TRENDS 360

Defining Decades

How Republican Leaders Shaped Middle East Policy

Issue No.1

TRENDS 360

Welcome to the inaugural edition of Trends Monthly, a new monthly newsletter from Trends Research & Advisory. Each issue will explore pressing global developments, offering in-depth analysis on key geopolitical and international affairs topics. In a world where shifting alliances, emerging conflicts, and great power competition shape global stability, staying informed is more critical than ever. This first edition examines the legacy of Republican leadership in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, exploring historical patterns and their implications for the newly inaugurated Trump administration. By tracing past strategies, we aim to shed light on whether history serves as a reliable guide – or if Trump's unconventional, transactional approach will redefine America's role in the region.

Introduction

The inauguration of the second Trump administration brings heightened speculation about the future of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Traditionally, history has served as a reliable guide to decipher the priorities and strategies of incoming presidents, particularly when examining patterns from their party predecessors. Republican administrations have often shared a common approach to the region, prioritizing stability, strategic alliances, and countering adversarial influences. But does this historical lens apply to Donald Trump?

With his business background, transactional mindset, and "America First" ethos, Trump challenges the conventions of traditional diplomacy. The Middle East in 2025 is markedly different from the region he left in 2020. Iran and its proxies have experienced significant setbacks, a new interim government has emerged in Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad, and the regional balance of power is being reshaped by the growing influence of Israel and Turkey. These shifts raise a critical question: Can the legacy of past Republican presidents provide a framework for anticipating Trump's priorities in the Middle East, or does his distinctive approach defy historical patterns? This newsletter delves into whether historical insights can help decode Trump's foreign policy or if his unorthodox style renders such comparisons irrelevant.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Taking office in 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower inherited a Middle East that was growing in strategic importance—not only for its vast oil reserves but also as a critical battleground in the emerging Cold War between the United States (U.S.) and the Soviet Union. His predecessor, Harry S. Truman, had already set a precedent by recognizing the newly formed state of Israel in 1948, marking the region as a focal point of U.S. foreign policy. Libya and Saudi Arabia were particularly important to Eisenhower due to their significant oil reserves. At the same time, he sought to cultivate strong relations with Egypt, envisioning the state as a potential ally in building a regional security framework to counter Soviet influence.[1]

1953–1961

The Suez Crisis of 1956 and Egypt's subsequent alignment with the Soviet bloc underscored the challenges of Eisenhower's objectives in the Middle East, highlighting the complexities of balancing Cold War priorities, regional alliances, and the waning influence of traditional colonial powers including Britain and France who had historically played dominant roles in the region. Their waning presence during the Cold War created a power vacuum that the Soviet Union appeared eager to exploit. Eisenhower viewed it as a strategic necessity for the U.S. to assume the role of the primary Western power in the Middle East, both to counter Soviet expansion and to preserve regional stability. [2]

1 Cook, S. A. (2024). The end of ambition: America's past, present, and future in the Middle East. Oxford University Press.
2 Danahar, P. (2013). The new Middle East: The world after the Arab Spring. Bloomsbury Publishing.
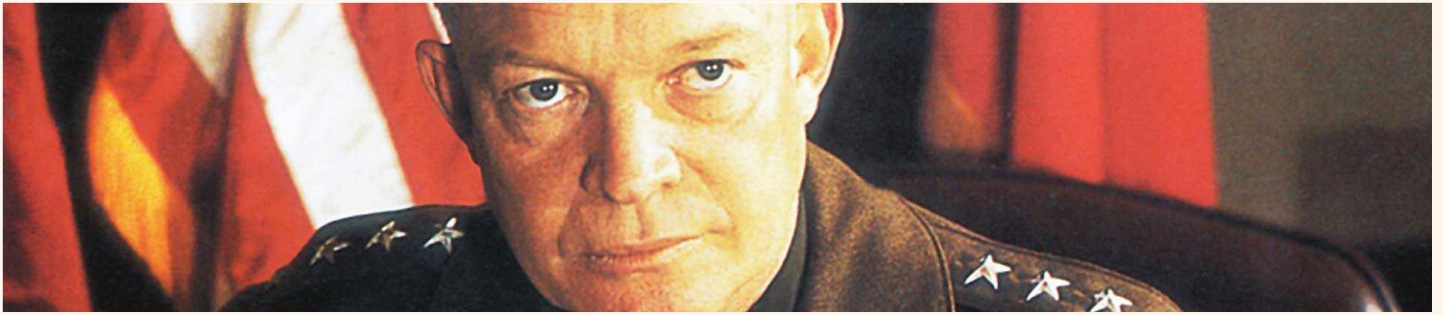
In 1957, Eisenhower introduced a new foreign policy initiative that would subsequently reshape US policy toward the Middle East, known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. This doctrine asserted that any Middle Eastern nation could request economic or military assistance from the U.S. if it faced "armed aggression from another state." The policy specifically aimed to counter the Soviet threat, with Eisenhower emphasizing its purpose as to "secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism." [3]

