



From Hegemony to Humanitarianism? The Dual Role of the US in Middle East Peace and Conflict in International Relations Discourse

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Abstract

This paper addresses the complicated contortions of the United States in the Middle East, where strategic hegemony is interpreted through a mostly humanitarian lens. Beyond the blatant interventions of Iraq and Syria, the paper examines less discernable U.S. interventions in Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman—geographies that have taken up U.S. influence and control by making use of aid, diplomacy, and military partnerships without open hostilities. This paper uses Realist approaches to theories and critical discourse analysis and shows how doctrines such as the “Responsibility to Protect” are instrumentalized and strategically deployed to advance its strategic interests. The paper then turns to the U.S.-Israel relationship and examines how the convergence of Commonwealth, political, social, and religious affinities influences policy decisions. At the same time, American complacency in Palestine and recent involvement in military strategies against Iran certainly raises legitimate doubts about the U.S. credibility as a peacebuilder. In conclusion, the research argues that humanitarianism is an engineered instrument of American hegemony, wherein the concept of intervention shifts from the making of overt war to subtle domination.

Key words – United States in the Middle East, humanitarian lens, Influence without Force, Moral Rhetoric, Corruption trail

Introduction and Background

Power no longer shows up in tanks. Power shows up in language, in leverage, in legal cover. It offers peace, but leaves ash. A Diplomacy in which the language of liberation is often just a mask for imperial ambition. This research proceeds from that tension the paradox of American presence in the Middle East. The United States’ involvement in the Middle East is often explored through its most overt violence invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. But the true shift in power occurs in other areas in places where the U.S. employs not invasion, but invisibility. These are quiet laboratories in which the differences between humanitarianism and hegemony have become indistinguishable. In places like Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman, the American presence is being discussed more often than the U.S. military presence, but the implications are even more pronounced. These are not traditional or classic battlegrounds but They are silent laboratories, where the line between aid and influence, protection and regulations, has eroded beyond recognition.



Background –

In which case it refuses the binary of invader/saviour and rather maps out the architecture of a power that has mastered how to adapt: from overt military domination to embedded political and economic presence, disguised as humanitarian initiatives. Conventional academic approaches have focused on the exposed conflicts and interventions; that of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria more noticeably, while the United States remains to be understood on how they orient an enduring, strategic presence through sustained, systemic, and muted practices.

By the late 2000s and early 2010s particularly following the Arab Spring uprisings. The United States began strategically reevaluating its battle against radicalization in the Middle East. It pivoted away from direct combat role and toward a vision in which it exerted influence regularly but sustainably and with less political capital. This pivot stands out in a number of contexts particularly the following three.

1. First, in Yemen (after 2014) the United States adopted an indirect approach to combat radicalization and provided direct support to the Saudi-led coalition while justifying its participation by focusing on humanitarian initiatives
2. Second, in Lebanon (after the 2006 war) the United States made substantial efforts to develop national institutions to represent an alternative stabilizing force to Hezbollah, especially its support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)
3. Third, in Oman, throughout the 2010s, the United States developed quiet military partnerships and took advantage of Omani policy neutrality to facilitate diplomatic back channelling.

The U.S. is deeply involved in several places, such as Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman, where we are supplying arms while financing humanitarian aid in Yemen, we condition the political outcome in Lebanon with assistance, and we unobtrusively operate military capabilities in Oman. There are institutional mechanisms inherent across the DoD, DoS, USAID and international organizations that enable the U.S. to provide influence without intervention. This paper examines this model where humanitarianism is often a front for calibrated hegemony

Problem statement and research objectives –

The United States' current foreign policy is indicative of a more pronounced transformation from visible military power to a more implicit control via humanitarian rhetoric, multilateral agency resourcing, and peace diplomacy. The shift that is referred to in this dissertation as 'strategic humanitarian governance' allows the U.S. to project influence across regions without the requirement of a traditional military. **Recent diplomatic efforts by the U.S. including proposals for the disarmament of Hezbollah (ABC News, 2025, highlight how we disguise geopolitical plans in peacebuilding talk and raise serious considerations regarding the use of humanitarian governance to alter regional balance of power .**

In states such as Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman, a stark duality can be seen. In Yemen, U.S. humanitarian assistance for Yemenis exists alongside a licensed arms sale for the Saudi-led coalition's activities against the Houthis.

