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**FIFTH EDITION**

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**Note from Prof. Wadouda Badran, Pro Vice-Chancellor for the Social Sciences Cluster, The British University in Egypt:**

*Pro Vice-Chancellor for the Social Sciences Cluster*

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It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the Political Science Conference Model (PSCM) at the British University in Egypt. As Pro Vice-Chancellor for the Social Sciences Cluster, I take immense pride in witnessing how the PSCM has become a flagship initiative, reflecting both the academic excellence and the remarkable commitment of our political science students.

Now in its third international edition, the PSCM continues to evolve, offering a space where students can engage rigorously with contemporary global issues. This platform allows them not only to apply theoretical knowledge but to develop the practical competencies that will shape their professional futures.

I applaud the team behind this inspiring event and it was truly inspiring to witness the insightful exchanges and ideas that this year's edition brought to the table.

Warm regards,

**Prof. Wadouda Badran**

Pro Vice-Chancellor for the Social Sciences Cluster

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**Note from Prof. Hadia FakhrEldin, Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration, Economics and Political Science, The British University in Egypt:**

*Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration, Economics and Political Science*

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It brings me immense pride and happiness to celebrate the Political Science Conference Model (PSCM), a distinguished initiative that showcases the remarkable talent, initiative, and academic rigor of our students.

The PSCM is more than just a conference, it is a vibrant demonstration of the transformative learning experience our faculty offers. Through this event, students actively apply what they have learned, engage with real-world political challenges, and sharpen their critical and analytical thinking in meaningful ways.

The PSCM has become a proud tradition of the Department and the Faculty that I had the privilege to observe since its inception and during its growth and development until now. Watching it flourish over the years has been both inspiring and deeply rewarding.

I wholeheartedly commend our students for their exceptional efforts in organizing the PSCM and applaud all participants for contributing to such a rewarding and intellectually rich experience.

Warm regards,

**Prof. Hadia FakhrEldin**

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**Note from Prof. Amany Khodair, Head of the Department of Political Science, The British University in Egypt:**


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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the **fifth international edition** of the Political Science Conference Model (PSCM) — a truly special initiative that continues to showcase the energy, excellence, and dedication of our students at the British University in Egypt.

With its dynamic agenda, thought-provoking panels, and global spirit of collaboration, PSCM offers a unique platform for dialogue that is both intellectually challenging and refreshingly forward-thinking.

I am constantly inspired by the passion, creativity, and leadership our students bring to this experience — from shaping meaningful discussions to presenting innovative research. This year's edition was no exception. It was a joy to witness the richness of ideas, the diversity of perspectives, and the sense of community that defined every moment of the conference. From compelling keynote talks to original student contributions, **PSCMV (2025)** brought to life the values we hold dear: critical thinking, openness, and mutual respect.

To every student who contributed — whether organizing, presenting, or participating — thank you. Your efforts speak volumes about who we are as a department and what we aspire to be.

Here's to many more editions of PSCM — growing stronger, reaching farther, and continuing to amplify the voices of the next generation of political thinkers.

Warmest regards,

**Prof. Amany Khodair**
Head of the Department of Political Science
The British University in Egypt

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# The Economic Chains of Imperial Overstretch: Evaluating the Politico-Economic Implications of the BDS Movement on Israeli Expansionism Since 7 October

Amen Elsayed

## Introduction

Ever since the late 19th century, there has been a clear Zionist strategy to enter the holy land of Palestine and declare it as a homeland for the scattered Jewish minorities around the world (Laqueur, 2003). Year after year, the World Zionist Organisation's expansionist strategy strengthened: killing and displacing millions of indigenous Palestinians even after accomplishing the goal of establishing a Jewish state (United Nations, 2024). Any action after the formation of the Jewish state automatically became legally recognised as an act of war and expansionism as it violates Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and customary international law prohibiting the annexation of land by military conquest (ICJ, 2004). At the time the only logical strategic counter for Palestinians was to resist such hard power and force with similar form of power or force, using guerilla tactics to resist the Israeli expansionism. Later, however, it became clear to the Palestinians that the use of military tactics and hard power was no longer as effective

In this light, and in response to the exacerbating status of the conflict, the Palestinians, in 2005, put forward form of non-violent resistance known as the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. The BDS movement acknowledges the true power of the economy in prolonging expansionism and, therefore, mainly targets the economic profit of specific Israeli and International companies that benefit from settlements and the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories. However, while the BDS movement has cultural and academic dimensions, this paper focuses specifically on the economic implications of the BDS movement on Israel's strategic political goals regarding the Arab Israeli conflict. The paper argues that

while the BDS movement plays a crucial role in deteriorating the legitimacy of the economic support given to Israel by key actors in the international community in times of peace, the BDS movement's aspects of boycott and divestment have an even greater impact in times of war, where more members and activists are taking part in its economic and political campaigns compared to the third aspect of sanctions – predominantly ineffective due to the support provided by certain actors in the international systems to Israel which provides Israel with a sense of impunity from prosecution in international courts.

This paper will first present a brief literature review on the influence of the economy on expansionist political strategies. Then, the paper provides a conceptual framework on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, along with the BDS movement's "theory of change" and specifically the economic implications and purpose that it was meant to fulfil since its establishment in 2005. Thereafter, in support of the literature and to solidify this paper's argument, this paper analyses the current impact that the BDS movement has on Israeli expansionist strategy since October 2023, arguing that BDS has the most effective impact when Israel is most vulnerable and increasingly reliant on greater economic means to pursue its even more ambitious strategic political goals "on multiple fronts." This analysis emphasizes how economic pressure through grassroots mobilization can serve as a powerful tool to counter expansionist policies when traditional diplomatic channels prove ineffective.

## The Economy of Expansionism

One of the most important drivers for any state strategy is the economic means necessary for implementation and to be able to balance between the state's strategic political ambitions and the economic capacity available to achieve them (Luttwack, 1990). In fact, Organski and Kugler (1980) argue that any change to this economy, whether it be direct or

indirect, will always be a perceived threat with a significant impact on the state's strategy and a condition that will surely be taken into consideration in the state's agenda setting.

While the ambitions of states are often limitless, specifically expansionist ones, states often struggle to achieve these ends as a result of having limited "means" necessary for implementation (Kennedy, 1987). According to Luttwack, (1990), the discourse on the core of such means has shifted, if not directly then indirectly, from military means to social and economic means, specifically at the end of the 20th century. Therefore, it is critical to note that a state's strategy is depicted and defined by the rationality of its policymakers to prioritise and balance between the political ambitions of the state, and the economic capacity to implement such ambitions by engaging in a thorough and pragmatic assessment of economic means.

Such economic means could either function as a driver for greater ambitions or as an obstacle to the current ones (Luttwack, 1990; Kennedy 1987). For example, while a thriving economy is not essential for resistance, it remains the most effective form of pre-emptive self-defence, as it enables a state to build long-term military capacity while also enhancing domestic stability. Economic development, therefore, serves a dual purpose: it provides the structural foundation for future military strength if needed, while simultaneously reducing internal grievances and the likelihood of conflict by promoting national satisfaction and resilience (Gilpin, 1981). In addition, if conflict arises, by having a powerful economic status, the state would have the necessary means to conduct its strategy as close as possible to its desired outcomes. This allows for the assumption that a strong economy is the best form of pre-emptive defence and a necessary tool for the implementation of a strategic offensive (Organski, & Kugler, 1980).

**The BDS "Theory of Change"**

While the BDS theory of change is not a comprehensive academic framework, it is a practitioner-driven model that reflects the strategic thinking and lived experiences of those directly involved in the movement. It is therefore important to understand and critically engage with this perspective to grasp what an "ideal" non-violent solution to a violent Israeli occupation might look like from within the movement itself. This practitioner's theory of change outlines both the intended "ends" (freedom, justice, and equality for Palestinians) and the "means" — including boycotts, divestment, and sanctions — through which these goals are pursued. Although it lacks the theoretical rigor of academic models, its relevance lies in its real-world application and influence on grassroots mobilization, making it an essential lens through which to evaluate non-violent resistance strategies in this context. One of the central assumptions of the BDS theory of change is that Israel is an apartheid settler colonial regime that applies an immoral and illegal military occupation against the Palestinian people and territories (BDS, 2025). Therefore, the purpose of the BDS movement is to end Israeli occupation and colonisation of all lands through peaceful, non-violent means. The BDS movement chooses non-violent resistance as a deliberate moral and strategic stance, aiming to expose the asymmetry of power between Israel and the Palestinians while maintaining international legitimacy and broad-based solidarity. Its theory of change rests on the premise that sustained economic and cultural pressure can hold Israel accountable under international law and gradually force a shift in policy without replicating cycles of unneeded violence and hatred.

BDS attempts to build sufficient power at the grassroots, cultural, academic, and civil society levels through global public awareness to put an end to all ties of support from the international community towards Israel (BDS, 2025). By doing so, it is believed that the international community will be able to end corporate and institutional complicity through

participating in consumer and economic boycotts, which would in turn lead to heavy losses for large corporations, institutions or even governments aiding the Israeli occupation both directly and indirectly. BDS also attempts to influence the agenda-setting phase of policymakers within Israel to end complicity within Israel's own apartheid system.