To implement this policy, Eisenhower sought congressional approval for $200 million in economic and military aid to support nations requesting assistance. This funding, authorized by Congress in March 1957, underscored the U.S. commitment to countering Soviet expansion and influence in the region. The Eisenhower Doctrine reflected the broader U.S. strategy of containment, solidifying American alliances in the Middle East while projecting U.S. power as a deterrent to Soviet ambitions. [4]

The doctrine's first major test came in 1958, when U.S. forces were deployed to Lebanon at the request of President Camille Chamoun. Chamoun sought American support to counter his political rivals, who were aligned with communist ideologies and backed by Syria and Egypt. The deployment of 15,000 U.S. troops to Lebanon, largely as a political favor to Chamoun, exposed a key weakness in Eisenhower's doctrine. The intervention, which had little to do with the U.S. strategy of containing Soviet influence in the Middle East, established a dangerous precedent for American involvement in regional conflicts blurring the lines of U.S. policy objectives. [5]

3 Office of the Historian. (n.d.). Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957. U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from
https://history.state.gov/milestones/1960-1953/eisenhower-doctrine
4 Danin, R. (2012, January 5). Remembering the Eisenhower Doctrine. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from
https://www.cfr.org/blog/remembering-eisenhower-doctrine
5 Boswall, J. (2022, July 29). 1950s U.S. foreign policy looms large in Lebanon. Newlines Magazine. Retrieved from
https://newlinesmag.com/essays/1950s-u-s-foreign-policy-looms-large-in-lebanon/

Richard Nixon

1969–1974

Amid growing public opposition to U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War, President Richard Nixon introduced the Nixon Doctrine in 1969. Constrained by the financial and political costs of the war, the doctrine called on America's allies to take greater responsibility for their own military defense during the Cold War. However, Nixon reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to honoring its treaty obligations and maintaining its nuclear umbrella for allied nations. Moving forward, U.S. support would primarily take the form of financial and military aid rather than deploying American ground troops.

Unlike his predecessors, President Richard Nixon, along with his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, adopted a Realpolitik approach to Cold War foreign policy. The administration sought to persuade Soviet leaders to reduce their support for communist revolutions abroad in exchange for greater cooperation on arms control and economic issues. [6]

6   McFaul, M. (2018). From Cold War to hot peace: An American ambassador in Putin's Russia. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

and economic issues. This strategy also prioritized securing oil supplies and fostering alliances with key regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran—a strategy later referred to as the "Twin Pillar" policy. By providing financial and military support, including training, to both nations, the U.S. aimed to maintain control over the region's vital oil flow. This approach also ensured that, even in the event of potential conflicts with the Soviet Union in the Middle East, oil supplies would remain uninterrupted. Equally important to Nixon was the expectation that partner nations would assume greater responsibility for managing regional challenges independently. [7]

