Shifting Sands: US Foreign Policy in the Middle East Under Biden Administration

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Abstract

The US foreign policy of the Middle East under Biden administration had shifted from an initial period of low priority to a renewed focus on re-engagement with the region. International events such as Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Palestine conflict after October 2023 and rising influence of Russia and China in the region, had compelled Biden's administration to review its Middle Eastern policy. However, it remains a complex task for the administration to balance between supporting its strategic ally and upholding the human rights particularly in the case of humanitarian crisis caused by Israel-Palestine conflict. This complexity and challenge further exacerbated due to the election year in the USA, which is why the administration had adopted a dual approach. Biden's foreign policy in the Middle East showed shifting dynamics of US foreign engagement, where domestic pressure and international obligations shaped and reshaped its strategic decision making. This article employs a qualitative, descriptive research method to analyse US foreign policy. Grounded in neo-classical realism, this article explores how both international power dynamics and domestic factors shape Biden's foreign policy choices.

Keywords

US Foreign Policy, Biden's Foreign Policy, Middle East, Geopolitics and US Priorities.

Introduction

Given its strategic significance, in global politics, the Middle East has always been a key focus of United States (US) foreign policy. Over time,

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America's perspective on the Middle East had evolved. The romanticism of the mid-20th century has given way to a more pragmatic and often cynical approach; however, the core strategic goals have largely remained the same. The region's oil and gas resources, the strategic importance of the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz, and America's commitment to Israel's security still shape its policies towards the region (Lenczowski, 1984).

The Middle East was not the high priority area in the initial days of foreign policy of the Biden Administration because when he took office in January 2021, the key focus area was to avert domestic crisis driven by the Covid-19, and the pressing issues like US relations with China and Russia, climate change etc. When it comes to the Middle East, he preferred to pivot away from the Middle East, minimising direct investment, funding and military involvement. However, during his campaigns he was committed to ensure the accountability of human rights abusers and promotion of democracy in the region as a clear preference. He has often been criticised also for not been able to live up to the discourse of his campaign, and his continuation to work with authoritarian regimes who violate human rights and democratic principles (Katulis, 2023).

President Biden sought to reshape US foreign policy by sticking to adopt modest goals through limited diplomacy and to guard against the deep levels of engagement to protect the US from an overwhelming situation. In the first year, the Biden administration appointed special envoys on Yemen, Libya and the Horn of Africa, however, it also downgraded the diplomatic engagement with Syria by eliminating the position of Syrian envoy, it also reengaged with Iran over its nuclear program and showed a commitment to lean on regional partners in a more active manner (Katulis, 2023, p. 25). It also sought to recalibrate ties with Saudi Arabia after the episodes of rocky bilateral relations.

Biden's foreign policy approach was based on multilateralism, diplomacy, with a focus on human rights, depicting a clear departure from the previous administration's transactional approach. While emphasizing a reduced military footprint in the Middle East, he aimed to maintain the US influence through conflict resolution, strategic partnerships, and engagement in multilateral initiatives. The administration's early moves,

such as attempts to revive the Iran nuclear deal and resetting the ties with Saudi Arabia, reflect a nuanced strategy of balancing core US interests with evolving global and regional dynamics. This approach reinforced Biden's intent to reinstate the US credibility on the global stage while navigating the complexities of the Middle East, a region pivotal to both the US strategic goals and international stability (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021).

It is pertinent to mention here that Biden's blind eye towards Israel atrocities in the Palestine have badly tarnished its reputation both domestically and internationally. There have been humanitarian crisis, human rights violations and war crimes committed by the Israel. Majority of the people in America wanted to end this conflict in which people are being killed and tortured. Fifty percent of the Biden's voters believed that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians (Khouri, 2024). American policy since that day has fractured Joe Biden's Democratic Party, lost him crucial support among young and Arab Americans and left the US looking isolated on the world stage (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021).

Biden's foreign policy in the Middle East is discussed in the existing literature, however, there is a notable gap in analysing Biden's selective human rights advocacy, limited engagement strategy and the domestic criticism over his policies, particularly in the context of Israel-Palestine issue. President Joe Biden attempted to minimise the US military involvement in the region while maintaining influence through diplomacy. But there were inconsistencies, such as recalibrating ties with Saudi Arabia and keeping a blind eye towards Israeli aggression have undermined the US credibility. This had fractured his Democratic voter base, with a significant portion believing Israel is committing genocide, exposing a disconnect between the US public sentiment and official policy. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by critically examining Biden's foreign policy recalibrations, implications on regional stability, and implications for the US influence in the Middle East. This article explores key aspects of Biden's Middle Eastern foreign policy by addressing the questions: What was the Biden Doctrine in the Middle East? How has Biden's approach evolved towards Middle East? How

Biden had balanced human rights advocacy and strategic interest amid Israel-Palestine conflict?

The article analyses the Biden's foreign policy in the Middle East through the lens of neoclassical realism, which combines systemic pressures with domestic factors in shaping foreign policy. Biden administration had faced structural constraints, such as the shifting global balance of power and the US urge to counter China and Russia's influence in the region had been the key focus of his foreign policy, on the other hand domestic political factors also played an equally important role. The aim of Biden's administration was to reduce direct military engagement in the region, due to public fatigue over prolonged conflicts and a desire to prioritise domestic recovery post-COVID-19. However, regional political situation, including Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Abraham Accords' implications, and the Israel-Gaza conflict, forced recalibrations. Initially, Biden administration wanted to prioritise human rights over other issues, however, the changing geopolitics led them to recalibrate their relations with the states based on geo-politics particularly to stabilise the oil prices. This blend of systemic pressures and domestic political calculations align with neoclassical realism, illustrating how the US foreign policy under Biden was shaped by both external constraints and internal political dynamics (Smith, 2023).