Omar Barghouti, the co-founder of the BDS movement clearly stated in a recent interview that "there are diverse forms of resistance" and that settler colonialism or any form of colonialism cannot be faced with a single form of resistance but rather the resistance must be fit to adapt to the changing dynamics of the oppressors (Barghouti, 2025). He gives the examples of "developing apartheid regimes" where Israel has learned from the apartheid regime in South Africa, and South Africa had learned from the apartheid regime in the United States against the indigenous peoples and the African Americans. Therefore, it would be illogical to assume that the same form of resistance should be applied to all three groups, as each struggle involves unique historical and political contexts that require tailored strategies for effective opposition.

**What is Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)?**

Inspired by the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the BDS movement began as a unified call among more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, trade unions, refugee camps/ networks, women's rights groups, NGOs, and many other institutions (White, 2011). These institutions wanted to form a collective grassroots campaign supported by the international community to pressure Israel into halting its expansionist settler colonial strategy and complying with international law by returning the Palestinians their basic humanitarian rights. Due to the illegal nature of the occupation, recognised by the ICJ (2024) in its advisory opinion, Craig Mokhiber (2024), a former senior UN human rights official, described the BDS movement as "not only a moral imperative […] but also, an international legal obligation." in

this light any form of direct or indirect compliance with the Israeli regime is an illegal act for which responsible individuals and actors should be held accountable for.

There are three main pillars of the BDS movement: and those are the B (Boycott), the D (Divestment), and the S (Sanctions). Each pillar is interlinked with the other, and all have a common target of ending the Israeli occupation through peaceful means by minimalizing Israel's complicit external sources of economic, military, or even technical assistance (Pappe, 2017). According to the BDS theory of change, the fulfilment of these three pillars would pave the way to the end of the occupation and grant the Palestinians their supposedly inalienable right to self-determination (BDS, 2025).

The first pillar and the one, which may have the most significance if the greatest number of participants take part in, is the boycott. The boycott's main target is the sole individual to begin with themselves by controlling their consumer behaviour and avoiding purchasing Israeli-affiliated products. By doing so, the BDS theory of change assumes that Israel's export-based revenues will relatively decrease, which would impact their relative budget expenditures and future agenda-setting and possibly reduce Israel's military budget (White, 2011).

The second pillar is the pillar of divestment, which means to sell the full control of certain business interests or investments. It is important to understand, that foreign direct investments are one of the most impactful factors to any state economy and therefore by encouraging and persuading governments, NGOs, companies, and other institutions to engage in divestment by withdrawing their investments from Israel or even halting specific investment projects (Barghouti, 2011; Barghouti 2025; BDS, 2025). This engagement could have a significant short-term economic impact on Israel which is believed to impact Israel's military capacity towards Palestine and alter Israel political strategy towards the conflict (Halper, 2015; BDS, 2025).

The third and final pillar is the pillar of sanctions. This pillar emphasises the importance of holding Israel accountable under international law and ending "Israel's immunity". The BDS movement attempts to influence international institutions such as the UN to legitimise its campaigns and enforce justice by implementing economic sanctions to hold Israel accountable to its illegal and unethical policies. Any state can take part in enforcing sanctions on Israel, unilaterally or multilaterally and both partially and entirely (Erakat, 2019).

**The Impact of BDS on Israel**

Unfortunately, as Barghouti (2025) argued, in the capitalist system present today, persuasion with profit in mind is much more effective than other legal and ethical arguments, specifically when negotiating with businesspeople. Ever since 2005, the BDS movement has focused primarily on a grassroots approach to find the core links of support for the Israeli regime and cut them through capitalist persuasion built on a legal, ethical, and moral core.

In September of 2024, the BDS movement influenced the city of Portland to become the fourth city to vote to cut investments from complicit companies that have chosen to conduct business with Israel. BDS has also influenced multiple multinational companies (MNCs) to withdraw or alter certain business activities from the occupied Palestinian territories, these MNCs include Veolia, Orange, G4S, SodaStream, and many others (Lapin, 2024). Such withdrawals increase the cost of oppression for Israel and make it more difficult for Israel to normalise its operations and occupation of Palestinian territories. One of the most recent and debated examples of BDS's potential impact is Intel's cancellation of a $25 billion mega-project just 15 miles from Gaza. While the official reasons cited include the instability of investing near an active war zone, BDS advocates, including Barghouti (2025), argue that the movement played a role by mobilizing shareholder activism and public campaigns that framed such investments as not only risky but also ethically and politically unacceptable. Although it

is difficult to isolate BDS as the sole cause, its sustained efforts to stigmatize economic complicity with Israeli military actions have increasingly influenced corporate risk assessments and reputational concerns.

One of the most impactful factors of the BDS campaign is its ability to influence how global public opinion perceives certain corporations ethically and morally as "genocide enablers" or "supporters of colonialism" and how this affects the revenues of certain companies and often leads them to shift their market strategies away from Israel. This could be seen vividly within university campuses across the United States, with university students engaging in peaceful protests to shift their university's complicit agenda towards one that calls for "freedom, justice and equality" (Noor, 2024).

Another pertinent example of this on the corporate level was Puma and its sponsorship for the Israeli national football team, which led many to boycott Puma, claiming the organisation as a pro-genocide corporation. Puma recorded a decline in net income by approximately 42.3% in just a quarter of its fiscal year (Reuters, 2018). This eventually led to Puma's withdrawal, which not only had a significant economic impact but also had an even more significant social impact as it raised awareness to many other corporations that had potential partnerships with Israeli institutions This is because it has made sectors of Israeli surveillance, security, military, and others "reputationally risky" for companies to approach. Not only is their reputation on the line, but they often face various forms of scrutiny from NGOs, human rights groups, and civil society organisations (Reuters, 2018).

Such economic vulnerabilities have altered Israel's cost-benefit analysis in prolonging the conflict. while it may not completely resolve the conflict, the economic vulnerabilities posed by the influence of the BDS movement prevent the conflict from further escalation.

## The Economic Deficit of Israel's Imperial Overstretch

With the events of 7 October 2023 and Israel's overstretching war against not only Palestine but also Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Yemen, Israel's political strategy is requiring much higher military expenditure, which, as mentioned in the section above, requires even greater economic resources. While it may seem as if Israel has become militarily stronger and more capable of going to war due to the "failure" of the BDS movement, according to the Internation Institute for Strategic Studies (2025), Israel has doubled the percentage of its military expenditure concerning the pre-war period in 2022. However, BDS did have a significant economic impact, specifically when analysing Israel export revenues in 2022 with 2023. It can be clearly seen that Israel's total export revenues in 2022 were around $164 billion, and in 2023, they declined drastically to only $69.3 billion (Statista, 2024). With this rate of economic deterioration, it is only a matter of time and resilience until Israel's war comes to an end.

To discern the impact of BDS from the impact of internal instability caused by the war, it is crucial to investigate how the demand of states on Israeli-imports has declined and if so to what extent? Recent data shows a measurable decline in state-level demand for Israeli imports in 2023. For instance, Turkey suspended all trade with Israel in 2024 following the Gaza war, after bilateral trade had already dropped by 23% in 2023. Additionally, Israeli exports to European countries decreased by 9.7%, while imports from the EU fell by 12.8% in the last quarter of 2023 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2024; Reuters, 2024). These shifts reflect not only the immediate impact of regional instability but also growing political and ethical pressure on governments and corporations to reconsider economic ties. This trend supports the broader claim that sustained geopolitical conflict and grassroots movements like BDS are influencing global trade dynamics. Therefore, it can be concluded that Israel's declining export revenues are influenced by the boycotts of Israeli products abroad.

Looking, more closely, the impact of divestment has Israel's foreign direct investment decreasing from $23 billion in 2022 to $15 billion in 2023 and expected to decrease even more in 2024 (Macrotrends, 2024). This implies that the "B" and the "D" in BDS have proven to be significantly impactful. However, the "S" in BDS seems to need the support of those who have the power to enforce sanctions. Israel has not been formally sanctioned by institutions such as the UN due to the United States' complicity and veto power within the UN security council – the only multilateral institution that has the legal right to order economic sanctions as a way of punishment to correct the true "rebels" of the international justice.

**<u>Post-October 2023:  A new potential for BDS</u>**

While the BDS movement has had a significant role since October 7th, there has been a consistent pattern in its activity which is solely reliant on a trend-based curve where social media plays the most significant role and therefore the movement's followers increase dramatically at times of war, specifically when highlighted in the news, but slowly fades as the media turns a blind eye to the conflict. This is a severe threat to the perseverance of BDS movement and its purpose. According to Egel and Ries (2020), this would mean that once Israel uses a non-violent illegal method of occupation, the world will stand silent, and Israel will be unaffected neither economically nor socially and this would kill the core purpose of resistance movements such as BDS: to end the Israeli apartheid regime's settler-colonialism and provide the indigenous people with their inalienable right to self-determination.

In conclusion, every new coloniser needs a new form of resistance to uncover its masks and end its unjust doings. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement has emerged as a powerful means of opposing Israel's expansionist policies, especially during heightened tensions like those following the attacks on 7 October 2023. Although it is difficult to directly measure the movement's economic influence, its strategic significance, particularly in wartime,

is clear by analysing the economic detriment of the state's export revenues and foreign direct investments. The boycott and divestment aspects of BDS have proven to be especially impactful during these times, as global focus shifts to Israel's military operations and occupation strategies. Nevertheless, the sanctions aspect remains predominantly influenced by strategic partnership between Israel and significant Western nations like the United States which provide Israel with a pathway to immunity.