A series of events, including U.S. support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War, tested the effectiveness of Nixon's strategies in the Middle East. In response to the conflict, President Nixon authorized $2.2 billion in emergency military aid to Israel, framing the region as "a flashpoint for potential world conflict." In his request to Congress, Nixon emphasized that the funding was critical to maintaining "essential flexibility" for preserving the military balance and ensuring stability in the region. [8]

However, this support provoked backlash from OPEC members, who imposed an Arab oil embargo on the U.S., as well as on the Netherlands, Portugal, and South Africa—countries that were also supporting Israel at the time. Along with the embargo, OPEC implemented cuts in oil production, leading to a dramatic quadrupling of global oil prices. While the crisis caused significant economic strain and skyrocketing fuel prices, it also transformed energy policies in oil-importing nations. Many countries introduced new regulations on energy consumption, and in Japan, the crisis spurred a drive to innovate, resulting in significant investments in energy-efficient technologies and advanced manufacturing developments that would lay the foundation for the country's technological dominance.

6 LSE International History Blog. (2020, June 4). Controlling the Gulf: American aid to Iran and Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseih/04/06/2020/controlling-the-gulf-american-aid-to-iran-and-saudi-arabia/
8 Finney, J. W. (1973, October 20). Nixon asks $2.2-billion in emergency aid for Israel. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/20/10/1973/archives/nixon-asks-22billion-in-emergency-aid-for-israel.html

For the Nixon administration, as well as for every subsequent administration, the Middle East, despite its political turmoil and divergence from traditional American values, has remained a vital component of the global economy and a region of significant importance. After the war in 1974, Nixon became the first U.S. president to actively pursue a policy aimed at reducing tensions between Arab states and Israel,[9] particularly in the context of the Cold War and following the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In a bid to strengthen U.S. relations with the Arab world, Nixon embarked on a historic tour of the region, visiting Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel, and Jordan.

During his visit, Nixon and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed the Agreement on Principles of Relations and Cooperation Between Egypt and the United States, which established the Joint Cooperation Commission and included a U.S. commitment to provide Egypt with nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. [10]

This new alignment between the U.S. and Egypt laid the groundwork for improved relations between Egypt and Israel, a process further advanced by the Camp David Accords in 1978, brokered by the Carter administration. These accords marked a definitive turning point in Egyptian–Israeli relations, culminating in a formal peace treaty in 1979.

9 Richard Nixon Foundation. (2017, September). Mediation in the Middle East. Retrieved from
https://www.nixonfoundation.org/09/2017/mediation-middle-east/
10 Office of the Historian. (n.d.). Foreign Relations of the United States, 1976–1969, Volume XXVI, Arab–Israeli Dispute,
1976–1974, Document 92. U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus76-1969v26/d92

Ronald Reagan

1981–1989

President Ronald Reagan's tenure coincided with a period of escalating violence and instability in the Middle East, particularly for U.S. forces stationed in the region. His administration faced a series of crises that tested U.S. foreign policy and reshaped American involvement in the region. In 1982, at the request of the Lebanese government, Reagan deployed U.S. troops to Lebanon as part of a multinational peacekeeping force alongside British, French, and Italian contingents. The mission aimed to stabilize a country ravaged by years of civil war, sectarian conflict, and foreign interventions. A primary objective was to facilitate the withdrawal of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) factions, whose presence and cross-border attacks on Israel had fueled both local and regional instability. The intervention also sought to bolster Lebanon's sovereignty, restore order, and create conditions for broader peace.[11]

11 Naval History and Heritage Command. (n.d.). Lebanon. U.S. Navy. Retrieved from
https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/middle-east/lebanon.html

However, the situation deteriorated significantly following the assassination of Lebanon's president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, in September 1982. Gemayel's death deepened Lebanon's internal divisions and sparked retaliatory violence, culminating in the Sabra and Shatila massacre, at refugee camps in Beirut later that same month. During the massacre, several hundred Palestinians and a number of Lebanese citizens were brutally killed by Israeli-backed Christian militias, who, like Israel, were working to expel the PLO from Lebanon. [12] The atrocity sparked global condemnation and severely undermined the credibility of the multinational peacekeeping mission. The events exposed the deep-seated sectarian rivalries and external influences that rendered Lebanon's political landscape highly volatile, highlighting the limitations of foreign military forces in resolving such entrenched conflicts. [13]