In Lebanon, providing assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces is framed as peacekeeping but is used as a tool to contain Shia political power, at present with Hezbollah. In Oman, constructing an identity of neutrality provides cover to coordinate military and intelligence assessments of the region.



These actions compel one to see, that humanitarianism is more than a privilege, it is increasingly valuable in a transactional sense. **This shift provides an extremely compelling, often overlooked, set of questions for scholars and practitioners:**

1. Does delivery of humanitarian aid now represent soft power mechanisms for contemporary empire?
2. What does soft-intervention do to state sovereignty?
3. Where are the ethical contradictions when peacebuilding efforts are sequestered by what is essentially geopolitical engineering?

This attempts to stabilize some of these tensions through exposing how the language of relief is regularly called upon in the service of ideological translation to legitimate invisible hegemony, and fundamentally challenges hegemonic understandings of intervention and global leadership.

Research Objectives

This study aims to critically analyze how humanitarianism is instrumentally repurposed as a vehicle of geopolitical power in contemporary U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. By introducing the concept of “strategic humanitarian governance” this study provides a new lens to understand how the language of aid, peacebuilding, and create institutional support serves the purpose of forwarding hegemonic objectives while maintaining a moral shield.

The specific ambitions of this study are the following:

1. To conceive and theorize “strategic humanitarian governance” as a modern rendering of a non-coercive form of power exertion where diplomacy, development aid, and security partnerships become the substitute for guns and occupation.
2. To undertake a critical analysis of U.S engagement in Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman in how humanitarian and diplomatic tools systematically align with long-term strategies and political interests.
3. To ethically, legally, and sovereignty determine the effects of humanitarian interventions that generate dependency, entrench asymmetries, or maintain conflict environments indirectly.
4. To interrogate if U.S foreign policy is a commodified remaking of empire manifested through invisibility, consent making, and moral justifications rather than occupation and use of force.
5. To offer an interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis of realist power theory, postcolonial critique, and critical humanitarianism to disrupt conventional debates about surveillance and global intervention.

Literature review

Theme 1 – U.S. Strategic Hegemony and Realist Interpretations

The United States has played a multifaceted role in the Middle East, often shifting between acting as a dominant global power and presenting itself as a promoter of humanitarian values. This fusion of strategic ambition and moral rhetoric has sparked ongoing debates in both academic and policy-making circles. It raises fundamental issues regarding the intersection of power, intervention, global stability, and ethical justification.



From the perspective of realist theory particularly hegemonic stability theory as outlined by Robert Violin 1981 a single dominant power is necessary to maintain international order.

Following the cold war, the US emerged as the leading global Hegemon and sought to shape the Middle East geopolitical environment through a combination of military strength, economic leverage, and diplomatic leadership (Walth,2005). However this leadership is driven less by altruistic motives and more by the strategic imperative to maintain a favorable balance of power. Mearsheimer 2001 concept of offensive realism further this view by arguing that major powers are inherently motivated to expand their influence in order to prevent the rise of regional challenges. According to this logic, U.S. actions in the Middle East can be seen not merely as reactive or defensive , but as a part of a broader strategy to preserve its dominance in a region critical to global power dynamics.

Layne 2006 also observed that U.S. dominance is sustained not by idealist policies, but by coercive and preventive methods aimed at ensuring energy flows and military superiority.

Realist thinkers emphasized the role of alliance as an instrument of power projection and stability. The United States has always supported authoritarian regimes like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States and Jordan, not out of democratic solidarity but for geopolitical reasons (Kirkpatrick, 1979).

