

The Impact of Middle Eastern Turmoil on U.S. National Security: Causes, Consequences, and Countermeasures

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Abstract: The Middle East remains a focal point of global attention due to its vast oil reserves, intricate ethnic and religious dynamics, and strategic geopolitical significance. The U.S., as the foremost economic and military power, holds considerable interests in the area. However, post-Cold War instability—illustrated by the Iraq War, Arab Spring, and the emergence of ISIS—poses significant threats to U.S. national security. This study investigates the underlying causes of turmoil in the Middle East, assesses implications for U.S. national security, and suggests remedial actions. Utilizing historical analysis, current situational evaluations, and policy reviews, it uncovers fundamental causes of unrest and critiques U.S. policies. Furthermore, it proposes strategies to enhance U.S. engagement, including improved intelligence, fortified alliances, and initiatives for political reconciliation and economic development in the region.

Keywords: Policy analysis, Historical context, Regional stability, Middle East, U.S. national security.

1. Introduction

The Middle East has long been the focus of international attention because of its vast oil resources, complex ethnic and religious tensions, and geopolitical importance. Meanwhile, as the world's largest economy and military power, the United States has huge interests and influence in the Middle East[1]. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the persistent instability in the Middle East has emerged as a significant challenge to U.S. national security. Events such as the Iraq War, the Arab Spring, and the ascendance of ISIS have contributed to a volatile security landscape in the region. Given that the Middle East is a critical hub for global oil production and a focal point of geopolitical dynamics, the ongoing turmoil profoundly affects U.S. national security interests. In recent years, the proliferation of terrorist groups, recurrent sectarian violence, and escalating interstate conflicts have not only jeopardized U.S. strategic interests in the region but also have the potential to disrupt the global security framework. This paper aims to elucidate the underlying causes of the unrest in the Middle East, assess its implications for U.S. national security, and propose relevant countermeasures and recommendations. The research will employ three methodologies: historical analysis, situational assessment, and policy evaluation. By examining historical events and the evolution of U.S. policies in the region, this study will uncover the deep-seated causes and long-term trends of instability, evaluate the direct and indirect effects of the current security situation on U.S. national security, and

assess the efficacy of existing U.S. policies. Furthermore, it will offer three areas for improvement to enhance the analysis and discussion of the topic.

2. History Review: Turbulence in the Middle East and American National security

During the Cold War, the strategic layout of the United States in the Middle East reflected its global chess game against the Soviet Union[2].

In the post-Cold War period, the strategic adjustment of the United States in the Middle East reflects the change in the global balance of power and the new challenges of the international political environment[3]. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the strategic center of gravity of the United States in the world has shifted, and the importance of the Middle East has become increasingly prominent. During this period, the United States attempted to reshape the political landscape of the Middle East through military interventions such as the Gulf War, the Afghanistan War and the Iraq War, and the promotion of the Middle East peace process. However, these strategic adjustments have failed to bring the desired stability and instead have triggered new regional instability. From the spread of terrorism to the political turmoil after the Arab Spring to the tension over the Iranian nuclear issue, the strategic adjustment of the United States in the Middle East in the post-Cold War period not only failed to effectively resolve regional conflicts but exacerbated the turmoil to a certain extent, making the Middle East the focus of international attention.

At the beginning of the 21st century, America's war on terror in the Middle East became the focus of international politics. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States launched a series of military operations aimed at fighting al Qaeda and other terrorist forces. From the war in Afghanistan to the war in Iraq, America's war on terror in the Middle East has not only changed the strategic pattern of the region, but also triggered widespread regional instability. These wars have led to regime change, social fragmentation, sectarian conflict and the rise of extremism, making the security situation in the Middle East more complex. In this process, although the influence of the United States has reached its peak, it also faces the question of international public opinion, the consumption of strategic resources, and the arduous challenge of regional stability and peace construction.

3. Reality Challenge: The Threat to U.S. National Security from Unrest in the Middle East

The phenomenon of terrorism in the Middle East represents a significant risk to American interests both domestically and internationally[4]. Through the execution of attacks, the orchestration of plots, and the dissemination of extremist ideologies, radical organizations not only pose a direct danger to the safety of American citizens and the security of military installations abroad but also erode the strategic stability and economic interests of the United States on a global scale. This situation intensifies the anxiety and distrust within the international community. Furthermore, it has a lasting detrimental effect on America's global reputation and its capacity for leadership.