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# Failure of the UN's Climate Action: Paris Agreement and the Case of Israel and Palestine

Hana Adham Mosaad

The effects of climate change experienced so far have been horrible, and the deteriorating conditions of the environment – resulting from human activity – predict even more harm in the future. Such experiences have led global efforts directed towards finding sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions to the current ways of living in attempt at fixing such a daunting issue. One notable example is the United Nations, which has been calling for discussion and action regarding climate change and sustainability for decades. It can be observed to host conferences and treaties such as the Rio Conference and the Paris Agreement most importantly, as well as the Kyoto Protocols and other sustainability goals such as the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. The United Nations was only capable of making progress, but not making considerable necessary changes towards the undoing of climate change because of the structure of the organization and its inability to exercise power and apply consequences.

The threat of climate change is growing and nearing points of no return, yet powerful parties and international organizations still lack the force of implementation to apply effective changes, solutions, and actions. This paper aims to investigate the role of the United Nations in addressing the threat of climate change within the context of conflict and its consequences, specifically by evaluating the effectiveness of the Paris Agreement set in 2015 and its shortcomings. This paper argues that the United Nations is failing to effectively tackle the threat of climate change because of its disregard of disastrous environmental consequences of wars, using the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, and the resulting unaccounted and unregulated emissions, as a case study. The theory of Environmental Peacebuilding is an effective reference that is used to analyze the shortcomings of the United Nations in enforcing peace and climate action.

According to Bun et al. (2024), the incomprehensive design of the Paris Agreement allows the increased greenhouse emissions released by militaries during conflict to go uncalculated, which highlights the weakness of the UN in drafting climate policies and in environmental peacekeeping. This research uses a mixed-method approach to analyze the effectiveness of the United Nations' environmental peacekeeping and climate action by

combining quantitative calculations of the greenhouse gas emissions and qualitative evaluations of the technicalities of the Paris Agreement, drawing on empirical data from existing expert reports, research papers, and published reports. This paper is divided as follows: a conceptual and theoretical framework, then a literature review examining the field of research, followed by highlighting the UN's attempts at climate action, then consequences of Israel's assaults, and finally an analysis of the UN's inadequacies and relevance of the theory.

## Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Regarding the environmental concepts, greenhouse gasses refer to carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide which are produced from industrial activity and combustion and result in the trapping of the sun's heat into the atmosphere (Armstrong et al., 2018). Additionally, climate change refers to the shifting of the general habits of the weather and atmosphere of Earth. Such phenomenon is caused by global warming, which is the release of high levels of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere because of human industrial activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, decomposition or burning of wood or solid waste, or cement manufacturing which traps atmospheric heat that has led to the raising of the global temperature by almost two degrees Celsius (Armstrong et al., 2018).

Environmental Peacebuilding refers to a theory that advocates for cooperation of countries for the sake of tackling ecological and environmental issues that would otherwise have caused conflict (Ogden, 2018). It can also be interpreted to entail applying peacekeeping operations with the goal of environmental protection. One of the main outcomes of the theory is its ability to foster dialogue of accountability on past conflicts and injustices within the context of conflict resolution and prevention. Additionally, it helps acknowledge the interdependency of the parties involved regarding their environmental issues which often leads to long term change in perceptions and behaviors usually through effective policies (Dresse et al., 2018).

## Literature Review

Comprehensive investigation of the topic of the environmental impact of the Israeli aggression on Gaza – specifically within the context of the 2023 war that started on October 7 – has been discovered to be lacking in thorough scholarship, assumingly because of the recency and continuity of the situation. However, research done by Neimark et al. (2024a, 2024b) have published an estimated calculation of the amount of greenhouse gases released during the Israeli aggression on Gaza, in the first months of the war, with specifications on the various

sources. Additionally, Qumsiyeh (2024) wrote about the effect of Israeli military activities on the Palestinian environment which highlighted the efforts of the United Nations. There has been writing on the detrimental consequences of Israeli violence on Palestinian people and land, with many studies discussing topics like ecocide, such as Jaber (2018), however academic sources within the specific context of carbon dioxide levels and climate change are generally limited regarding criticism of the Israeli military.

It has been observed that analysis of greenhouse gas emissions of militaries has been a recent trend within the studies of climate change – such as by Larbi et al. (2024) – however, the focus is more centered on the Ukrainian war and its consequences. The writing of Bun et al. (2024), for example, is a comprehensive analysis of the environmental consequences of the war on Ukraine, which has been used as a reference point of the military activity and environmental effects within the context of international treaties and conventions. However, the text lacks analysis of the effectiveness of such agreements in the face of the uncovered data. Additionally, studies regarding the shortcoming of the Paris Agreement tends to focus on the unaccounted emission of the United States military, not Israel. Overall, there is a lack of writing on the connection between the environmental consequences of the Israel-Palestine war and criticism of the Paris Agreement.

## Climate Attempts by the United Nations

Due to the climate situation's urgency, the United Nations and other international organizations have tried to implement policies to halt the damage. Such attempts at climate action can be traced back to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) or Stockholm Conference in 1972 which was the first conference to discuss issues of the environment (Kennet, 1972). The Rio Conventions took place afterwards in 1992 which established the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, tacklinggrowing concerns about global environmental protection regarding environmental degradation and climate change (Maurer et al., 2009). As mentioned by Lovett (2005), scientists pointed out that such an issue was a result of years of industrialization and increased burning of fossil fuels which influenced the earth's climate. The goal of such a conference was to stabilize the releasing of such hazardous gas emissions.

Another protocol was drafted shortly after, in 1997, called the Kyoto Protocol, which included detailed target goals of reduced emissions along with deadlines for such goals (Lovett, 2005). However, since the protocol had to be ratified by 55 countries and the signing was

gradual and not deemed as urgent by participating countries, the protocol only came into effect in 2005 and ended in 2012 (Lovett, 2005).

Another attempt put in place in 2015 by the United Nations was the Sustainable Development Goals which are composed of 17 targets that mainly focus on goals for peace, security, prosperity, and social justice with the addition of tackling climate change and efforts at ecological preservation (United Nations, n.d.). This is an improvement from the other sustainability-focused Millenium Development Goals established in the year 2000 that did not put into account any climate-related goals even when there has been discussions by the United Nations regarding the issue. The deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals is the year 2030.

The most notable climate attempt by the United Nations to enforce limitations towards climate issues up to date is the Paris Agreement set in 2015, which was seen as the successor for the earlier attempt at climate action, the Kyoto Protocol. Its main goals are to stabilize the average global temperature to under 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels and to increase the ability to adapt to the current and upcoming effects of climate change (Horowitz, 2016). It is regarded as one of the notable climate agreements set by the United Nations so far because it does not only monitor the powerful and developed countries, but all parties. It sets an environment of transparency where all participating countries are forced to report their annual emissions.

## Consequences of the conflict

One of the main conflicts of the century that is also the most environmentally disastrous is the violent Israeli Palestinian war and occupation. The Palestinian people have been subjected to forced displacement, land destruction, and general ongoing disturbances and assaults on their societies and lifestyles for more than 70 years by the Israeli occupation (Qumsiyeh, 2024). The most recent attack on Palestinian territory and people that took place starting in October 2023 (and still ongoing) was the most gruesome, violent, and harmful to the global and local environment in comparison to the multiple previous assaults (Qumsiyeh, 2024).

Besides the cruel devastation, there are severe environmental consequences and destruction. For example, the effects of the Israeli assault on Gaza have had a tremendous effect on the environment, waste, air pollution, noise pollution, soil erosion, and of course greenhouse emissions which are responsible for climate change. As highlighted by Qumsiyeh (2024), it has been uncovered that Israel has dropped 89,000 tons of explosives only from October 7 to

31December 2023, which is more than four times the number of explosives as the 2014 conflict. Studies done by Neimark et al. (2024a, 2024b) have also estimated that Israel generated more than 20,000 tons of carbon dioxide within October to December only from munitions alone, which has almost quadrupled in the following two months.

Additionally, the study claims that the flights present in the war – whether on missions or as suppliers from the US – have generated more than 250,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, also within the first 2 months. With the addition of the emissions of tanks, the total immediate exuding of carbon dioxide released by Israeli forces just through October to December reach almost 300,000 tons (Neimark et al., 2024a). The total greenhouse gases released from the war in October to February exceed those of 26 countries combined (Neimark et al., 2024b). Additionally, it is estimated that to rebuild Gaza after the destruction, it will release emissions that exceed those of 135 countries' annual emissions, as calculated by Neimark et al. (2024b).

The Palestinian side and their defenses and offenses have also generated greenhouse gasses, around 3000 tonnes of carbon dioxide (Neimark et al., 2024b), but they do not compare to the amount produced by Israel. Since the war is currently ongoing, there is more data being published about this topic with every passing day. All the released data point to the same thing; that Israel is producing massive levels of emissions that are fueling the climate disaster by the minute.

**The UN's Weak Action**

Even with all those attempts at sustainability and protecting the environment, the UN is still unfortunately ineffective. For example, the Paris Agreement has been critiqued that it does not have any concrete goals or consequences set in place for the participating parties, only general targets of reduction driven by perceived international pressure (Horowitz, 2016).