Reagan's administration also faced an alarming rise in anti-American terrorism in the Middle East. In 1983, the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait was bombed, and later that year, terrorist hijackers seized a Kuwaiti airliner, killing two Americans. In June 1985, Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed proxy group based in Lebanon, hijacked TWA Flight 847, culminating in a 17-day ordeal with landings in Beirut and Algiers that resulted in the death of an American passenger. [14]

The most devastating attack during Reagan's presidency occurred in October 1983, when a truck bomb struck the U.S. Marine barracks at Beirut airport, killing 241 U.S. servicemen – mainly Marines. Earlier that year, another Hezbollah bombing targeted the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 17 people. These attacks underscored the increasing danger faced by U.S. personnel in the region.

12 Economic Cooperation Foundation. (n.d.). The Gulf War and its implications for the Middle East. Retrieved from https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/1326

13 Economic Cooperation Foundation. (n.d.). Sabra and Shatila Massacre (1982). Retrieved from https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/1326

14 Cannon, L. (n.d.). Ronald Reagan: Foreign affairs. Miller Center, University of Virginia. Retrieved from https://millercenter.org/president/reagan/foreign-affairs

The Marine barracks bombing forced a major reassessment of U.S. policy in the Middle East. Against his advisors' recommendations, Reagan ordered the withdrawal of all remaining U.S. forces from Lebanon in early 1984. For the remainder of his presidency, Reagan avoided deploying large-scale ground forces to the region, instead adopting a more cautious approach that prioritized intelligence gathering, covert operations, and counterterrorism initiatives aimed at disrupting terrorist networks and their state sponsors.

Reagan's Middle East policy placed significant emphasis on strengthening alliances with key regional partners, particularly Egypt. Collaborating closely with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Reagan supported efforts to safeguard Lebanon's sovereignty, advocating for the withdrawal of all foreign forces, including Israeli, Syrian, and Palestinian troops. [15] He also sought to address the Arab-Israeli conflict through the 1982 Reagan Plan, which proposed Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza.

However, the plan explicitly stated that the U.S. would "not support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state." Instead, Reagan advocated for "self-government by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan," describing this framework as offering "the best chance for a durable, just, and lasting peace," [16] a concept that, then – and now, continues to be rejected by the Israeli government. While the Reagan administration recognized the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, it stopped short of endorsing full Palestinian sovereignty, aligning with the broader "land-for-peace" principles outlined in the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council Resolution 242.

Despite these challenges, Reagan is remembered by some in the Middle East as a leader who sought stability and strengthened U.S. alliances in the region, even as his administration grappled with the complexities of a deeply divided and turbulent landscape.

15 Reagan, R. (1982, February 3). Remarks of President Reagan and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt following their meetings. The American Presidency Project. Retrieved January 13, 2025, from https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-president-reagan-and-president-hosni-mubarak-egypt-following-their-meetings

16 Shipler, D. K. (1982, September 3). Israel rejects Reagan plan for Palestinians' self-rule, terms it 'serious danger.' The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/03/world/israel-rejects-reagan-plan-for-palestinians-self-rule-terms-it-serious-danger.html

George H.W. Bush

Entering office towards the end of the Cold War, President George H.W. Bush had an opportunity to reset U.S. foreign policy, shifting from a focus on superpower rivalry to addressing regional conflicts, fostering international cooperation, and shaping a new world order centered on American leadership and multilateralism.

