutions in political life often arise in both academic and political debates in the region.

Another important part of US involvement in the region has been its direct or indirect involvement in regional conflicts. Military operations in countries like Iraq and participation in foreign coalitions of forces in fighting conflicts in Syria and other regions have had a large impact on the geopolitical situation in the Middle East. These interventions have had much wider ramifications in terms of not just regional arrangements for security, but in terms of the shaping trajectories of internal politics, in the states concerned [9; 20].

Military interventions often change domestic political lives, by changing the structure of power, by weakening or destroying existing political institutions, or by creating new political actors. In some cases interventions have played a part in bringing about political transitions; in other cases they have been a contributing factor to internal conflicts and internal fragmentation. Due to the resulting political environments often there isently followed and a large process of the state reconstruction, institutional reform respectively political negotiating to be expectation.

The presence of also the foreign military forces in this region affects the perceptions of the people and political discourse in the Arab societies. Debates about sovereignty, foreign influence and national independence often occur when foreign military involvement occurs. The political elites, opposition groups and civil society organizations commonly tend to interpret these developments from varied ideological perspectives and political interests.

Public opinion plays a significant role in determining the manner in which these developments are perceived at home. In some circumstances, the cooperation of external powers in meeting security threats might be considered a practical necessity. In other cases, the presence of foreign military could be seen as meddling in national political affairs. These perceptions may affect the legitimacy of governments at home as well as more general attitudes toward international partnerships.

In addition to direct military cooperation, security relationship also includes intelligence sharing and counterterrorism cooperation. The expansion of extremist organizations in some parts of the Middle East has led to the creation of vast webs of intelligence and cooperative security. Through information

exchange and joint operations, as well as coordination and stimulus for surveillance activities on the part of the United States and its regional partners, the objective is to reduce the operation capabilities of extremist groups. These efforts go to the development of sophisticated security infrastructures integrating technological capabilities, data analysis systems and specialized counter terrorism units. While such initiatives improve the capacity of governments to respond to security threats, they also raise important questions around the civil liberties, political accountability and role of security agencies in society.

Another dimension of security cooperation is institutional reform in defence sectors. Training programs and professional development programs sponsored by international partners frequently have objectives to modernize military structures, enhance strategic planning, and introduce professional standards of defense management. In a few cases, these reforms have made contributions to the professionalization of military forces and to the better functioning of the administrative system of the defense institutions. However, the long-term effect of such reforms has a domestic political context by which it depends. Institutional modernization is important and that not only requires technical training, but political commitment to transparent government and effective civilian oversight. Where such conditions exist, security sector reform may help build institutional stability and foster more accountable institutional structures of governance. Where they are not present, reform may drive a more limited institutional change. The interaction between security cooperation and socio-political processes is therefore one of complexities surrounding the interaction between external strategic initiatives and a domestic political reality. Security partnerships can help to build state capacity and contribute to regional stability but they can also shift the internal political relations in ways that are not always predictable.

Economic Engagement and Institutional Change in the Arab World

Economic engagement is the other dimension of U.S. policy in the Middle East that is very important and plays a significant role in the socio-political processes of the Arab world. Alongside diplomatic and security cooperation, economic initiatives have been used as instruments to encourage institution modernization, promote economic development and strengthen long-term partnerships between United States and Arab states. These initiatives often include development assistance programs, trade agreements and investment projects and institutional reform support exercised through bilateral and multilateral frameworks [19].

From the standpoint of international political economy, the idea of economic cooperation between the United States and Arab countries is a reflection of the wider interdependence between the economic

structure of the world and domestic political structures. Economic engagement opens channels between the practices, regulatory frameworks and development strategies in international economic interactions and the governance systems of individual countries. As a result, economic relations tend to have an impact on not only the market performance but also institutional transformation and policy orientation among the states involved. One of the core elements of U.S. economic engagement in the region has been economic reform development assistance programs. Various initiatives supported by international financial institutions and bilateral cooperation agreements are in place with the aim of improving administrative capacity, improving the transparency of the regulations and promoting economic diversification. In several Arab countries, projects on economic cooperation have dealt with the modernization of the financial institutions, the strengthening of public administration and the enhancement of economic governance [17].

Such programs often promote reforms aimed at making public institutions more efficient and at improving fiscal management and the integration of national economies into the world economy. In this respect economic cooperation can play its part in the gradual evolution of the system of governance through the introduction of new administrative practices and policy framework. Institutional reforms associated with economic programs may impact on such areas as public finance management, regulatory oversight and economic planning. Economic partnerships also fulfill the functions of technological exchange and human capital development. Educational cooperation programs, research cooperation and training programs facilitated by international cooperation frameworks offer possibilities for knowledge transfer and capacity building. Through academic exchanges, professional training programs and technical cooperation projects, the local institutions may be able to access new technologies and new administrative practices to support modernization processes.

These forms of cooperation can have important long term socio-political implications. Economic modernization and institutional reform can regularly affect public aspirations for governance, transparency and political accountability. As economic development advances, the citizens may place ever greater demands on administrative efficiency, public service delivery and political participation. In this sense, economic engagement may be contributing to the evolution of political institutions and the public discourse of political discourse indirectly in the Arab societies. However, there is nothing uniform or automatic about the relation between economic cooperation and political transformation. The effectiveness of the economic initiatives depend in many ways on the domestic political conditions and institutional capacity. In those states where governance structures

are not too weak and where administrative institutions are functioning, economic cooperation programs could be supportive of sustainable development and institutional strengthening. In contrast, in places with a history of political instability and/or weak institutional frameworks, economic initiatives might have less promising results. Another significant issue of economic involvement involves international investment and trade relations. The United States has maintained important economic relationships with a number of Arab nations through trade agreements, cooperation on investment and in the energy sector. Foreign direct investment and economic partnerships often contribute to the development of infrastructures, the modernisation of industrial production and the expansion of economic sectors such as technology, energy and finance.