1.1 The Biden Doctrine and the Middle East

As discussed above, under the Joe Biden the US foreign policy in the Middle East was characterised by a strategic reengagement with its traditional allies by emphasising multilateral diplomacy coupled with a commitment to upheld human rights and democratic values. In addition to these, the other elements of its foreign policy were comprised of restoration of critical alliances by rejoining the international agreements such as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In practice, however, the administration departed from these commitments as in the case of Israel-Palestine conflict. Consequently, President Biden faced criticism at home which cost him the election outcomes (Century International, 2024).

During the first phase of the Biden administration, it could not achieve the results from its initial approach to the Middle Eastern region and subsequently made tactical adjustments. It realised that a new agreement with Iran to rejoin 2015 nuclear deal is difficult due to the changes in Tehran, the Yemen conflict and stalemate Israel-Palestine issue and the low priority set out by the Biden team was also deteriorated due to these problems in the region. The desire to limit the US engagement in the region by the last three administration have brought challenges such as diminishing influence. During the second phase, the administration had adopted limited strategic reengagement from 2022-2023. One of the key factors of this reengagement was the rising global food and energy prices due to Russia-Ukraine War, because of high prices and inflation it could impact the domestic political standing of the Joe Biden. It reminded the Americans and the world that the Middle East remained vital to the global economy and energy markets. During his visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia, he emphasised the importance of the region and showed its commitment to remain active and engaged in the region (Middle East Institute, 2023).

Saudi Arabia's response to Biden's first visit in July 2022 was marked by pragmatic engagement yet clear resistance to the US pressure, reflecting a shifting power dynamic in their bilateral relations. While Biden sought to rebuild ties, secure increased oil production, and reinforce security cooperation, Saudi leadership, particularly Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), maintained a calculated diplomatic stance, signalling that the era of unquestioned US influence over Riyadh had diminished. The fist bump instead of a handshake was a symbolic yet deliberate move, reflecting Saudi caution rather than a full embrace of Biden's outreach. Moreover, despite Biden raising Jamal Khashoggi's assassination, MBS rejected accountability and pointed to the US human rights failings, undermining Biden's moral authority. Riyadh further asserted its autonomy by cutting oil production rather than increasing it, defying Washington's expectations and reinforcing its strategic alignment with both Russia (OPEC+) and emerging multipolar global trends. The visit ultimately exposed Biden's limited leverage, as Saudi Arabia prioritised economic and geopolitical diversification over unconditional alignment with the US, signalling a more assertive, interest-driven foreign policy independent of Western dictates (Marsi, 2022).

This visit had ushered a new phase of engagement in the region, as it brought the signing of bilateral framework agreements with both Israel and Saudi Arabia in the fields of technology, climate change, economic cooperation and other areas. This had significantly deepened the ties with two regional powers which was opposite to the restraint and pull back behaviour it initially adopted. In addition to these bilateral framework agreements, the administration also engaged in six key elements, which are; I2U2 (Israel, India, US and UAE framework to promote joint investment in water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security), Bilateral US Partnership for Accelerating Clean Energy with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Israel-Lebanon Maritime Deal, Biden's meeting with Egyptian President Fateh El-Sisi (top level US diplomatic engagement) and The Negev Forum Working Group. These frameworks showed a shift in the US policy from military towards adopting a more diversified engagement in the region (Katulis, 2023, P. 7).

The Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a historic shift in US foreign policy, ending a 20-year military engagement. While the withdrawal aimed to fulfil a long-standing promise to disengage from 'forever wars,' it left noteworthy repercussions for Middle Eastern security and US counterterrorism strategies (Borger, 2021). The third phase was marked by adopting a more proactive strategy when the Biden administration calculated that China was moving to make inroads in the region. It brought a new level of diplomatic engagement in the mid-2023. When China announced in March 2023, Iran-Saudi Arabia normalisation agreement it raised concerns for the US policy makers, hence sought to expand economic statecraft diplomacy in the Middle East. To achieve this, US National Security Advisor visited Saudi Arabia to attend a meeting on regional integration. In June, the US Secretary of State Blinken visited Saudi Arabia to attend two meetings, the US-GCC Ministerial Meeting and Global Coalition to defeat ISIS. This diplomacy culminated into the announcement of a new Trans-Regional Infrastructure Project at the G20 Summit in September 2023, named as India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (Al Jazeera, 2023).

One significant move the Biden has made which affected the Middle Eastern security and US counterterrorism strategies is the US withdrawal

from Afghanistan in August 2021. It ended an era of US foreign policy. The withdrawal aimed to fulfil a long-standing promise to disengage from wars, however, the exit depicted the declining the US commitment to its allies, particularly in security and stabilisation efforts. But it raised concerns to its partners (Saudi Arabia and UAE) about Afghanistan once again becoming a hub for extremist activity that could spill into the broader region for their reliance on American security guarantees, leading to a diversification of alliances, including growing ties with China and Russia (Creighton & Schindler, 2023).