3.1. The Threat of Ethical and Religious Conflicts in the Middle East to U.S. Allies in the Region

3.1.1. Compromised Government Stability and Regional Strife

Ethnic and religious tensions in the Middle East frequently result in diminished governance effectiveness, disruption of law and order, and impaired operations of state institutions[5]. This adversely impacts the political stability of U.S. allies and may instigate regime changes or provoke political unrest, thereby altering the strategic dynamics of the United States within the region. These conflicts often transcend borders, inciting tensions among nations in the vicinity. U.S. allies might

become entangled in regional disputes due to religious and ethnic disputes, potentially straining U.S. relations with those partners.

3.1.2. Deteriorating Security and the Ascendancy of Extremism

The decline in security stemming from ethnic and religious confrontations is frequently accompanied by the emergence of extremism and terrorism[6]. Such activities jeopardize the national security of U.S. allies and may present a looming threat to the U.S. homeland. A notable instance is the rise of extremist organizations like ISIS, which has severely disrupted the security environment in the Middle East. The instability affecting U.S. allies could hinder America's capability to protect its oil interests, execute anti-terrorism strategies, and navigate regional power rivalries, particularly with nations such as Russia and China.

3.1.3. Humanitarian Catastrophes and Economic Collaboration Obstacles

The extensive displacement of populations, humanitarian emergencies, and breaches of human rights stemming from ethno-religious conflicts significantly tarnish the global image of the United States and its partners. Consequently, the United States may face mounting international pressure to engage in the conflict and provide humanitarian aid. The complex interplay of political instability and deteriorating security conditions has hindered economic cooperation between the United States and its allies, leading to a reduction in investment and trade, which negatively affects the interests of American businesses. In summary, the intricate threats posed by ethnic and religious strife in the Middle East have profound implications for regional security and the broader strategic objectives of the United States. Therefore, it is crucial for the United States to meticulously observe the shifting dynamics in the region, adopt strategies to sustain strong relationships with its allies, and protect its strategic interests.

3.2. The Middle East Energy Security Threat to the United States and the Global Energy Supply

The Middle East is crucial for global energy due to its vast oil and gas reserves. Key threats to energy security for the U.S. and worldwide include:

3.2.1. Supply Disruptions

Political unrest and conflicts in the Middle East have historically caused severe oil supply disruptions, greatly affecting global energy markets[7]. The Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s, for example, devastated oil infrastructure, drastically lowering output and causing shortages. Similarly, Libya's civil war in the 2010s resulted in the closure of vital oil facilities, showcasing how conflict undermines energy production. These disruptions not only impact local economies but also affect global markets, underscoring the vulnerability of energy supply chains in unstable regions.

3.2.2. Price Volatility

When conflicts or political unrest lead to supply disruptions, panic frequently permeates global markets, causing significant fluctuations in oil prices. For instance, abrupt declines in production can trigger sharp price surges, which reverberate throughout the economy. Rising oil prices escalate expenses for consumers and businesses alike, affecting transportation costs and the pricing of goods and services. This volatility complicates strategic business planning and financial forecasting, ultimately impeding economic growth and undermining consumer confidence.

3.2.3. U.S. Dependency

Despite progress in domestic energy production, the United States remains reliant on Middle Eastern oil [8]. This dependence creates vulnerabilities, as instability in the region can drive up domestic oil prices, threatening economic stability. A sudden rise in oil prices can inflate costs for American consumers and businesses, leading to broader inflationary pressures. Furthermore, reliance on foreign oil complicates U.S. foreign policy and national security, as ensuring steady energy access is a critical concern. Consequently, the relationship between Middle Eastern instability and U.S. economic health highlights the necessity for a comprehensive energy strategy that balances domestic output with international relations.

4. Case Study: The Specific Response of the United States in the Middle East

The US war in Iraq, launched in 2003, was based on allegations of weapons of mass destruction and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. The process involved rapid military occupation and political reconstruction. However, the result was prolonged political instability, a security vacuum, and the spread of terrorism, prompting deep reflection on the legality of the war, inadequate post-war planning, and the consequences of international intervention.

Political implications for the Middle East

(1) Regional balance of power: The war has changed the balance of power in the Middle East, especially by increasing Iran's influence and intensifying the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

(2) Intensification of sectarian conflicts: The Iraq War aggravated sectarian conflicts in the Middle East and affected the political stability of the whole region.

(3) Proliferation of terrorism and extremism: Post-war Iraq has become a hotbed for terrorist and extremist groups, and the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS poses a threat to the entire region.