The UN applies to the Paris Agreement by legally requiring all parties to be transparent about their emission levels every five-year cycle, and to have Nationally Determined Contributions that the state would hold itself accountable for but does not require specific methods of reduction or levels of emissions (Bodle et al., 2016). Overall, its only legal requirement is transparency and planning, but not actual change. Such a method is clearly ineffective as states would only follow them if they were benefiting, which is not consistent and is conditional, therefore not guaranteed. An example of its inconstancy and lack of enforcement power is the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement under the rule of President Donald Trump in 2017, and again in 2025, making it the only major power not involved in the global agreement (Daly & Borenstein, 2025). Such an action marks a turn

towards worse climate circumstances, as the United States is one of the major emitters of greenhouse gasses and has now become relatively unregulated (Dineen, 2025).

Also, as highlighted by Bun et al. (2024), the Paris Agreement does not account for the greenhouse gases released by the military and its processes. When such study is added to that of Neimark et al. (2024) which uncovers the emissions produced by the Israeli military, it becomes apparent how the UN's method of regulation is weak. Such analysis can conclude that the massive amounts of greenhouse gases released from military activity go unaccounted for and unregulated which is further deteriorating the already fragile climate atmosphere; the opposite of what the UN is aiming for. Not only is Israel committing horrendous crimes, but it is also heavily contributing to climate change that is harming the planet and everyone on it.

## Environmental Peacebuilding

At the current rate of environmental deterioration, an effective resolution to the UN's shortcomings would be to apply the theory of Environmental Peacebuilding on the conflict. There have been multiple attempts at environmental peacebuilding between Palestine and Israel such as the Joint Water Committee which attempted to manage shared bodies of water, but it was found to be inefficient because of the apparent disparities between parties (Dresse, 2019). However, more and better attempts are desperately needed in the current dire state of the climate, and as they would not only be tackling resulting environmental conflicts and climate consequences within the region, but globally.

Such an approach would easily entail that the UN prioritizes protecting the environment and limiting greenhouse gas emissions through the enforcement of peace and ceasefire. It ensures the achievement of the two goals within the theory; stopping the intense expelling of greenhouse gasses (regulate the environment) and ending the violence towards the Palestinian people (building peace and resolve conflict). The UN, however, is failing to implement environmental peacebuilding which would covers the organization's main goals of establishing peace and diffusing the threat of climate change (as claimed in the Paris Agreement). Accordingly, that clearly demonstrates the UN's weakness in achieving its goals.

## Conclusion

The United Nations is failing to upkeep international prosperity because it is structured in a way where environmental peacekeeping is difficult to apply because it lacks binding power and application of consequences. As highlighted, it leaves the application of treaties to the desires of the states, which is unstable and unsustainable. This study was limited by the scarcity of clear quantitative data specifically regarding the emissions of the Israeli military and climate

threats, as most research about military emissions were focused on the US military and the war in Ukraine.

Within the context of the environment, the UN has been proven to have poor application of environmental treaties which can be seen in its negligence of the calculation of greenhouse gases and emissions produced by militaries within the mandated measurements in the supposedly successful Paris Agreement in 2015. Such a calculation is crucial to examine considering the destructive capabilities of modern-day warfare and the urgent state of the climate. This paper proved that the United Nations has failed to tackle the threat of climate change properly and adequately, and its actions can only be considered as attempts, as clearly observed in the 2023 Israeli aggression on Gaza and its brutal and detrimental consequences.

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# Assessing Qatar's Role in the 2023-2025 Gaza War: Strategic Posture and Mediation

Mahmoud Mohamed Hassan Hassan and Ibrahim El Sayed

## **Introduction**

In the foreign policy analysis literature, there is a commonly accepted assumption that small states, particularly from the Global South, are inherently limited in their power to act as third parties during conflicts. (Al-Jaber & Theros, 2024). However, the Qatari case presents new insights into small states' motivations for mediation. Qatari diplomacy represents more than a mere "chequebook diplomacy". Since 1995, Emir Hamad's vision of an active Qatari diplomatic engagement has established profound networks of Qatari relations with opposing parties in various conflicts. Consequently, Qatar has led peace talks among powers whose stances are widely divergent such as Iran and the United States as well as Hamas and Israel. (Guzansky, 2024).

This study focuses on the Qatari mediary efforts in the Hamas-Israeli case, utilising the lens of role theory. It critically assesses how Qatar, as a small state, has managed to exert disproportionate influence in regional affairs during the ongoing Gaza conflict.

This study argues Qatar's ability to act as a regional mediator allows it to exert influence beyond its small-state status, effectively engaging with Israel, Hamas, and the United States. Despite challenges to its involvement, Qatar's mediation efforts enhance its diplomatic leverage and position it as a key facilitator in the conflict. This paper focuses on the Qatari mediation since 7 October 2023 until the January 2025 agreement during U.S. president Joe Biden's administration. This helps determine U.S.-Qatari interaction patterns up until the new Trump administration, whose Middle Eastern strategy is still not obvious.

The paper relies on a qualitative approach, focusing on discourse and content analyses of official governmental statements to understand the Qatari perceptions of its role in the Gaza

War in addition to the expectations of the other actors of Qatari engagement. This paper is divided into four sections. The first reviews the literature on small states' foreign policies. The second introduces role theory in foreign policy analysis. The third examines the self-perceived Qatari role in meditation efforts. The fourth analyses the roles expected of Qatar by Hamas, Israel and the United States during the Gaza War. The final section delves into the implemented Qatari role in the conflict and its endeavours.

**<u>Literature Review</u>**

Small states are typically characterized by a lack of ability to face external threats autonomously and must thus look for protection from stronger powers, regional bodies, or international institutions. This reality is related to their low territorial area and/or population density and weak adaptation and survival abilities, which make dependence a constitutive aspect of their structure (Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020).

Recent scholarships focus on how small states, being aware of their limited military and economic strength, formulate strategic foreign policies to advance their interests. Sinani et al. (2025) claim that small states increasingly pursue multilateralism and form strategic alliances to influence world affairs through active participation in international organizations to ensure their defence (Sinani & Hoxha, 2025).

Gunasekara (2015) identifies bandwagoning as a foreign policy strategy where small states align with powerful states for protection or economic gain. Sri Lanka's post-independence agreements with Britain demonstrated how alignment with a powerful state aimed to protect its sovereignty. However, small states do not rely solely on bandwagoning but also have recourse to coalition formation and/or multilateral forums to counter great power influence (Gunasekara, 2015).

Sishekanu (2019) argues that small states become internationally prominent by focusing on niche areas like climate change or human rights. For instance, small island states are now at the forefront of climate activism. They also employ soft power through cultural diplomacy and humanitarian work to build alliances and establish international norms. Finland and Costa Rica illustrate how sustainability and human rights commitment can bolster global reputation. Small states can have disproportionate political influence through the marriage of specialization and soft power (Sishekanu, 2019). Therefore, this study argues that Qatar's mediation role reinforces its global prestige and diplomatic standing, allowing it to bypass its structural limitations as a small state and play a vital role in resolving the Gaza conflict.

**Theoretical Framework**

Role theory assumes that states are performing actors by playing roles according to a script while adjusting to their objectives and the expectations of other actors (Holsti, 1970). Thus, role theory emphasizes the significance of the "roles" that states adopt in their interactions on the international stage. These roles are grounded in past events, societal norms and cultural expectations (Theis, 2017). Additionally, states' roles reflect a combination of leaders' own perceptions about the appropriate behaviour of their states in addition to expectations of other actors about states' duties and responsibilities (Theis, 2017).

Nevertheless, these roles are not fixed. They are subject to change based on multiple factors including states' re-interpretation of their roles and external pressures (Kara, 2017). Accordingly, the paper utilizes role theory to investigate the Qatari self-perceived role in the Israeli Palestinian conflict, its adaptation to the conflict's external environment, and navigation through and pressures exerted by other actors.

**Role Perception**

Qatar self-identifies as a "neutral, reliable and responsible mediator" as indicated in article 7 of Qatar's Constitution which stipulates mediation as a "key foreign policy priority".

Accordingly, in 2023, Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs established new Ministerial roles such as a team of Special Envoys and other Ministerial and High-Level Officials on Mediation and signed memorandums of understanding with reputed states in negotiation and dispute resolution such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland on mediation expertise (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, 2024). Therefore, by sustaining partnerships with these neutral states, Qatar re-affirms its alignment with this block of "mediators".

The Qatari self-perception as a mediator has shaped its foreign policies towards regional and international disputes. Qatar has been involved in 51 mediation processes – excluding the Palestinian Israeli talks – between 2004 and 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, 2024). Qatar managed to mediate conflicts whose parties have limited willingness for negotiations such as Sudanese military factions, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Russia and Ukraine (Guzansky, 2024). This active Qatari involvement has reinforced its international prestige as an active player in global politics.

Regarding the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, Qatar presented itself as a "credible mediator" not only within intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks but also during Palestinian–Israeli escalation waves. Qatari ideological proximity with Hamas in addition to its openness to Israel reinforce successful Qatari mediations. This means that Qatari pragmatism enables it to bridge the gap between its proximity with Hamas and its mediation roles. Overall, Qatar has engaged in 21 mediation processes on the Palestinian issue since February 2012. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, 2024; Schaer, 2025).

In response to Hamas's October 7 attacks in 2023, Qatar's intervention in the mediation process was monitored by other players. Majed Al-Ansari, the official spokesperson of the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced three urgent objectives for Qatari intervention in the mediation process: preventing the crisis from expanding to other fronts, delivering aid to

the Gaza Strip, and returning the hostages. (Azm, 2024; Dyer, 2023). The neutral nature of these objectives and their alignment with both Hamas and Israeli interests reflect Qatari consistency with its self-perception as a "neutral mediator". Qatar's role as a reliable and experienced mediator helped it rapidly integrate into the core of the current Palestinian Israeli conflict.