The chaotic withdrawal has underscored the importance of strategic foresight in the US foreign policy. As regional powers recalibrate their security doctrines, the US risks diminishing its influence unless it articulates a clear and coherent strategy for Middle Eastern engagement. The withdrawal highlighted the complexity of balancing domestic political promises with global security obligations. The enduring consequences of this decision will likely shape the US interactions with Middle Eastern states for years to come, compelling Washington to reassess its role as a security guarantor and mediator in an increasingly multipolar world.

Biden's Middle East doctrine was characterised by a strategic recalibration rather than a complete departure from traditional policies of the US, focusing on diplomatic engagement, reduced military intervention, and burden-sharing with regional allies. Unlike Trump's transactional approach or Obama's pivot away from the region, Biden sought to balance the US interests, particularly security, energy stability, and human rights, while avoiding deep entanglements. His emphasis on multilateralism and diplomacy, seen in efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal and recalibrate ties with Saudi Arabia, reflected a shift from unilateral military interventions to coalition-driven regional stability. However, this approach was highly inconsistent, his administration claimed to prioritise human rights, yet continued arms sales to authoritarian allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt while turning a blind eye to Israeli aggression in Palestine. Moreover, Biden's attempt to reduce U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil clashed with his diplomatic outreach to OPEC nations when global energy prices surged. Ultimately, his doctrine failed to establish a clear, long-term strategic vision, exposing the limits of the US

influence in a multipolar world where regional actors are increasingly asserting their autonomy (Chatham House, 2024).

2.1 Relations with Saudi Arabia

President Biden's administration had been able to amend its relations with Saudi Arabia which were receded into the background due to the significant differences over human rights issues. It had departed from the close ties maintained during the Trump era, President Biden was committed to balance national security interests with human rights concerns. In his initial days of the term, an intelligence report was released, implicating Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in a murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. This showed the administration's commitment to addressing human rights violations while signaling a reassessment of bilateral relations. In addition to this, Biden administration also shifted US involvement in Yemen, and halted support for offensive Saudi-led military operations and limited arms sales to defensive weaponry. This approach again showed his commitment to address humanitarian concerns and reassess the US' role in protracted conflicts in the region. However, despite these changes, Biden visited Saudi Arabia in 2022, reflecting the enduring importance of the kingdom in global energy markets amid disruptions caused by the Ukraine crisis (Smith, 2023).

Saudi Arabia has increasingly expanded its ties with China and Russia, signalling a shift toward a more diversified foreign policy that reduces reliance on the United States. Through OPEC+ collaboration with Russia, Riyadh has played a key role in coordinating oil production cuts and price stabilization, often in ways that counter US interests, particularly during global energy crises. Additionally, China's growing investments in Saudi infrastructure, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have deepened economic cooperation, with major projects in energy, technology, and transportation sectors. The 2022 Saudi-China summit further strengthened bilateral ties, with agreements on oil sales in yuan, military cooperation, and 5G technology development, signalling a move toward economic and strategic diversification. These expanding partnerships reflect Saudi Arabia's pursuit of a multipolar strategy, leveraging relations with China and Russia to gain greater geopolitical

autonomy while still maintaining its long-standing security ties with the US (Ali, 2025).

These factors have made the Biden administration to review the disengagement policy into a reengagement policy to ensure its geopolitical influence remains robust in the Middle East. Therefore, it adopted some tactical shifts in its foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia in particular and the Middle Eastern region in general. The tactical shift in Biden's Middle East policy, particularly toward Saudi Arabia, was driven by the need to preserve the US geopolitical influence amid shifting regional and global dynamics. Initially, Biden distanced the US from Saudi Arabia, emphasising human rights concerns, particularly over the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. However, geopolitical realities, including the Ukraine war, rising oil prices, and China's growing influence in the region, forced a recalibration. The US moved from a disengagement strategy to a reengagement approach, prioritising pragmatic diplomacy over moral posturing. This included restoring high-level diplomatic ties, making security commitments, and seeking cooperation on global energy policies to counterbalance Russian and Chinese influence. Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia in 2022 and efforts to strengthen economic and defence ties demonstrated this shift, as Washington sought to maintain its strategic foothold in a rapidly evolving Middle Eastern landscape.

Moreover, Biden reaffirmed the longstanding 'ironclad' support of the US for Israel, emphasising security and regional stability. The Biden administration also continued to promote the Abraham Accords signed among Israel, UAE and Bahrain, which normalised Arab-Israel relations. While the administration supported these agreements, it sought to ensure that expanding relations with Israel did not exacerbate regional tensions. Biden's diplomacy reflects a nuanced strategy to uphold Israel's security while advocating for steps toward a sustainable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Biden's recalibration of US alliances with Saudi Arabia showed a pragmatic balance between traditional partnerships and evolving regional and global dynamics. This approach seeks to secure the US interests while addressing emerging challenges and fostering stability across the Middle East (Jones, 2023).