However, Bush had little time to fully implement this vision before a major crisis emerged. In August 1990 under Saddam Hussein's leadership,100,000 Iraqi troops invaded and occupied neighboring Kuwait. Saddam justified the invasion by claiming historical ties, asserting that Kuwait had been part of Iraq during the Ottoman period. [17] In the lead-up to the invasion, in an attempt to further bolster its case for war, Iraq accused Kuwait of oversupplying the global oil market and demanded compensation for oil allegedly extracted from a disputed oil field along their shared border. [18]

17 Abidi, A. H. H. (1991). Origins and dimensions of the Iraqi claim over Kuwait. India International Centre Quarterly, ,(1)18 143–129. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23002125
18 BBC. (n.d.). 1990: Iraq invades Kuwait. BBC News. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/2/newsid_2526937/2526000.stm

Determined to protect Kuwait's sovereignty and maintain regional stability, the U.S. initially sought a diplomatic resolution. When diplomacy failed, the Bush administration imposed sanctions on Iraq, and ultimately resorted to military force. [19] Like his predecessors, Bush prioritized two critical objectives: safeguarding vital oil supplies and upholding the rules-based international order by ensuring that aggression would not go unchecked.

Eager to demonstrate that even a unipolar superpower could operate within a framework of multilateralism, the Bush administration worked through the U.N. to build a broad international coalition. This coalition, composed of NATO allies and Middle Eastern powers including Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt [20] successfully pushed back Iraqi forces and liberated Kuwait, reinforcing the principle that aggression would not be tolerated in the post-Cold War era.

Despite the military success of the war, the extensive bombing of strategic sites in Iraq—including critical infrastructure aimed at crippling the state into submission—resulted in a severe and devastating humanitarian crisis. The situation worsened in the aftermath of the war as Saddam Hussein brutally suppressed uprisings that erupted following Iraq's defeat. In the north, violent crackdowns against opposition forces led to the mass displacement of Kurds, who were already highly vulnerable under Saddam's regime. [21]

Similarly, in the south, Saddam targeted Shia communities who had risen up against his weakened army, unleashing widespread violence that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands and the displacement of countless others. Beyond the humanitarian toll, Saddam's regime destroyed Shia shrines, centers of learning, and entire communities, erasing cultural and religious landmarks critical to the identity and heritage of Iraq's Shia population. [22]

19 Haass, R. (2020). The world: A brief introduction. Penguin Press.
20 Office of the Historian. (n.d.). The First Gulf War. U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/firstgulf#:~:text=Bush's%20foreign%20policy%20team%20forged,its%20long%2Dtime%20client%20state.
21 Helfont, S. (2021, February). The Gulf War's afterlife: Dilemmas, missed opportunities, and the post-Cold War order undone. Texas National Security Review. Retrieved from https://tnsr.org/02/2021/the-gulf-wars-afterlife-dilemmas-missed-opportunities-and-the-post-cold-war-order-undone/
22 Alaaldin, R. (2015, April 17). Iraq: Growth of the Shia militia. BBC News. Retrieved January 2025 ,13, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32349379

After the Gulf War, the U.S. established a permanent military presence in Kuwait to deter further aggression from Iraq and ensure regional stability. This presence set off a domino effect across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where defense agreements were strengthened. These agreements granted U.S. forces access to bases and infrastructure, enhancing their ability to counter threats from Iraq, Iran, and other potential aggressors. Additionally, the continued U.S. military presence served to enforce U.N. sanctions on Iraq while acting as a key deterrent to preserve security and stability in the region.

The number of U.S. military personnel stationed in the Middle East fluctuates depending on the prevailing security environment. As of September 2024, approximately 43,000 troops are stationed throughout the region, [23] including those aboard ships operating in regional waterways. The U.S. also maintains basing agreements with Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Among these, Qatar stands out as a key hub for U.S. military operations, hosting the regional headquarters of U.S. Central Command. [24]

[23] Copp, T., & Baldor, L. C. (2024, September 30). US sending a few thousand more troops to the Middle East. Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/us-troops-middle-east-israel-hezbollah-e37e2dbef573e33c0f8fb6a8103f27f1

[24] Masters, J., & Merrow, W. (2024, October 1). U.S. troops in the Middle East: Mapping the military presence. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/article/us-troops-middle-east-mapping-military-presence