## Role Expectations

Qatari moves are shaped by the external environment of its foreign policy, particularly the expectations of major players: Hamas, Israel, and the United States. First, Hamas relies on Qatar for its external interactions. Following the expulsion of Hamas leadership from Jordan, Qatar provided temporary refuge for the organization in Doha before facilitating their return to Amman amidst a dispute between Jordan and Hamas in 1999 (Aras & Al Ansari, 2024). Emir Hamad's visit to Gaza was crucial for Hamas's international legitimacy as no other leader had visited the area following Hamas's accession to power in 2007. (Aras & Al Ansari, 2024).

Hamas expects Qatari mediation to represent its interests and help end the Gaza war. This is supported by a 2024 survey showing that 79% of Palestinians in Gaza believe Qatar's role is instrumental in ending the war (Nowacka, 2024). Hamas also relies on Qatar for humanitarian aid, as evident through Qatar's establishment of the Qatar Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza (QCRG) in 2012 to manage development work (Aras & Al Ansari, 2024). Pre-2023, Qatar was supplying about $30 million each month to Gaza (Schaer & Hollies, 2023). Hamas's emphasis on Qatari humanitarian assistance was duplicated in political leader Ismail Haniyeh's October 2023 statement welcoming proposals for a ceasefire tied to increased assistance (Anadolu Agency, 2023). Overall, Hamas anticipates a continued, active Qatari humanitarian involvement in Gaza.

On the other hand, Tel Aviv views Qatar as "a moderate Arab State". In 1996, Qatar became the only Gulf state to allow the establishment of an Israeli trade office in the wake of the Oslo

Accords. On the same year, the then-Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres paid an official visit to Qatar. (Aras & Al Ansari, 2024). This means that Israel accepts a Qatari role in negotiations despite Doha's strong ties with Hamas.

Yet, Israelis seek to limit Qatari role in the Gaza Strip to a mere "humanitarian provider". Israel allowed a €13 million aid package from Qatar to be delivered to Palestinian workers in 2018 on instalments as a biannual assistance for the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip (Aras & Al Ansari, 2024). As a result, Israelis expect Qatari mediation efforts to achieve two purposes: Exerting enormous pressure on Hamas's leadership in Doha and facilitating the release of the Israeli hostages. (Schaer & Hollies, 2023).

A notable pattern of Israeli official statements should be highlighted. The Israeli position on the Qatari mediation depends on the extent of its capability to achieve the Israeli war aims. Qatar was a key mediator in ending 11 days of clashes between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, an endeavour that earned praise from Israeli leaders (Guzansky, 2024). Moreover, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen stressed that "Qatar has 'moral responsibility' to secure hostages' releases" in October 2023 (Frantzman, 2023). Israel's national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi embraced the Qatari role in releasing Israeli hostages in November 2023, arguing "Qatar's diplomatic efforts are crucial at this time" (Schaer & Hollies, 2023). Tel Aviv perceives Qatari mediation as a mere "path" for returning the hostages and more broadly realizing Israeli policies.

Simultaneously, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu criticized the Qatari mediating role in February 2024. He argued that Qatar is not employing "sufficient pressure on Hamas to secure the release of hostages". Furthermore, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich showed rejection of Qatari-Hamas relations altogether, stating "Qatar encourages terrorism, finances terrorism, pushes terror and is playing a double game" (Sharon & Bachner, 2024). Moreover, Former Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen stated "Doha could influence and enable the

immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by the terrorists" in October 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2024). In Summary, Tel Aviv generally does not approve of the Qatari ties with Hamas if they do not assist the Israeli war aims.

Eventually, The United States perceives the Qatari role in the conflict as an "interlocutor" similarly to the case of the Qatari-Taliban relations. Doha hosts a political bureau for the Taliban at the request of Washington to act as a "communication channel" between the US and the American-classified terrorist group. The Qatari neutral stance helped broker a US-Taliban agreement that facilitated the American evacuation from Afghanistan in 2021 (Schaer & Hollies, 2023). Qatar established a similar office for Hamas in 2012 at the explicit request of the Obama administration, which sought to prevent Hamas from moving its offices to Iran after fleeing Damascus amid Syria's civil war (Al-Jaber, & Theros, 2024).

Accordingly, the Americans expect a harsh Qatari reaction to Hamas' resistant stance in the negotiations. Following US pressure on Qatari leadership, Qatar expelled some Hamas members such as Saleh al-Arouri and Musa Dudin who orchestrated Western-perceived "terror attacks" in the West Bank in 2017 (Pack, 2024). Former American Foreign Minister Blinken argued that "There can be no more business as usual with Hamas." in response to a press question regarding the future of Hamas's political bureau in Doha. (Dyer, 2023).

Similarly, over one hundred American legislators in October 2023 urged Qatar to expel Hamas officials, describing its relationship with the organization as "unacceptable" (Schaer & Hollies, 2023). Both American parties' coalition of 113 members also requested strong U.S. pressure against Qatar and Türkiye to remove Hamas leaders (Al-Jaber & Theros, 2024). By April 2024, Congressman Steny Hoyer warned that inaction should prompt a re-assessment of U.S.-Qatar relations, and Senator Ted Budd proposed stripping Qatar of its status as a Major non-NATO Ally (Al-Jaber & Theros, 2024). For this purpose, the U.S. insisted on Qatar to

coerce Hamas into policy shifts even if it means severing relations. This placed Qatari leadership in a delicate balance between its perceived role as a humanitarian actor and mounting U.S.-Israeli pressures.

**Role Implementation**

Considering these competing interests, Doha strategically aligned its mediation with the priorities of key actors. Qatar leveraged shared goals such as exchanging Israeli hostages for increased humanitarian aid to facilitate progress. In October 2023, the Qatari–Egyptian mediation released two Israeli–American hostages, and a subsequent November 2023 humanitarian pause released 105 Israeli hostages and 204 Palestinian prisoners, satisfying the fundamental Israeli and Hamas demands (Azm, 2024). Similarly, the January 2024 Qatari–French-mediated deal conditioned humanitarian aid and medicine for Gaza civilians on medicine for Israeli detainees (Azm, 2024). Qatari leadership's mediation goals have corresponded to the interests of the other actors.

One might argue that Qatar has navigated American pressures. For instance, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani defended Hamas's presence in his country. He reiterated the U.S. argument on Hamas' office, clarifying "this was started to be used as a way of communicating and bringing peace and calm into the region, not to instigate any war" (Dyer, 2023). Qatar's embassy in Ottawa echoed the same message, "Regarding the Hamas office in Doha, it has been used from the beginning as a channel of communication and a means to bring peace to the region and that is in coordination with our Western allies, particularly the United States." (Dyer, 2023). Qatar balanced its vision as a "neutral mediator" which has open channels with all parties with U.S. expected pressure on the Hamas office. This balance manifests in endorsing the narrative that Hamas's office was "American-requested" in the first place.

Qatar's reaction to the American pressure is derived from its perception as a credible mediator. In 2024, Al Ansari clearly argued "As long as their presence here in Doha, as we have always said, is useful and positive in this mediation effort, they will remain here (Staff & Agencies, 2024). This means that the Qatari leadership stresses that its personal connection to the militant group's key figures is perhaps the most important factor behind Qatar's ability to effectively negotiate in this conflict (Mills, 2023).

However, Mounting U.S. pressure on Qatari political leadership has pushed Doha toward diplomatic manoeuvring. In April 2024, The Qataris signalled their likelihood to suspend negotiations due to the "lack of good faith" of negotiating parties. Furthermore, Doha withdrew from negotiations in November 2024 acting upon its threat. (Nowacka, 2024). In the same month, Doha indicated that "the presence of Hamas leaders on its territory is no longer welcome." Thus, Qatar lifted the political embarrassment from itself and complied with the American and Israeli views. On the other hand, the Qatari Foreign Ministry pointed out that the Hamas leaders left its territory without permanently closing the movement's office, indicating that Qatari communication with Hamas continues. (Gutierrez & Simmons, 2024; Jerusalem Post, 2024)

The Qatari withdrawal from negotiations capitalises on Qatar's realisation of its significance as the "main mediator". Due to "Hamas and Israel's uncompromising stance", as described by Al-Ansari, which hindered meaningful negotiations since December 2023, Qatar decided to utilize its leverage in the conflict to push for a ceasefire. Without Qatari mediation, Israel loses access to its hostages in Gaza. Having praised the Qatari crucial role in previous releases of Israeli hostages, The Israeli intelligence agency Mossad described cooperation with Qatari agencies as "traditionally close" (Guzansky, 2024). Thus, Israeli war aims were not realizable in the absence of the Qatari mediation team. Not to mention that 69 % of Israelis pressured their government to accept a hostage deal. It can be argued that the Qataris understood that

their withdrawal would increase public pressure on the Israeli government and thus, the possibility to reach a ceasefire deal. Qatari government adjusted its mediation tactics to new realities of the Israeli landscape. (Staff, 2024).