3.1 The Iran Factor in Biden Administration's Policies

Biden's approach to Iran was shaped by a mix of cautious diplomacy and strategic pressure, primarily focused on reviving the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The administration wanted to restore the agreement, which was abandoned by the Trump administration in 2018, as a cornerstone of nuclear non-proliferation efforts in the Middle East. The efforts to reinvigorate the JCPOA had seen the progress in early 2022, however, talks repeatedly stalled due to the disagreements regarding sanctions relief and Iran's compliance. In 2023, the situation became more complex due to the alleged continued uranium enrichment by the Iran which was beyond the JCPOA's thresholds, reaching levels close to weapons-grade. This increased the concerns among the US allies and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which reported limited access to inspect Iran's nuclear facilities. There had been diplomatic engagements between the two countries over this issue, including indirect negotiations in Oman, but trust between the parties remained fragile. In the mid of 2023, a breakthrough moment occurred with the US-Iran detainee exchange, viewed as a tentative step towards de-escalation. However, rising regional tensions, such as Iran's missile launches and alleged involvement in the October 2023 Hamas-Israel conflict, disrupted diplomatic momentum. These events underscored the challenge of addressing Iran's nuclear ambitions while navigating its regional behaviour, including its backing of proxy groups like Hezbollah and its antagonism toward Israel (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

While the US sought to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear capability, it had faced pressures from its strategic ally Israel, which advocated for pre-emptive strikes on Iranian facilities due to the Iran's alleged involvement in the Hamas and Hezbollah's action in Israel-Palestine conflict. But Washington's adopted restraint in its behaviour and reluctant to endorse any such measures demonstrated its preference for diplomacy over escalation. Nonetheless, incidents like Iran's drone strikes in Syria targeting US assets and the alleged provision of military aid to Hamas highlighted the enduring tensions in the US-Iran relations (MIT Security Studies Program, 2024).

In 2024, the election of a reformist Iranian president created a glimmer of hope for reinvigorating JCPOA talks. However, the broader geopolitical landscape, including Iran's deepening ties with Russia and China, complicated the US efforts to isolate Tehran. Biden's balancing act, reining in Iran's nuclear ambitions while managing its regional influence remains a high-stakes endeavour, with potential ripple effects on Middle Eastern stability. By employing a strategy of "soft power with a backbone," Biden attempted to mend ties frayed by years of mistrust, but the complexities of Iran's regional ambitions and domestic politics ensured that progress would be as elusive as finding a needle in a haystack (Sachs, 2024).

Biden's foreign policy toward Iran was a mix of diplomacy and deterrence, attempting to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) while simultaneously maintaining economic sanctions and military pressure. His administration initially signalled a willingness to return to the nuclear deal, reversing Trump's maximum pressure strategy. However, negotiations stalled due to Iran's demand for stronger guarantees and continued uranium enrichment beyond JCPOA limits. Meanwhile, Biden kept sanctions intact, enforced new punitive measures on Iran's missile and drone programs, and strengthened regional security alliances, including the Abraham Accords and defence coordination with Israel and Gulf states. This contradictory approach, engaging diplomatically while reinforcing containment policies, weakened the US credibility, as Iran deepened ties with Russia and China, expanded its regional influence through proxy networks, and accelerated its nuclear advancements. Ultimately, Biden's Iran policy failed to achieve a decisive breakthrough, exposing the limitations of the US leverage in an increasingly multipolar global order.

4.1 Energy Diplomacy and Economic Partnerships

One of the cornerstones of the US foreign policy in the Middle East is to ensure the energy diplomacy and economic partnerships, where oil and natural gas reserves are critical to global energy markets. Under the Biden's administration, these priorities have been reinforced to balance traditional energy interests with emerging priorities such as renewable energy and economic diversification. As the world's largest consumer of

energy, the United States has long recognised the geopolitical importance of oil and gas, hence ensuring a steady supply of hydrocarbons deemed crucial to its economic stability and industrial progress. Historically, the US energy diplomacy has revolved around maintaining strong ties with oil-rich nations in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE (Jones, 2023).

To keep up its energy ambitions, the US relied on energy diplomacy and strengthened its relations with Saudi Arabia, which holds nearly 17% of the world's proven oil reserves. The US-Saudi partnership has been instrumental in stabilising global oil markets, especially during crises like the 1973 oil embargo and, more recently, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Despite political tensions, such as human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, the Biden administration has engaged Riyadh to secure stable oil prices amid the Russia-Ukraine war. Such as, in the wake of Russia-Ukraine war of 2022, the gasoline prices surged, which led to Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia to encourage increased oil production. Though met with mixed success, this visit underscored how vital oil remains in shaping U.S. foreign policy (Smith, 2023).

The US energy policies have been evolving over the years. Although domestic production through shale oil and gas has reduced America's dependence on Middle Eastern imports, giving Washington more leverage in negotiations. For example, the US was able to implement sanctions on Iranian oil exports without severely disrupting its own energy needs. Nonetheless, maintaining access to global energy resources remains critical, especially for its European and Asian allies. In addition to hydrocarbons, the Biden administration has also prioritised broader economic partnerships focusing on renewable energy, technological innovation, and economic diversification. These initiatives are critical in addressing climate change and fostering long-term stability in regions heavily reliant on oil revenues (Blackwill & O'Sullivan, 2014).

The role of economic partnerships in the US foreign policy, particularly regarding shifting energy dynamics, has been a crucial yet inconsistent element of Biden's approach. As the US has moved toward energy independence and renewables, its reliance on Middle Eastern oil has declined, but geopolitical realities continue to drive energy-related

diplomacy. The Ukraine war and sanctions on Russia created a global energy crisis, forcing the US to re-engage with traditional energy partners like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar despite earlier tensions. At the same time, Biden's push for a green transition has limited long-term energy cooperation with fossil fuel-rich allies, creating uncertainty and friction. Moreover, rivals like China have capitalised on this shift, deepening energy ties with Gulf states through long-term oil and gas deals. The lack of a clear and consistent the US energy strategy has weakened economic partnerships, pushing Middle Eastern actors to diversify their alliances and reducing Washington's leverage over global energy markets.