Global political implications

(4) International law and norms of war: The Iraq War has led to a discussion of international law and norms of war, particularly about preventive war and the principle of sovereignty.

(5) Rethinking international intervention: The experience of war has prompted the international community to rethink the consequences of external intervention, including the understanding of state reconstruction, the promotion of democracy, and international responsibility.

(6) Energy Policy and Geopolitics: The war has affected global energy markets and international energy policy, while reshaping the landscape of global geopolitics.

5. The Iranian Nuclear Issue: the Game between the United States and Iran and its Solution

The Iranian nuclear dilemma has consistently captured global scrutiny. The dynamic between the United States and Iran revolves around the question of whether Iran is pursuing the capability to develop nuclear weapons. The United States exerts pressure on Iran through stringent economic sanctions and advocates for international restrictions on Iran's nuclear endeavors. Conversely, Iran maintains that its nuclear program is intended for peaceful applications and engages in a strategic maneuvering regarding the nuclear discourse. Currently, Iran is advancing its nuclear initiatives while simultaneously engaging in diplomatic negotiations. Ultimately, both parties arrived at the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, wherein Iran consented to curtail its nuclear activities in return for the alleviation of sanctions. However, the US's withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the subsequent reinstatement of sanctions have complicated the path to resolution. A conclusive settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue necessitates a return to the negotiating table by all involved parties, aiming for a sustainable agreement and the restoration of trust between the United States and Iran.

6. The Syrian Civil War: U.S. Intervention and Policy Evolution in Syria

The Syrian civil war represents a multifaceted conflict that has unfolded since 2011, engaging a myriad of domestic and international actors. The trajectory of U.S. intervention and policy in Syria has evolved significantly, transitioning from initial support for the opposition aimed at toppling Bashar al-Assad's regime to a later emphasis on countering the extremist organization known as the Islamic State (ISIS). Initially, the United States provided the Syrian opposition with financial assistance and military training; however, as the conflict escalated and ISIS gained prominence, the U.S. commenced airstrikes against ISIS in 2014 and deployed special operations forces within Syria. This marked a gradual pivot in U.S. policy from advocating for regime change to pursuing a political resolution, which included backing the Geneva peace negotiations and facilitating the establishment of "conflict de-escalation zones" throughout Syria. Nevertheless, U.S. intervention and policy adjustments have consistently been influenced by regional powers such as Russia and Iran, alongside domestic divisions regarding extensive involvement in the Syrian conflict, resulting in a landscape of uncertainty and complexity surrounding U.S. positions and actions regarding the Syrian crisis.

7. The Conflict in Yemen: U.S. Interests and strategic Options in Yemen

The Yemeni conflict, which began as a civil war in late 2014, escalated into a regional confrontation involving Saudi-led coalition forces against the Houthis. U.S. interests in Yemen center on counterterrorism, regional stability, and safeguarding Red Sea shipping. Initially, the U.S. backed the Saudi coalition through intelligence, aerial refueling, and military advisory support to restore Yemen's legitimate government and mitigate Houthi expansion. However, as the conflict progressed and humanitarian conditions worsened, the U.S. reassessed its strategy, reducing direct assistance to the Saudis amid rising domestic and international pressures. The focus then shifted towards countering extremist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS through drone strikes and special operations. These strategic shifts illustrate the U.S.'s intricate balance of regional alliances, counterterrorism efforts, and international reputation management.

8. Conclusion

The policy of the United States in the Middle East has experienced a strategic layout from the Cold War period to the strategic adjustment in the post-Cold War period and then to the war on terrorism in the early 21st century. These policies have intensified the turmoil in the Middle East to a certain extent and have had a complex impact on the United States. Case studies show that the United States faces many challenges and uncertainties in its policy choices in the Middle East, which need to consider the regional situation, alliances, terrorist threats, energy security, and international responsibilities. In response to the threat to U.S. national security posed by the turmoil in the Middle East, the United States can take the following measures. First, strengthen intelligence collection and analysis to keep abreast of the security situation and terrorist threats in the Middle East. Second, strengthen cooperation with Allies in the Middle East to jointly address the threat of terrorism and extremism. Additionally, political reconciliation and economic development should be promoted in the Middle East and fundamentally address the root causes of unrest in the region. Actively participate in the peace process in the Middle East and promote regional stability and prosperity. All in all, the turmoil in the Middle East poses a serious challenge to the national security of the United States, which requires the United States to take active and effective measures to deal with it.

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