Finally, Qatar's response to Hamas's demands combines both humanitarian incentives and mediation strategies. Qatar has maintained partial communication with Hamas amid international pressures. Additionally, Doha's withdrawal from negotiations accounts for the new humanitarian situation on the ground in Gaza. According to UNFPA (2025), one million women in Gaza do not have access to adequate healthcare or shelter. It also reported that only 18 hospitals are operating in Gaza. In other words, the humanitarian crisis within the Strip is severe.

Therefore, Qatari policymakers committed to their Hamas-perceived humanitarian roles by pushing Hamas to agree on an imperfect deal in January 2025 that would enhance the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The Qatari influence in the deal is deduced from Hamas's demands for Qatari guarantees to approve the truce. (Schaer, 2025). This ceasefire permitted the entry of 2400 humanitarian aid trucks into Gaza in only the first three days of the truce. One might argue that the surge in humanitarian aid in Gaza reflects the coherence between Qatari role perception and role expectations of other actors on its humanitarian duties. Currently, Qatari mediation efforts are still ongoing to reach a permanent end to the Gaza War.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper argues that Qatari engagement in the 2023-2025 Palestinian Israeli conflict is deeply rooted in Qatari-self-perception as a "credible mediator". Qatari past experiences in mediating various and complex conflicts have presented Qatar as a trusted mediator for Hamas, Israel, and the United States.

The paper relied on discourse and content analyses to understand the American, Israeli, and Hamas expectations of the Qatari meditation. Doha has confronted numerous challenges including American and Israeli pressures, maintaining close ties with Hamas, and committing to its humanitarian responsibilities in Gaza. In response, the Qataris utilised common issues such as humanitarian aid and the status of the hostages to advance negotiations. Qatari leadership shifted to diplomatic manoeuvring to accommodate the interests of the U.S.–Israeli alliance and push all actors for a deal.

This has resulted in adapting Qatari mediation efforts to the expectations of other actors, culminating in the 2025 ceasefire. This paper showcased Qatari pragmatism and its ability to narrow the gaps between divergent views, utilizing diplomatic manoeuvring. Thus, Qatar played an outsized role in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. However, Qatari mediation efforts are still ongoing in pursuit of a new ceasefire deal requiring more literature, especially with a new US administration in office.

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# Beyond Conflict: Bedouin Identity and Multicultural Integration in South Sinai

Menna Tallah Yasser

In a world woven with diverse cultures, ideologies, and belief systems, identity is a powerful force that impacts social dynamics and human interaction. In the context of the Middle East, a region coated with a rich history, cultural diversity, and geopolitical complexities, identity holds the potential to either create conflict or cooperation within the political context. This dichotomy has generated scholarly debate. The first group argues that identity plays a role in fueling political violence. They argue that when individuals strongly identify with a particular group, it can lead to exclusionary attitudes towards other groups, which eventually manifest as political violence. This perspective relates identity to political violence and conflict (Levi, 2007; Maynard, 2015; Cook-Huffman, 2008). The second group of scholars argues that identities can strongly influence cooperation. The variety of social identities developed culturally to support collaboration between people meeting various demands in various contexts. The way that social identity is structured and how much it is used for assortment is linked to how societies are structured, and social identity makes assortment easier to coordinate successfully. Identity significantly expands on the idea that ethnic identities help maintain cultural boundaries (McElreath and Boyd, 2007; Barnhard, 1969; Khan and Hoey, 2017). After reviewing the literature, the research question arises: how can different cultural identities coexist and cooperate without conflict and contribute to the uniqueness and richness of the larger community?

This paper argues that cultural identity alone does not inherently lead to conflict or cooperation. Instead, it is the surrounding social, political, and economic conditions, including state policies, access to resources, and patterns of inclusion or marginalization, that determine whether diverse cultural identities coexist peacefully or come into tension. Through the case of

the Bedouin in South Sinai, the paper demonstrates how mutual understanding, recognition, and equitable engagement can foster cooperation, even within a diverse and shifting social landscape.

The first section of this paper provides a theoretical framework that tackles multiculturalism theory and compares the melting pot and salad bowl theories and their relevance to the study. Second, this study investigates the Bedouin community in South Sinai and describes their culture and social characteristics and how their identity contributes to society's richness and diversity. Also, it creates tourism opportunities through cultural practices and traditions. Then, the paper concludes by analyzing the Egyptian government's post-2014 policies towards the Bedouin community.

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining semi-structured interviews with participant observation to explore Bedouin identity and multiculturalism in South Sinai. The paper draws insights from three in-depth interviews with key community figures. These individuals were selected for their deep involvement in local affairs and their recognized authority in representing Bedouin perspectives.

Fieldwork also included participant observation at social gatherings and local events, which provided contextual insight and supported the interpretation of interview data. While the limited number of interviews constrains the scope of empirical analysis, this paper offers a preliminary contribution to understanding the lived experiences of Bedouins. The study forms part of an ongoing research project, with further data collection and thematic analysis planned.

**<u>Constructive Definition of Cultural Identity</u>**

Cultural identities are expressed in the deeply ingrained values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and social practices through the categories and labels that individuals give to themselves and others to indicate where they belong; the indexed speech patterns and behaviors

that people use to carry out their identities; and the interpretations that other people make of those indices. It serves as a foundation for self-identification and shapes one's sense of belonging and affiliation within a larger societal context. Cultural identity provides individuals with a framework through which they interpret the world, understand their place in it, and establish meaningful connections with others who share similar cultural backgrounds. Cultural identity promotes diversity and inclusivity and encourages the recognition and appreciation of different cultural perspectives and practices (Joseph, 2012).

**Theoretical Framework**

The study is founded on the theory of multiculturalism, which is associated with cultural identity. Multiculturalism focuses on addressing the challenges and opportunities that arise from cultural diversity within a society, both at the national and community levels. Sociologically, multiculturalism assumes that society benefits from increased harmony of different identities (Adler, 2002). Multiculturalism typically develops according to two theories: The melting pot theory and the salad bowl theory. The melting pot theory assumes that various immigrant groups will tend to "melt together", abandoning their cultures and eventually becoming fully absorbed into one society. As cited in It involves the merging of the lifestyles of immigrants and hosts, resulting in a shared way of life that is constantly developing (Meier, 2019; Park & Burgess, 1924; Woofter, 2019; as cited in Ayden, 2019).

Regarding the salad bowl theory, unique identities are maintained, individuals celebrate and share their unique cultural way of life, language, tradition, and behavior. Compared to the melting pot, the salad bowl theory offers greater opportunities for integration. In a metaphorical sense, we can choose which elements to include in our salad, omitting some and adding more of others according to our needs. Because of this, the metaphor of the salad bowl not only respects the uniqueness of the ethnic identities it symbolizes but also opens the door to the selective integration of various ethnic groups according to the need for such integration in host

communities. Given that groups have varying propensities to integrate based on their predispositions for cultural norms and lifestyles. The salad bowl theory holds significant application to the South Sinai governorate, as over the past three decades, global processes have significantly shaped the social reality of the South Sinai region in Egypt. The region has evolved from a politically disputed borderland to a tourist area and residential settlement. These changes have urged indigenous Bedouin nomads into urbanization and introduced new populations into coastal towns, including Egyptian citizens resettled from mainland areas and Europeans seeking a warm climate and affordable living (Karkabi, 2013). Although there are different identities within society, Bedouin identity embraces the diversification and uniqueness of the whole society.

**Bedouin Social Life in South Sinai[1]**

The tribe continues to be the fundamental social unit among Bedouins. Tribal loyalties are strong; most Bedouins identify as belonging to a specific tribe or even a sheikh (Glassner, 1974). Bedouin social life is centered around blood ties. The population is organized into tribes, clans, and families, with the sheikh at the top of each tribe, assisted by tribal leaders and customary judges. Every tribe is unique. Each tribe restricts its hunt for food and water to the boundaries of its region. The Bedouin never leave their area except for compelling justifications. The loyalty of the Bedouin is first due to their tribe. The Bedouin are brought up with adherence to the principles of brotherhood, neighbor sanctity, truth, and honesty (Rashwan, 2021; Gilbert, 2013). In their society, tribal institutions and familial relationships are essential for fostering a feeling of self, community, and support for one another. The Bedouin concept of collective duty and extended family is strongly embedded in the community, promoting harmony and collaboration.

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[1] According to Gilbert (2013), in the Middle East, Nomads known as Bedouins mostly live in Yemen, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Libya. It peans people live in the desert (Fakhrany et al.2021).

Bedouins in South Sinai (ancestors of the tribespeople who came and settled here about 800 years ago) consist of 8 different tribes.[2] The consequences of these developments have significantly impacted the tribal identity of the Bedouins in South Sinai. Strict tribal rituals and regulations have formed the foundation of Bedouin culture. Cutting down "green trees" is forbidden by tribal law; the punishment carries a maximum of three 2-year-old camels or their monetary equivalent, according to Bedouin sayings. "Killing a tree is like killing a soul." One of the biggest turbines, Al-Muzeina, manages the protected areas of Nabq and Abu Glum. This shows the collaboration between Bedouin tribes and the government in preserving natural resources.

## Bedouin Women's Embroidery and Fashion

The history and culture of the Sinai Bedouins are communicated through Bedouin Handicrafts. Wool is the most important raw material utilized in artisan production in South Sinai. Most wool produced is from sheep, whose wool is mostly utilized to construct light-colored carpets. Expert weavers can occasionally produce big, heavy, striped woolen bags that hang over the shoulder and resemble little, former flour-carrying camel bags. Rather than being made locally, the gorgeously colorful knitted belts, tassels, and bags that adorn the camels in South Sinai are imported from North Sinai. Women make traditional Bedouin embroidered clothes inside their small houses, under the supervision of some civil associations in Sinai, aiming to increase Bedouin women's income and preserve the Sinai heritage.