One emerging trend is the US relations with Middle Eastern countries is to develop renewable energy projects. In this regard the UAE, has become a leader in solar energy, and the US has supported initiatives like the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week to encourage investment in clean technologies. Simultaneously, the Middle Eastern countries are also diversifying their economies to reduce reliance on oil exports and the US has played a crucial role in supporting these efforts through its investments in various sectors like technology, education, and tourism. The Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's flagship economic reform program, includes substantial American involvement in tech investments and entertainment ventures, such as Neom, a futuristic city project (UAE Embassy, 2024).

Moreover, the U.S. has deepened its energy ties with Qatar, one of the largest exporters of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Due to the Europe's energy crisis following the Ukraine war, the US companies collaborated with Qatar to increase LNG exports to European markets, reducing reliance on Russian energy supplies. This partnership showed the significance of economic cooperation which essentially aligned with geopolitical goals. The Biden administration has supported Iraq's efforts to modernise its energy infrastructure, particularly in reducing gas flaring and improving electricity supply. By aiding in infrastructure development, the US helps stabilise Iraq while ensuring a reliable energy partner in the region (Al Jazeera, 2020).

The energy diplomacy of the Biden's administration reflected a balancing act between traditional oil partnerships and emerging green energy collaborations. For instance, while maintaining close ties with

Saudi Arabia for oil stability, it also pushed for commitments to renewable energy transitions. This dual strategy helped Washington address immediate energy needs while showing its commitment to combating climate change. There have been challenges, such as the rising competition from China and Russia in the Middle East has complicated the US efforts to remain the dominant partner in energy and economic affairs. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for example, has led to significant Chinese investments in Middle Eastern infrastructure, creating new economic dependencies in the region (Wasser et al., 2022).

As the world transitions to cleaner energy sources energy diplomacy and economic partnerships remain pivotal in the US foreign policy. Simultaneously, the role of oil and gas would continue to shape key alliances, emerging partnerships in renewable energy and technology signal a forward-looking approach. This strategy, is evident through cooperation with countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iraq, not only addresses energy security but also fosters regional stability. However, it is quite complex to balance traditional energy interests with green initiatives while competing with rising powers like China and Russia, it would require a nuanced approach.

The Biden administration has placed significant emphasis on human rights and democracy promotion as key pillars of its foreign policy. From his early days in office, President Joe Biden articulated a vision of America that upholds democratic ideals and actively combats authoritarianism worldwide. This approach reflects an effort to reclaim the US leadership in promoting global values, particularly after perceptions of democratic backsliding during the previous administration (Carothers & Brown, 2024).

5.1 Humanitarian Issues and Human Rights

The central narrative of the Biden's foreign policy had been the human rights, and an emphasis on protecting fundamental freedoms such as free speech, equality, and the right to peaceful assembly. These ideals were not only adhering to the moral imperatives but also designed to achieve strategic necessities in countering the rise of authoritarian powers like China and Russia. So, the foreign policy agenda of the Biden's

administration was sought to intertwine human rights with broader geopolitical goals, and projecting these elements as an essential component of the American diplomacy. For instance, in September 2021, during his first address to the United Nations, he reiterated America's commitment to universal values and warned against the threats posed by authoritarian governments. He maintained that human rights violations are often led to broader regional instabilities, which tend to directly impact global security (Agarwal, 2021).

Balancing the promotion of human rights with the practical realities of geopolitical and economic interests had been the real challenge for the Biden administration. The administration was very vocal about supporting the democratic movements and condemned authoritarian regimes, consequently, it often faced dilemmas in addressing allies with questionable human rights records. For example, balancing these with its ally Saudi Arabia. During his election campaign, Joe Biden promised to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah" for its human rights abuses, including the 2018 assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Later, his administration declassified an intelligence report implicating Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Khashoggi's murder. Despite this, he had to maintain its strategic relationship with Riyadh, because of the kingdom's importance in global oil markets and regional security.

That is why in 2022, Biden visited Saudi Arabia amid geopolitical tensions, and rising energy prices which drew criticism for prioritising economic and strategic interests over human rights. This shows the administration's struggle to reconcile idealistic rhetoric with pragmatic decision-making. In contrast, his administration adopted a more confrontational stance on China, where human rights abuses were a central point of contention. It repeatedly condemned Beijing's treatment of Uyghur Muslims. It termed it a genocide, and imposed sanctions on Chinese officials and entities which were linked to alleged abuses (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022).

6.1 Democracy Promotion

To strengthen the US commitment towards democratic principles and values, Biden had taken initiatives like the 'Summit for Democracy,'

launched in December 2021 (The White House, 2022). This summit brought together leaders from over 100 countries to discuss strategies for defending against authoritarianism, fighting corruption, and advancing human rights. The purpose of this event was to uphold democratic principles in the world and unite democratic nations to unite in the face of rising autocracy. Furthermore, his administration also sought to strengthen alliances with democratic nations by fostering closer ties with partners in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In this regard, the US worked with NATO, in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, to uphold democratic principles presenting the conflict as a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

The administration's responses to authoritarian regimes were based on by both principle and pragmatism. Although it advocated for democratic reforms, but it was more cautious in pushing too hard, particularly in regions where authoritarian governments held strategic importance. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 proved to be a turning point for Biden's democratic agenda. The US became a staunch defender of Ukrainian sovereignty and democratic values, providing billions in military and economic aid to Kyiv, the Biden administration framed the conflict as a battle for the survival of democracy against authoritarian aggression. This approach helped the administration to reaffirm its commitment to democratic ideals while strengthening transatlantic ties (Nadkarni et al., 2024).