George W. Bush

Following the al-Qaida 11/9 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush led the 2003 invasion of Iraq as part of his administration's Global War on Terror, a moment often seen as a turning point in U.S. history. Rejecting the constraints of diplomacy and the conventions of multilateralism, Bush initiated a preemptive war against Iraq, citing Saddam Hussein's alleged stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and his regime's potential to expand its arsenal. Bush also pointed to Saddam's record of human rights abuses, framing the invasion as a mission to disarm Iraq, liberate its people and promote democracy—a strategy intended to protect the U.S. and the world from grave threats, including terrorism in the wake of 11/9. [25]
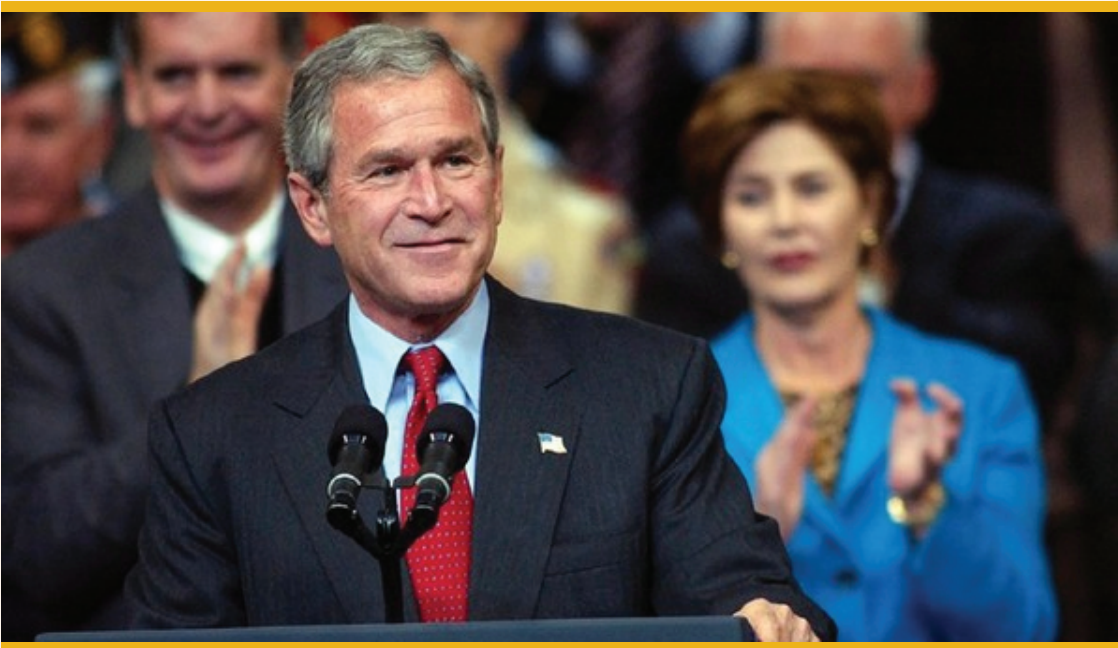
25 The White House. (2003, March 19). President Bush's address to the nation on the Iraq war. George W. Bush White House Archives. https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/17-20030319.html

Under what became known as the Bush Doctrine, a foreign policy framework emphasizing unilateral action, preemptive strikes, and the promotion of democracy, George W. Bush moved away from the Cold War strategies of containment and deterrence in favor of a more assertive approach to exercising American influence across the world. He advocated for strong American leadership and, most controversially, the right for the U.S. military to engage in preemptive attacks against perceived threats. [26]

Despite the initial success in defeating the Iraqi army and overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime, no weapons of mass destruction were ever found. Between 2003 and 2011, the war—estimated to have cost $273 billion [27] —failed to significantly improve the lives of most Iraqis, foster democracy, or reduce terrorism in the region and beyond. Instead, the ensuing instability led to a civil war from 2005 to 2008, the deaths of nearly 200,000 Iraqis, and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS, further exacerbating global security challenges.