Buying these mostly homemade outfits with superb Bedouin personality is a popular activity for foreign tourists. What makes Sinai's costume stand out the most is that it symbolizes

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[2] Tribes of South Sinai are Al-Ulaiqat: they live from the Grendel Valley to Ramla, and Muzainh: Their origins can be traced back to Banu Harb, a region renowned for its love of truth and harmony. AlAwarmah: They live in a location extends from AlRamla to al-Tur city's southern region. They are residents of Al-Tur; Saeed Awlad: They are residents of Al-Tur; Qararsha: It was allegedly from the Quraish tribe, which lives in the center of Al-Tur city; and AlJebeliya: They reside in the Al-Tur Mountain; which they are a part of. (Public Administration for Editing, 2021).

a significant part of the Bedouin identity. It refers to the tribal background; a Bedouin woman's embroidered attire may reveal her tribe (Rashwan, 2021). An interviewee, Saleema ElGably from the El Jebeliya tribe and Founder of the Sinai Arts Foundation for Handicrafts and Heritage, said:

> Bedouin women share their remarkable journey of empowerment and innovation by integrating their deep connection with nature and their traditional role as sheep herders. Inspired by the beauty of their surroundings, they created an embroidery application that reflects their heritage. Recognizing the need to adapt to the times, they infused this traditional craft into everyday items, combining authenticity with contemporary designs.

This endeavour, in addition to protecting their traditional heritage, also gave Bedouin women more economic options and strengthened their sense of pride within the Community. Their heritage-inspired products have gained recognition locally and internationally, fostering a greater understanding and respect for the Bedouin way of life.

**Bedouins in the Tourism Industry**

For several Bedouin tribes, the growth of the tourism sector has been a hopeful economic and cultural force. Some Bedouins operate in the tourism sector as owners and managers of their businesses that draw on their unique culture and tradition. For Bedouin communities, tourism represents an opportunity to enhance their standard of living (Marx, 2013). Furthermore, it preserves their cultural identity while also empowering them (Homa, 2007). For example, since the early 1980s, a great number of Bedouin towns and camps have been constructed; all of them are owned and run by Bedouins. The introduction of Bedouin culinary variety, presents, and regular performances, coupled with the construction of cappuccino services, provides opportunities for tourists to learn more about Bedouin culture and traditional ways of living. In addition to acting as examples for visitors to follow. These Bedouin tourism destinations serve as the main points of contact for many tourists with

Bedouins and as instructional resources about Bedouin culture by demonstrating to visitors what it is like to live like a Bedouin. In an interview conducted with El Sheikh Gomaa Farag, one of the Trabeen Tribe in South Sinai, he said that most of the Bedouins are working in the tourism industry, and they inherit the job from their fathers and most of them can speak fluently more than one foreign language. This emphasizes the contribution of Bedouin's identity to the economic situation by integrating it into the tourism industry.

## The Role of the Egyptian Government in South Sinai

Integrating Bedouins into various development projects is one of the sustainable development goals adopted by the Egyptian president, El-Sisi. The governor meets periodically with Bedouin sheikhs and elders and listens to their demands. The government is working to improve living standards and provide job opportunities, with a focus on integrating all segments of society into sustainable development. As evidence of Bedouin empowerment, the Assistant Governor of South Sinai, Dr. Gaber Fatih, is from the Muzayna tribe. He emphasizes that tribal affiliation plays an effective role in development and is keen to preserve all elements of development in South Sinai to advance society in all fields, whether environmental, economic, or social. He also pointed out the keenness of the Sinai citizens to participate in the development process in the governorate, as evidenced by taking advice from Bedouin Sheikhs and elders in national projects.

Major General Wael Mostafa, Head of the Executive Authority for Sinai and Canal Cities Development, emphasized the authority's commitment to achieving real development in Sinai, in line with the directives of the political leadership. This includes meeting citizens' demands and providing essential services such as housing, agriculture, electricity, water, and sanitation. The authority has implemented developmental and service projects across cities, villages, and Bedouin communities in South Sinai to ensure a dignified life for residents. Among these projects are 17 model farms in valleys to meet agricultural needs, create job

opportunities, and achieve crop self-sufficiency. Additionally, electricity has been extended to valleys, roads connecting valleys to cities have been paved, and Bedouin homes have been constructed to encourage settlement. Currently, 60 new Bedouin homes are being built in Al-Jebel village, with 45% completion. This entails the government's efforts to integrate identity into society, which is crucial for promoting social cohesion and harmony between all citizens.

In this context, this paper provides recommendations for the government to integrate identities in society. Firstly, through policies and legislation, the government can recognize and protect the rights of individuals from different identity groups, actively promoting integration. Laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and other protected characteristics create an environment where people feel valued and included. Additionally, affirmative action policies can address historical inequalities and promote diversity, further contributing to the integration of marginalized groups. Secondly, government institutions can foster inclusive governance and representation. By ensuring diverse representation in decision-making bodies such as parliament, cabinets, and local governments, governments can reflect the diversity of their societies. This allows individuals from different identity groups to have a voice in policymaking, facilitating the integration of multiple perspectives and interests. Furthermore, government initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue, education, and awareness can also contribute to the integration of diverse identities. Education policies that include comprehensive and accurate representations of different cultures, histories, and identities foster understanding, empathy, and respect among individuals. Government-funded programs that facilitate interactions and cultural exchanges between different identity groups can further build bridges and promote integration.

In conclusion, this study reveals that Bedouin identity, when nurtured within a multicultural framework such as the "salad bowl" model, becomes a powerful force for both social cohesion and cultural resilience. Unlike assimilationist models that dilute minority

identities, multiculturalism allows cultural groups like the Bedouins to maintain their distinct traditions while actively participating in broader national life. The integration of Bedouin cultural heritage into sectors like tourism not only supports local economies but also affirms the value of indigenous knowledge and identity in contemporary Egypt. The findings underscore the importance of recognizing and institutionalizing cultural diversity as a strength rather than a challenge. Governmental policies should move beyond symbolic recognition and work toward inclusive and participatory frameworks that engage Bedouin voices in decision-making processes, particularly in education, economic development, and heritage preservation. Supporting initiatives that promote traditional crafts, multilingualism, and cultural expression can empower communities and foster a deeper sense of national belonging. While this paper presents a limited empirical scope, it offers an entry point into understanding how identity and multiculturalism intersect in the everyday lives of marginalized communities. Future research should expand the empirical base and explore how policy reforms can sustainably support Egypt's Bedouin populations' cultural autonomy and socio-economic well-being.

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# The Ramifications of the Fall of the Bashar Al-Assad Regime on the Push and Pull Factors Affecting the Return Intentions of Syrian Refugees in Türkiye (from December 2024 to February 2025)

Mireille Ayman and Tierney Joel

## **Introduction**

The fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime in Syria has come as a shock to the entire international community. With the regime that had driven over half the Syrian population out of their homes gone, the focus is now directed at the Syrian refugees whose presence in host countries has become increasingly securitized (Kayaoglu et al., 2021). Specifically, Türkiye, which hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees, 2.9 million as of December 2024, has seen a rise in the hostility facing Syrian refugees and great political will to have them return (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Thus, it is important to examine how this development will impact the Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye and in driving their return intentions, particularly. This paper argues that Syrian refugees are likely to gradually return to Syria due to the push factors from Türkiye, such as poor economic conditions, decline in social cohesion, and the employment of propaganda and the pull factors to Syria including improved internal conditions, good governance mechanisms and a significant increase in available social services. To do so, this paper will provide an extensive literature review, provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for the push and pull theory of return migration and the propaganda model. Then, utilizing a qualitative, secondary literature-based approach, they will be employed to assess the push and pull factors affecting Syrian refugees in Türkiye and how they affect their return intentions.

## **Literature review**

## **Pull Factors Towards Syria**

Upon reviewing the literature, the emphasis on security as a key determinant of return migration to Syria is prevalent (Abdul-Talib and Mohamed, 2020; Husein and Wagner, 2023; Mencütek, 2019). In addition, Husein and Wagner (2023) and Mencütek (2019) highlighted that return intentions are especially responsive to changes in the country of origin[3] while Alrababah et al. (2023) and Yavçan (2019) supported this by claiming that pull factors, especially the dissipation of threats and guarantees of physical integrity, outweigh push factors in terms of importance. Scholars highlighted that refugees' considerations of return weighed institutional differences between the two countries, especially economic conditions, access to essential services, availability of safe housing, and property ownership. (Alrababah et al., 2023; Beaman et al., 2022; Husein and Wagner, 2023; Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Kayaoglu et al., 2021; Sönmez, 2015; Yavçan, 2019). There is also a great consensus that an overwhelming majority of refugees residing in Türkiye intend to return to Syria, especially if the situation improves, infrastructure is reconstructed, and a new government is formed in Syria, which is a conditional type of return (Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Kayaoglu et al., 2021; Mencütek, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Kayaoglu et al. (2021) claimed that Syrians prioritized access to livelihoods, property, and essential services, while Alrababah et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of the existence of a social network. Some have also stressed that the Turkish government allowing visit permits to Syria is favorable to return intentions[4] (Mencütek, 2019; Yavçan, 2019).