The United States pursued a containment theory in this region during the Cold War period with countries such as Saudi Arab, Iran, Israel. After the disintegration of the USSR, the United States adopted a more direct hegemonic role, which became an evidence of long term military presence in Iraq, in 1991 Gulf War and the Persian Gulf (Gause, 2009). In 2002 Bush gave the concept of National Security Strategy and introduced the doctrine of Preemptive war under this in 2003 Iraq invasion was justified. Scholars such as Khalidi 2013 and Parsi 2007 argue this enhanced U.S. dominance at the cost of regional peace and sovereignty.

“American intervention in Iraq was not about democracy—it was about reasserting hegemony in a strategically critical region.” (Chomsky, 2003)

Theme 2 – Humanitarian Justification and the Moral Rhetoric of Intervention

Mearsheimer 2011 and Chomsky 1999 argue that moral justification is often used to serve power driven objectives. For example, the doctrine of the “Responsibility to Protect” R2P, Although formally adopted by the United Nations World Summit, has been selectively applied, raising the question about its true function. The United States has invoked R2P in a selective manner such as Libya, parts of Syria and Kurdish regions of Iraq suggesting that humanitarian arguments are often used to legitimize strategic interests rather than uphold universal moral principles.

Realists saw NATO s 2011 involvement in Libya, which was officially justified by humanitarian needs as a strategic measure to remove a stubborn regime and ensure western access to Mediterranean oil lines. The absence of post-conflict planning confirms the realistic view that such activities are tactically motivated rather than part of a long term rebuilding strategy. Mazey(2019) talks about how presidents like Barack Obama and George W. Bush formed alliances both domestic and international by using humanitarian rhetoric.



Cases such as Somalia 1992- 1993), and portions of Syria 2013-present demonstrate that humanitarian interventions frequently result in long term destabilisation. Whether humanitarian intentions were sincere or merely tactically advantageous is questioned in the literature (Duffield,2001: Hehir,2013).

Theme 3 - Peacebuilding, Mediation, and the Crisis of the U.S. Credibility

In the conflict between Israel and Palestine the US claims to be a peacemaker. Scholars such as Rashid Khalidi 2013 in “Broker of Deceit” argue that the US consistently prioritises Israel’s interests, compromising its reputation as an impartial entity. It shows the “hegemonic alignment” and peace rhetoric are at odds with each other.

The United States strategy assessing non-state groups such as the Syrian Democratic forces, Mujahideen in Afghanistan, and Kurdish militias often backfire. Instead of promoting peace, proxy warfare has exacerbated conflict, created power vacuums and empowered rival interventions (Hazbun, 2016; Bachevich,2020).

The inconsistency of United States interventions has diminished the moral authority of its leadership. After the failure of Iraq and Libya, along with inaction in Yemen, international confidence of lost faith in the U.S. laid peacebuilding.

Perceptions of double standards are reinforced even within the U.N. The United States votes on humanitarian resolutions such as those pertaining to Gaza (Lynch,2023; Fall,2014).

The United States talks about freedom but supports tyranny and it talks about peace yet weapons the war (Fall,2014).The dual role of the United States in the Middle East (Humanitarian and hegemon) indicates deep tension in American foreign policy. While humanitarian discourses frequently accompany interventions, research suggests the framing often promotes hegemonic interest rather than genuine moral imperatives. Each of the three themes of hegemonic strategy, humanitarian justification, and peacebuilding credibility demonstrate how the United States speech and actions regularly vary. If the United States wants to re-establish credibility in peace building, it must balance its strategic goals with continuous, norm based international participation.

Methodology

Discourse analysis in international relations serves as the foundation for this study’s qualitative and interpretive methodology. With an emphasis on the delicate transition from overt military interventions to strategic humanitarian narratives that conceal hegemonic aspirations, the research explores the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The following is the structure of the methodology, which combines case study analysis, document evaluation, and discourse interpretation:

Case Study Selection:

Oman, Lebanon, and Yemen are three important Middle Eastern situations that have been purposefully chosen because they provide valuable examples of the dual role of the United States. Every instance provides a distinct illustration of how American influence appears through non-combative, indirect means:



Yemen: The Saudi-led coalition is supported by the United States under the pretence of humanitarian concerns.