26 Stoley, A. (2018). The Bush Doctrine. The Mirror - Undergraduate History Journal, 178–161 ,(1)38. Retrieved from https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernumirror/article/view/15751
27 Anastacio, N., & Murray, M. (2023, March 20). Iraq war by the numbers: 20 years later. NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meetthepressblog/iraq-war-numbers-rcna75762

The war also significantly tarnished America's global reputation, particularly eroding its soft power. Opinion polls conducted a year after the war began revealed a sharp decline in trust among America's NATO allies with %78 of respondents in France, %73 in Turkey, and %70 in Germany expressing reduced confidence in the U.S. as a trustworthy nation. [28]

In his 2010 memoir, Decision Points, George W. Bush acknowledged two key missteps by his administration: relying on faulty intelligence about weapons of mass destruction and failing to act decisively as security in Iraq began to deteriorate. [29] While future administrations may debate and reshape U.S. policy on Iraq, still scarred by those years, their efforts should focus on fostering stability, promoting reconciliation, and supporting the Iraqi people in building a peaceful and prosperous future.

28 Pew Research Center. (2004, March 16). A year after Iraq war: Survey report.
https://www.pewresearch.org/global/16/03/2004/survey-report/
29 Baker, P. (2023, March 20). George W. Bush reflects on Iraq war's legacy 20 years after invasion. The New York Times.
https://www.nytimes.com/20/03/2023/us/politics/george-w-bush-iraq-war.html

Conclusion – A Second Trump Era

The inauguration of a second Trump administration offers an opportunity to reflect on the historical patterns of Republican foreign policy in the Middle East and assess their relevance in light of Trump's unorthodox approach. While past Republican presidents have prioritized stability, strategic alliances, and countering adversarial influences, Trump's business-driven, transactional mindset and "America First" ethos challenge traditional diplomacy. Yet, history provides valuable lessons about the risks of poorly informed interventions and the enduring impact of unforeseen consequences. Instability, power vacuums, sectarian violence, and the influence of external patrons in the region remain challenges that cannot always be fully anticipated in a war room. These unforeseen consequences continue to define the complex relationship between war and its aftermath.

Trump's first term brought significant shifts to the Middle East, most notably through the Abraham Accords, which established formal diplomatic relations between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, later expanding to include Morocco and Sudan. However, his second term begins amid a dramatically different security environment, marked by heightened tensions following Hamas's October 7th attack on Israel and Israel's subsequent military campaign in Gaza. With regional stability at risk, Trump faces the challenge of preventing further escalation while shaping his administration's approach to the deepening humanitarian crisis and the long-term reconstruction of Gaza. His recent remarks suggesting that the U.S. could assume control over Gaza, relocate Palestinian residents, and oversee its rebuilding have drawn sharp criticism from both Arab and Western world, highlighting the volatility surrounding U.S. policy in the region and the delicate balance his administration must navigate.

The current geopolitical landscape of the Middle East is being shaped by shifting dynamics, marked by the degradation of Iran's proxies, the emergence of a transitional government in Syria, and the growing influence of Israel and Turkey. Trump's policies must account for these changes while considering the broader implications of great power competition. The much-anticipated U.S. pivot to the Indo-Pacific, motivated by strategic competition with China, must not come at the expense of sustained engagement in the Middle East. Striking a balance between these priorities is essential to preserving U.S. influence, securing partnerships, and avoiding conflicts with ambiguous goals.

The U.S.'s continued influence in the region will depend on its ability to adapt its approach. While energy security and regional stability remain as critical as ever, the increasing urgency of renewable energy and clean technology, combined with advancements in artificial intelligence, presents new opportunities for innovation, economic collaboration, and strengthened partnerships. These efforts will not only reinforce regional partnerships but also align with evolving global challenges. As the Trump administration looks ahead, it must decide whether to draw on the lessons of its Republican predecessors or forge a new path—one that balances pragmatism with ambition to shape the region's future in ways that serve both U.S. and regional interests.

TRENDS DUBAI