These economic interactions may produce wider socio-economic impacts, through creating job opportunities, entrepreneurial opportunities and economic diversification. In countries that are looking to alleviate the reliance on traditional resource sectors, international investment can help to promote the growth of new industries and build economic resilience for the long term. Such change transformations may have gradual effects on social structures and labor markets, and contribute to broader socio-economic change.

Nevertheless economic engagement may also create debates in domestic political arenas. Discussions about economic dependency/national sovereignty and the apportionment of economic benefit typically comes into play in the context of international economic partnerships. In some cases, critics say that outside economic influence can cause domestic economic priorities to be affected or create imbalances in national development strategies. These debates point at the intricate interplay between the workings of the process of globalization and domestic political considerations. Public attitudes toward international economic cooperation depend a great deal upon the society and politics. In certain countries the economic partnerships with world actors are considered as opportunities for modernization, investment and technological advancement. In others, skepticism may arise over the social consequences of globalization or over the extent of control of the policy decisions of external economic actors [23].

In addition to economic reforms, cooperation programs often put emphasis on institutional capacity building in areas that are associated with governance and public administration. Initiatives aimed at for instance improving legal frameworks, strengthening regulatory institutions and enhancing administrative transparency may contribute to broader processes of institutional development. Such reforms can be the backbone for more effective implementation of policies and better coordination between the

government institutions. At the regional level, economic engagement is also behind the integration of Arab economies into the global economic system. Participation in international trade networks, financial markets and development programs facilitates economic interaction between regional economies and global economic structures. This integration has effects on economic policy-making and encourages governments to adopt internationally recognized economic standards and practices concerning regulation.

The socio-political effects of economic engagement on a long-term basis are thus closely interrelated with the wider processes of economic change and institutional reform taking place in the Arab world. Economic cooperation initiatives may have a bearing on governance structures, administrative capacity and socio-economic conditions which in turn shape the allocation of the larger environment in which political processes are taking place.

Conclusion. The analysis of the U.S. Middle East policy shows that the United States has continued to be one of the most significant foreign actors influencing the political and social developments in the Arab world. Through a combination of diplomatic engagement, security cooperation, economic partnership, and involvement in regional political initiatives, U.S. policy has impacted on different measures of governance and political interaction in many Arab states. Such forms of engagement go to show that international actors can influence not only the institutional framework of states, but the socio-political environment in which political processes occur.

Strategic alliances and long-term security partnerships have been pivotal to strengthen political relations between the United States of America and a series of Arab governments. These relationships have on many occasions been responsible for the consolidation of state institutions, as well as for political stability in countries that maintain close cooperation with the United States. At the same time, these alliances have shaped domestic policy priorities, especially those related to national security, regional cooperation and counterterrorism strategies. As a result, many of the Arab governments have made security-oriented policies a part of the broader framework of governance through both internal challenges and external strategic partnerships.

Military involvement and regional security initiatives also have had a great impact on the political scenario of the Arab world. U.S. involvement in regional conflicts, security coalitions, and defense cooperation programs, participated in; enhanced security of nations thereby transforming the regional power dynamics and security arrangement. These developments have often sparked political debates in Arab societies about topics such as sovereignty,

outside influence and the role of international players in regional affairs. Consequently, political elites, civil society groups, as well as the general public tend to interpret these developments in the context of international relations as well as national strategic interests [9, p. 90-118].

Another important dimension of the U.S. engagement in the region is economical cooperation and development assistance. Economic initiatives and investment programs and institutional reform projects have helped to support economic modernization and administrative capacity building in a number of Arab states. Programs related to education and technological development and reform of governance have also helped to improve institutional effectiveness and economic management in some countries. These initiatives showcase that economic relations between states may have wider political implications, not only in the structure of governance but also in socio-economic condition that affects the political stability. Public opinion and political discourse within the Arab societies provides another example of how international involvement in regional affairs affects the societies. Perceptions of U.S. policy differ greatly across different societies and political groups, based on their experiences and policies (both historically and politically) and the different ideologies embraced. While some sections of society see cooperation with the United States as conducive to economic development and security in the region, others and politics student them as a threat to national sovereignty or as an influence to domestic political decision-making. These different perceptions inform the political debates that affect their ideological conversations, and the attitudes towards international partnerships and foreign policy orientation.

At the same time, the variation in political systems and socio-economic conditions across the Arab world means that the impact of the US policy is not uniform across the region. In some countries, cooperation with external actors is part of the solution to enhancing institutions and economic reform, while in other countries, cooperation generates political tensions and/or public debates related to governance and national independence. These different variations are important in emphasizing the need to look at the local political contexts when gauging the impact of international policy strategies.

Overall, the interaction between U.S. Middle East policy and socio-political processes in the Arab world is the flavor of the complex interaction between the global geopolitical strategies and the domestic political development. External engagement in the form of diplomacy, security and economic partnerships impact on the institutional frameworks, political priorities and public perceptions in the Arab societies. Understanding these interactions is key to understanding how international policies influence the political environments

in various regions and how domestic political systems react to outside pressures, opportunities and strategic partnerships in an increasingly interconnected global political system [10].

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