Lebanon: Using military diplomacy to balance Hezbollah with institutional assistance. Quiet military alliances and diplomatic backchanneling in Oman

Document and Policy Analysis:

The evolution of U.S. involvement has been traced through primary sources, including Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports, policy briefs, and international agency documentation. These records were picked because they were reliable and up to date, enabling a thorough examination of American foreign policy following the Arab Springⁱⁱ

Discourse Analysis

In order to defend and frame their operations in the Middle East, U.S. agencies such as the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), and USAID employ language and rhetoric that is critically evaluated in this study. This method emphasizes the difference between the overt humanitarian rhetoric and the oftentimes hidden geopolitical agendas.

Limitation

The study acknowledges the limitations of access to classified data and the interpretive nature of discourse analysis, which may involve a degree of subjectivity. Nonetheless, using reliable government sources and triangulating case studies helps reduce the possibility of bias.^{iv}

Interpretation and analysis

US strategic interests in Israel-Palestine conflict and escalating tensions with Iran

The topic of the duality of the USA is evident in its actions in the Middle East—providing around \$30 million in aid to Palestine while also offering military support to Israel. The U.S. has long intervened in regional conflicts, and its current stance shows support for Israel while remaining in conflict with Iran. Recent reports highlight bombings and alleged war crimes, including the killing of civilians, children, and medical workers. This raises questions about the U.S.'s role and its complex relationships in the region.

US-Israel relations

With several nations been hostile to Israel actions in Palestine still armoured with US as an ally, in 1917, the Balfour Declaration transferred rule of the middle eastern region known as Palestine to the British Empire as a temporary national home for Jewish people. Between 1917 and 1948, Palestine was inhabited by Jewish immigrants who supported the idea of Zionism (the right of the Jewish people to return to the Holy Land) and Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians who had occupied the land for many centuries. **U.S. President Harry Truman was the first world leader to officially recognise Israel as a legitimate Jewish state on May 14, 1948, only eleven minutes after its creation. The response US gave led us analyse the core idea of American support for Zionism.** 8



American Israel” a term frequently used to connect US with ancient Israel by connection usually felt by Americans towards Israel through representation of biblical landscapes, one was portrayed by Abiel Abbot’s thanksgiving in 1799 speech, where he referred Americans to be connected with Israel by citing religious references.

The Old Testament (Jewish bible) gave much source to the way puritans explained about future difficulties in biblical languages. Protestant Christians saw the atrocities that were committed to Israelis by European Christians and condemned the holocaust. Further the journey for ‘promised land’ connected well with the ways Israelis journey to their new home is part of biblical commandments that were cited by **a lot of scholars well recognised personalities as the right enshrined in the Bible where God promised to Abraham:**

“I will give you, and them the land in which you are now a foreigner”

- **Genesis 17:8**

Most Americans believed this verses to be authentic and thus is free from any discrepancies and argued Regarding return to homeland and thus as a result Religion plays a major role in uplifting of what now Israel calls their land where Truman recognised its establishment.

US also shares same culture with Idealism, liberal republicans which connected US and Zionist and later this ideal was shown as supporting Jewish national movement. Herman Melville quotes “We Americans are peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time, we bear the ask of the liberties of the world,”

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In the similar way George R Brown describes Palestine as origin field for Jewish home seekers and was discussed in house resolution 52. **Another reason that Americans supported Jews is to full the vote bank nearly 3 million lived in US. President such as Delano and Roosevelt relied on Jewish money.** [1]

Core Findings

The occupational distribution reveals that students constituted the overwhelming majority at 76% of the sample, followed by those in government or private service at 14%. Self-employed individuals represented 6%, while homemakers and business persons each comprised 2% of respondents. One respondent identified as a teacher



The dominance of students in the sample aligns with the young age profile discussed earlier and has significant implications for interpreting the findings. Students typically have high digital engagement through educational platforms, social media, and entertainment services, making their privacy experiences particularly relevant. However, their occupational status may also influence their privacy concerns and practices differently than working professionals who handle sensitive occupational data or business owners managing commercial information. The limited representation of diverse occupational categories suggests that findings may not fully capture privacy awareness and practices across different professional contexts, each of which may present unique privacy challenges and requirements

Hollywood film producer, and James Packer, an Australian billionaire. A 2020 conflict of interest arrangement, drawn up by then-Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit and upheld by the High Court of Justice, prevents Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from involving himself in judicial appointments or legislation that could impact his ongoing corruption trial, and to distract the public as well as international forums on the trial Netanyahu is committed to destroy Gaza as only up to now only 18% land is left for Palestine on the strip.