In the case of Myanmar, the administration condemned the military coup of February 2021 and imposed sanctions on the Junta. Similarly, in Belarus, it also supported pro-democracy protests and sanctioned President Alexander Lukashenko's regime. These actions showed the Biden's commitment to promote democratic movements, even in regions of limited US strategic interest.

However, the withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, posed significant challenges to Biden's human rights narratives. The chaotic exit left millions of Afghans, particularly women and minorities, vulnerable to oppression. The administration defended its decision as necessary to end

America's longest war but acknowledged the human rights implications of the Taliban's return to power (Al Jazeera, 2021).

It was deemed pertinent to promote human rights and democracy for both moral reasons and for fostering global stability as democracies are perceived to be less likely to engage in conflict, and protecting freedoms contributes to economic growth and innovation. Biden's commitment to these issues signifies an understanding that defending human rights aligns with long-term US interests, even when short-term challenges arise. However, it also highlights the complexities of modern diplomacy, as the administration faced challenges in aligning ideals with practical considerations. In some cases, the US successfully positioned itself as a defender of democratic values, such as Ukraine and China, However, in other cases, the administration faced criticism for perceived inconsistencies, such as relations with Saudi Arabia or the Afghanistan withdrawal.

7.1 Israel-Palestine Conflict

After assuming its office President Joe Biden reinstated financial support to the Palestinians, which was halted under the Trump administration. His administration also emphasised a commitment to the two-state solution as a cornerstone of the US policy. The Biden administration, like any other the US administration, viewed the Israel as its strategic ally. While dealing with Israel-Palestine conflict, it tried to balance a historical alliance with Israel against the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the West Bank (BBC News, 2021). However, the escalation of violence in October 2023, following a surprise attack by Hamas on Israel, became a defining moment. This unprecedented attack, which claimed over 1,200 Israeli lives, prompted the US to reaffirm its unwavering support for Israel, both militarily and diplomatically. Biden condemned Hamas in unequivocal terms, it provided Israel with substantial military aid and deployed the US naval assets to deter regional escalation. Despite its robust support for Israel, the humanitarian toll in Gaza became a major point of contention. Israel had been killing tens of thousands of Palestinians in its military retaliation, which sparked widespread criticism from progressive voices within the US and the international community. The administration's endorsement of Israel's

right to self-defense often overshadowed the disproportionate impact on civilians in Gaza, hence, undermined the US credibility as a mediator in the conflict (Arab Center Washington DC, 2024).

The Israel-Palestine conflict also exposed shifting dynamics in the U.S. influence in the Middle East. Regional countries like Qatar and Turkey had been mediating, while traditional ally of the US, Saudi Arabia, adopted an independent stance. This development highlights the challenges Biden faced in maintaining American diplomatic leadership in the region. The complexity of the US foreign policy is evident as balancing strategic interests with humanitarian and democratic ideals is a real challenge. But his administration sought to restore balance and renew commitments to a peaceful resolution, however, enduring nature of the conflict and recent escalations have made tangible progress elusive. The administration's approach towards the Israel-Palestine conflict remains a polarising aspect of Biden's foreign policy legacy, which signify the broader challenges in aligning the US principles with geopolitical realities (Atlantic Council, 2024).

Another feature of the Biden policies toward the Israel-Palestine conflict was the continuity with past approaches along with certain recalibrations, leaving critical aspects of the situation unresolved. While President Biden reinstated some measures to support Palestinians, such as restoring funding to UNRWA and reopening the US Office on Palestinian Affairs, however, these actions were not enough to mark the Biden’s policy shift from the Trump-era policies. Most importantly, Biden upheld the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, signalling continuity in recognizing the city as Israel's capital, despite its contentious status in the conflict. Also it did not restore the Palestinian Liberation Organization's office in Washington, nor did it contest Trump’s recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights. That is due to the reason of the US commitment to defend its strategic ally in the region. Hence, Biden administration also had to keep the continuity of the Trump policies which were deemed essential for the protection of Israel. Another continuity of the Trump’s policy was endorsement of the Abraham Accords, which aimed to foster normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states, so that a shift in regional dynamics could take place in the favor of Israel.

As, the Accords sideline the Palestinian issue, effectively bypassing the central grievance at the heart of the conflict. Biden encouraged Saudi Arabia to join these agreements to make it more effective. The renewed conflict of Israel and Palestine following October 2023 demonstrated the fallacy of relegating the Palestinian question to the background, exposing the enduring volatility it represents (Blank, 2024).

Following the October 7 attack by Hamas, President Joe Biden, expressed his and his administration's solidarity with Israel, and provided unwavering support with substantial military aid. However, his policy of defending and supporting Israel has been complicated by the scale of Israel's retaliatory campaign in Gaza, which resulted in humanitarian crisis with significant civilian casualties and devastation. Despite the calls for restraint by the Biden administration, Israel continued its brutality and atrocities towards Palestine, which had drawn sharp criticism globally and within the United States. Although, Biden had announced temporary suspensions of certain arms shipments, but have been perceived as minimal gestures rather than meaningful checks on Israeli operations (Al Jazeera, 2023).