Operation rising lion

Israel conducted a surgical operation targeting key Iranian military and nuclear personnel where main target was to Disrupt Iran's strategic confidence and command structure through sophisticated deception techniques and the Pre-positioned strike platforms inside Iranian territory to bypass traditional defence system that eliminated possible key scientists, military heads. It was based on apprehension conducted as to Iran possibly having 400kg of uranium. US asked Iran for unconditional surrender whereby 125 aircrafts were launched striking 75 precision bombs. America used B2 stealth bombs for deploying the Bunker buster bomb GBU- 57 on Iran where in no such claims were ever made by IAEAs.

It was a deliberate attempt to distract public, us as a nation wants Israel as an ally based on strategic interests. The hegemony showed from the part of US towards activity of Middle East is evident in recent days, Trump on one hand tried mediating between the two nations and on the other supporting Netanyahu y military assistance and veto power

Policy and practice Recommendations

In disclosing the facade of humanitarianism as covert statecraft, U.S. foreign policy must undergo the cleansing of ethics and structural decoupling. First, there would be the institutionalization of a Geo-Humanitarian Firewall Protocol, i.e., a protocol requiring that military logistics cannot be linked in any verifiable manner to humanitarian assistance, with transregional ethics council-based enforcement.



Second, creating Assembly for Recipient-Led Resilience (ARRs) would ensure that non-negotiables for aid conditionality are set by frontline states such as Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman in order to prevent support from being legitimate for political containment.

Third, a Diplomatic Influence Disclosure Act should be passed in order to make public all bilateral humanitarian negotiations and detail where aid serves ideological ends. Furthermore, the Digital Hegemony Tracker would monitor the simultaneous convergence of defense cooperation with development diplomacy in real-time. Finally, Ethical Imbalance Simulations could be embedded within American foreign policy academia to help train diplomats in evaluating the long-term fallout of double-edged aid. Using simulation case labs based on past neglect, such as Lebanon post-2006, will potentially build anticipatory ethics.

Conclusion

These proposals challenge From Hegemony to Humanitarianism? The Dual Role of the US in Middle East Peace and Conflict in International Relations Discourse, the topic suggests a broad approach towards peace resilience and engagement for prosperity with showing the dominance which was engaged since the beginning of geopolitical change. US engagement in Middle East is not a new phenomenon it existed since a long while where tensions between hegemonic approach and humanitarian intervention existed in parallel forms, the duality shown in Yemen by supporting Saudi led government to supplying military assistance to Israel simultaneously providing humanitarian aid to Gaza all this is nothing but a strategic interest where power is driven through persistent frame of democracy combined with American foreign policy, where efforts toward peace are frequently undermined by alliances with authoritarian regimes, military interventions, and selective support for human rights.

Within international relations discourse, this duality challenges scholars and practitioners to critically reassess the authenticity of humanitarian justifications and the long-term implications of hegemonic behavior disguised as benevolent leadership. Moving forward, a more coherent and ethically consistent U.S. approach will be essential for achieving genuine stability and credibility in the region.

The United States' strategic hegemony and humanitarian rhetoric are purposefully combined in the Middle East. Through the use of aid, diplomacy, and institutional support in place of overt warfare, the United States transforms intervention into a more palatable but no less effective form of control. It has demonstrated by its activities in Yemen, Lebanon, and Oman how soft power tools can uphold geopolitical goals while putting on a moral front. According to this study, maintaining domination is more important than providing aid in "strategic humanitarian government." In light of the ongoing debate over the morality of intervention, the U.S. model calls into question the traditional divisions between power projection and peacebuilding and calls for a reassessment of the viability and significance of such a dual-purpose foreign policy.

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