The Biden's administration had faced a lot of criticism over the US policies both domestically and internationally due to humanitarian crisis in Gaza and it became a real challenge for his administration. This humanitarian crisis became worse when Israel blocked aid delivery, which consequently led to shortages of food, water, and medical supplies. There has been widespread condemnation by international organisations with figures like Cindy McCain of the World Food Program. The organisation in Gaza was at the collapse of food systems and there had been the risk of famine in the area. Despite the calls for greater humanitarian access, aid flows remained insufficient, and the administration's ability to leverage its influence over Israel proved to be very limited. Consequently, there had been tensions between Biden and Benjamin Netanyahu due to the differences over the handling of Gaza, because it posed challenges for the Biden administration to balance its strategic interests with humanitarian and diplomatic imperatives. In addition to this, the administration also faced criticism from within Biden's party and international allies which showed the administration's precarious position over the issue. Although,

the Democrats favoured to adopt a balanced approach that considers Palestinian rights, however, like every administration of the US, the Biden's administration was committed to steadfast support for Israel aligned with his longstanding views and broader political calculations (Foreign Affairs, 2024).

The administration also faced criticism over the provision of military aid to Israel amid humanitarian crisis. Following, October 2023, the US provided $17.9 billion of military aid to Israel (The Economic Times, 2024). This support not only showed the depth of the US-Israel alliance but has also worked as making perceptions about the American complicity in the humanitarian crisis of the conflict. The Biden administration often seemed to be reluctant to impose tough conditions on Israel sue to the ideological and political considerations and consistently affirmed its commitment to Israel's defence and security. Its stance reflected the deeply held beliefs as well as a pragmatic recognition of the political costs associated with challenging pro-Israel constituencies in the United States. Republicans and conservative voices within his party were seized on any perceived criticism of Israel to portray the administration as insufficiently supportive, complicating efforts to adopt a more balanced approach (Middle East Institute, 2024). In this regard the Vice President Kamala Harris also faced such complexities, to balance Israeli security with appeals for a ceasefire and humanitarian relief. Though, she had been cautious but this depicted political constraints, particularly as she sought to get support among diverse constituencies, including Arab-Americans and progressive Democrats. Furthermore, as the election approached, it further constrained Biden’s ability to take bold steps, because any notable shift in his policy could risk alienating key voter groups and fuelling partisan attacks.

Looking ahead, speculation abounds about whether a post-election Biden administration might adopt a tougher stance on Israel. Freed from immediate political pressures, Biden could theoretically pursue measures to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and reassert the US credibility as a mediator. However, his historical record suggests that any such actions would likely be incremental rather than transformative. Without

significant US pressure, the prospects for ending Israel's military campaigns and achieving a durable resolution to the conflict remain slim.

The Biden's policies have shown the enduring tension between American ideals and strategic interests with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. While Biden had sought to adopt a balanced diplomacy, his administration's actions have largely reinforced existing dynamics, prioritising support for Israel over substantive engagement with Palestinian grievances. The Biden administration has gone and President Trump has assumed his role as a new President of the United States of America, however, the Israel-Palestine conflict remains there and evolving every day and the Biden administration's legacy will likely be judged by its ability, or inability to align its moral rhetoric with meaningful action.

8.1 The Impact of Biden's Middle Eastern Policies on Domestic Politics

Foreign policy decision making of any state is based on the interplay of the domestic and international factors, similarly, formulation and execution of the US foreign policy in the Middle East have also been profoundly influenced by domestic political dynamics. The Biden's administration represents this interplay, where electoral priorities, ideologies, and public opinion shaped his policies and decisions. It is pertinent to analyse how these domestic factors have impacted Biden's Middle East policies, particularly his stance on Israel and the balancing of humanitarian concerns with strategic alliances.

Just before 2024 presidential election, the Biden administration's foreign policy decisions are increasingly viewed through an electoral lens. There had been bipartisan backing in the US with regard to its support for Israel, with a notable tilt among Republican constituents. Similarly, Biden also supported Israel amid the renewed Israel-Palestine conflict following October 2023. It can also be viewed as a strategic move to appeal voters and pre-empt criticism from political adversaries. This approach was aimed at consolidating its support among pro-Israel voters and mitigate potential electoral vulnerabilities (The Guardian, 2024).

A large spectrum of views existed on Middle East policy, within the Democratic Party, progressive factions favoured a more balanced

approach, based on human rights, while centrist elements emphasised the traditional alliance with Israel. As discussed earlier, Biden's policies tried to navigate both preferences simultaneously. As evident through, the administration's support for a two-state solution and provision of aid to Palestinian organisations, simultaneously, it provided substantial military aid and assistance to Israel. This dual approach sought to get the favour from both progressive and centrist party members, as well as gaining the voters support.

Along with this media and public opinion played a vital role in shaping foreign policy of the Biden's administration. The perception of the public towards the Middle East conflicts influenced policymakers who were sensitive to voter opinions. Public empathy and pressure had been surfaced due to the media coverage of humanitarian crises, such as those in Gaza. Which pressured the Biden's government to balance its strategic alliance with Israel against domestic calls for humanitarian intervention. This policy of balancing could be seen in the administration's efforts to facilitate humanitarian aid to Palestinian territories while defending Israel's interests (The Washington Institute, 2024).

Legislative factors also influenced the policy making towards Middle East under the Biden administration. Lawmakers often reflected their constituents' views, which can either bolster or constrain executive decisions. Strong bipartisan congressional support for Israel had led to the passage of key defence bills including hefty military aid. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal 2025, allocated $500 million for U.S.-Israel missile defence, which showed how legislative decisions are tied to domestic political considerations. To balance between strategic alliances with humanitarian responsibilities remains a key challenge. The administration's commitment to Israel's security must be weighed against its stated dedication to human rights and humanitarian aid. This complexity is reflected in policies that provide military assistance to Israel while simultaneously advocating for humanitarian relief for Palestinians. To keep up the balance requires careful consideration of domestic political pressure, international commitments and moral principles of the US foreign policy (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

Conclusion

President Joe Biden's four years in office were based on the pledge to re-establish the US leadership at the global level while pursuing a foreign policy focused on human rights and to cooperate with its strategic alliances. However, his administration had faced a lot of criticism over several areas particularly its support for Israel amid Israel-Palestine conflict. Although, at the initial days of its term, the administration was committed to drawdown from the region, however, certain developments in the post Ukraine war and renewed Israel-Palestine conflict led his administration to re-engage more in the Middle East. Therefore, it can be termed as a reactive foreign policy of the US under Biden administration, which lacked a coherent regional approach and resulted in a strategic drift shaped by the various international and regional events.

One of the major ingredients of the Biden's foreign policy in the Middle East was to avoid a more proactive stance in its diplomatic and military actions due to the political constraints associated with the Israel-Palestine conflict, particularly choosing sides to support. As, according to an estimate, 46,584 Palestinians had been killed since the war began in October 2023, and UNO experts had warned about Israel's action in Palestine were consistent with genocide. Simultaneously, the US supplied almost $17.9 billion as military aid to Israel. Which somehow had been viewed the US complicit to the crimes committed by the Israel. That is why, Biden adopted a dual policy such as restoration of funds for UNRWA and showing its commitment for a two-state solution, on the one hand and on the other hand backed Israel diplomatically and militarily. This dual policy showed and exposed the enduring asymmetry in the US engagement with both Israel and Palestine. These asymmetric actions and dual policies had weekend the Biden's commitment and stance over human rights and also diminished the US credibility as a mediator in the region.

The Biden's administration seemed to be locked in a difficult situation domestically because of the election year in the United States. That is why, most of the policies of his administration were shaped by electoral considerations due to the polarized political landscape. Donald Trump and other Republicans, criticised even mild US rebukes of Israeli

actions, framing them as insufficient supporter for a key ally. Such kind of political environment constrained Biden's ability to opt for a balanced approach. Vice President Kamala Harris faced similar issues and challenges, navigating calls for stronger humanitarian responses without alienating pro-Israel constituencies.

At the global level, the focus of the Biden administration was complicated by the geopolitical competition with China and Russia in the Middle Eat. Over the years and due to the disengagement policies adopted by the previous US administrations, both Russia and China were able to fill the power vacuum and strengthen their foothold in the region through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Moscow's military partnerships. This posed challenged to the US influence in the region and forced Biden to balance traditional alliances with emerging economic and security dynamics.

While the new administration under Donald Trump has assumed its role, it signified that the traditionalism of protecting its key ally, Israel will remain be the focus of the new government. As, it announced to cleanse the Gaza and committed to take it under US control. These announcements of the Trump administration are widely criticised by Arab and European States. However, the coming days will bring more clarity of Trump's policies towards the region which might bring the continuation of the Biden's policies as evident in its support of Israel's actions. Comparing Trump and Biden's policies, Trump pursued maximum pressure on Iran, withdrew from the JCPOA, and imposed sanctions, while Biden attempted to revive the nuclear deal but faced obstacles. Trump cultivated strong ties with Gulf monarchies, particularly Saudi Arabia, while Biden initially sought to recalibrate relations, especially following the Khashoggi murder, before engaging with Saudi Arabia pragmatically due to energy and security concerns. While Trump reduced the US troop presence in the region in a chaotic manner, Biden maintained a more cautious drawdown, balancing military disengagement with strategic realignments. In Israel-Palestine affairs, Trump's approach heavily favoured Israel, moving the US embassy to Jerusalem and cutting aid to Palestinians, whereas Biden restored some aid but largely maintained the pro-Israel stance. Ultimately, Trump's approach emphasized economic deals and transactional alliances,

whereas Biden leaned toward multilateral diplomacy and selective engagement, but neither fundamentally altered the core US strategic objectives in the region.

The Trump administration's foreign policy in the Middle East, characterized by unilateralism, transactional diplomacy, and a strong focus on the US strategic and economic interests, has several long-term implications for the region. The Abraham Accords, which normalized ties between Israel and several Arab states, reshaped regional alliances but also sidelined Palestinian aspirations, potentially fuelling future instability. The withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) escalated tensions, increasing the likelihood of nuclear proliferation and deepening the Iran-Saudi rivalry. The administration's 'America First' approach reduced the US engagement in multilateral conflict resolution, leaving power vacuums that Russia and China actively sought to fill, particularly in Syria and economic sectors. Moreover, the inconsistent the US stance on military interventions, such as the sudden withdrawal of troops from northern Syria, undermined Washington's credibility among allies, particularly the Kurds, who felt abandoned.

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