**Push Factors from Türkiye**

According to Husein and Wagner (2023), the conditions in Türkiye are key in driving return migration to Syria. They attributed this to the lack of an official refugee status which

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[3] Husein & Wagner (2023) found that when considering the distant future, more than two-thirds of the respondents wanted to return to Syria. They also said half the refugees in Turkey wanted to return compared to 13% of them in Germany

[4] By 2018, 57% out of 252,000 of Syrians who undertook go-and-see visits remained in Syria (Mencütek, 2019)

exacerbates feelings of insecurity and limits the state support they receive since refugees in Türkiye are granted "temporary protection"[5] and are expected to return after conflict resolution in the country of origin (COO) (Husein and Wagner, 2023; Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Loris-Rodionoff, 2020)[6]. In addition, there is a consensus in the literature that Syrians face exploitative economic conditions, insufficient access to public services, poor average income and living conditions, and limited education and employment opportunities due to selective integration policies (Husein and Wagner, 2023; Kayaoglu et al., 2021; Mencütek, 2019). Chatty (2017), Ferris and Kirişci (2016), and Kayaoglu et al. (2021) asserted that there are increased hostile sentiments of Turkish citizens towards Syrians, especially due to the public rhetoric of them being a burden on infrastructure and economy due to competition on limited resources[7]. This was also exacerbated by a lack of transparency in government policies, hardline government opposition, and increased intercommunal violence (Bahcekapili and Cetin, 2015; İçduygu, 2015; Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Mencütek, 2019). Return is also the politically preferred option, claimed İçduygu and Nimer (2020) and Kayaoglu et al. (2021), and there have been many instances of deportations and forcible return of refugees, especially due to the limited crisis management capacity of Turkish authorities.

**Main Obstacles to Return**

Husein andand Wagner (2023) andand Yavçan (2019) found that the infighting between different factions and the resultant instability and insecurity of living conditions and economic situation are

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[5] They are issued a Kimlik (temporary protection ID) which entails non-refoulment and registration in Turkey that is only viable as long as they are unable to return due to the situation in Syria. Kimliks are also difficult to obtain even though its necessary for lawful residence and are granted access to education and health services. Thus their status falls under a weak legal framework (Loris-Rodionoff, 2020).

[6] It is important to highlight that Turkey has very lax refugee protection laws where it is only party to the 1951 Refugee Convention which imposes a geographic limitation in granting asylum seeking status to Europeans and has a law made in 2006 to promote settlement of those of "Turkish descent and culture" (İçduygu, 2015)

[7] Chatty (2017) attributed this to Turkish citizens feeling that they are losing their jobs to Syrians since they accept lower wages and provide a lot of unskilled labor. Içduygu & Nimer, 2020 also raised the point that since government is forced to allocate more resources to Syrians, Turkish people may perceive them as competitors for scarce resources.

the main obstacles to return. Many scholars also emphasized destruction of infrastructure and property, and the low quality of public services as main impediments (Balcilar and Nugent, 2018; Husein and Wagner, 2023; Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Mencütek, 2019). Yavçan (2019) also added that the situation in Syria must be sufficient for return and their ability to reintegrate, where an increase in integration in Türkiye makes it less likely for a migrant to return, according to Içduygu and Nimer (2020). Return is also less likely when there is a risk of not being allowed back, which means that the Turkish government allowing visit permits to Syria is favorable to heighten return intentions (Yavçan, 2019). Kayaoglu et al. (2021) highlighted the lack of trust in the government or any possible future power holder in Syria as a substantial obstacle to their return. Lack of credibility and reliability of information on the situation also plays a big part in their perception and willingness to return in addition to the mobility costs of return (Alrababah et al., 2023; Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Yavçan, 2019). Yavçan (2019) asserted that the degraded relationship between the two countries is a hindrance to the sustainability of return cooperation between both sides.

**Propaganda and Its Effect on Refugees and Policy Makers**

Asher et al. (2023) emphasized the large role the media plays in framing issues, which influences public opinion and thus reinforces existing political narratives and alters public perception of issues. Ibanez (2023) highlighted the media's substantial role in shaping policy responses through spreading positive and negative narratives. Cretu (2017) presented distortion of facts, exaggeration/minimization, demonization or mystification as the main tools the media uses to manipulate narratives (framing). In addition, according to Ibanez (2023), this framing contributes to the rise of anti-immigrant policies andand sows negative public discord. Thus, the media greatly impacts how certain groups of people will be treated during a crisis andand what policies may be implemented (Cretu et al., 2017). Hyunjin et al. (2016) and Johan et al. (2018) applied this onto

social media, where main parties in conflict use social media for their propaganda purposes whilst also sharing attention-grabbing images and deliberately using main themes to solidify their political standing. Ibrahim (2016) highlighted that while social media presents alternative news from the mainstream ones, the majority still follow mainstream media and are highly influenced by it, especially through their use of flak. Johan et al. (2018) found that the spread of extremism is linked to the fact that online propaganda has often been accepted as valid information, which affects user perceptions of racial issues. Furthermore, Johan et al. (2018) emphasized the role that misrepresentation and disinformation in social media play in influencing public opinion by reinforcing neo-racist ideas and supporting racist anti-Muslim narratives and thus affecting decision-makers and policies, especially with regards to immigration and minority rights. Thus, according to the literature, there is a clear link between media propaganda and the increased polarization among public opinion, leading to a rise in extremist negative public opinions

**Theoretical framework**

**Push and Pull Theory of Return Migration.**

This paper will employ the Push and Pull Theory of Return Migration in order to assess the effects of the fall of Al-Assad's regime on Syrian refugees in Türkiye. push and pull theories of migration are based on the hypothesis made by Lee (1966) where migration is selective and occurs when there are negative factors in the COO (push factors) and positive ones in the destination country (pull factors) which lead to the flow of migrants.[8] Furthermore, the decision to return to COO is based on comparing these 'push' and pull' factors (Alrababah et al., 2023; Constant, 2020; Lee, 1966). This paper adopts the assumption of Gmelch (1980) that positive attributes of the 'pull'

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[8] According to Lee (1966), overwhelmingly negative factors at COO leads to migrants being less selective of country of destination. Building on this, many Syrians were forced to migrate to Turkey seeing as it is the most convenient. So migrants are predisposed to returning to Syria their COO since their choice wasn't based on proper selectivity.

factors are more influential than the 'push' factors in return migration decision-making and that return intentions change based on perceptions of security in COO (Husein and Wagner, 2023).

This paper utilizes the base framework of Mohamed and Abdul-Talib (2020) who divided push and pull factors into three categories which are economic, political, and situational an adds a social one as provided by Urbański (2022). These factors include the incentives for the different types of return highlighted by Cerase (1974), and the factors brought up by Gmelch (1980), Liu et al. (2024), and Constant (2020). The importance of economic and institutional push factors and pull factors of political conditions and financial stability underscored by personal motivation have a significant influence on decision-making (Husein and Wagner, 2023; Liu et al., 2024).
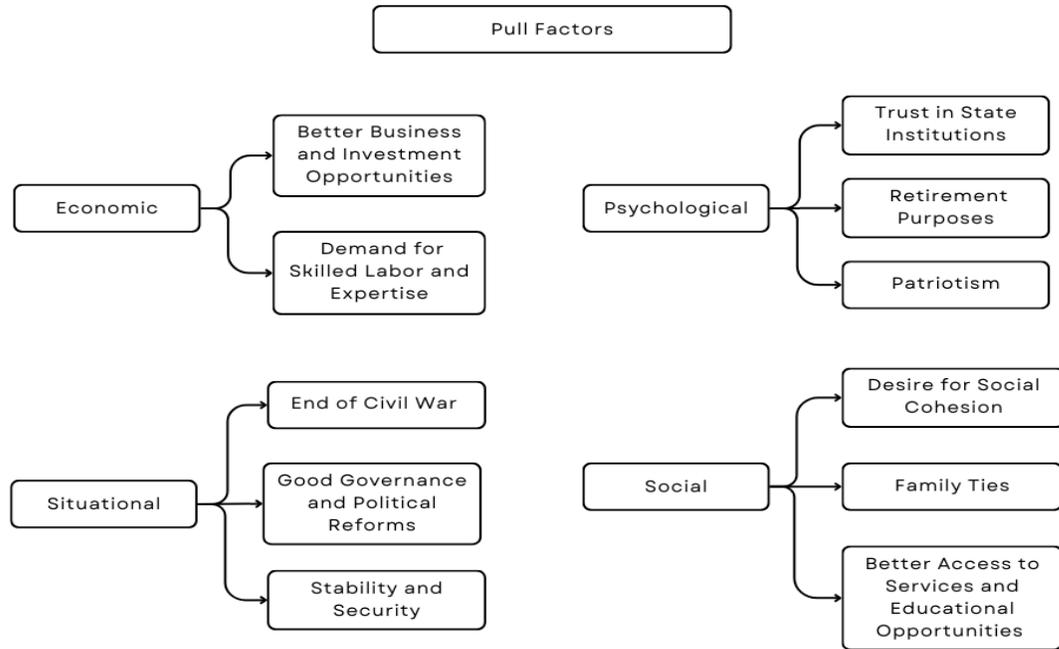
The following diagram illustrates the main push factors (Figure One) and pull factors (Figure Two) of return migration:

Figure One
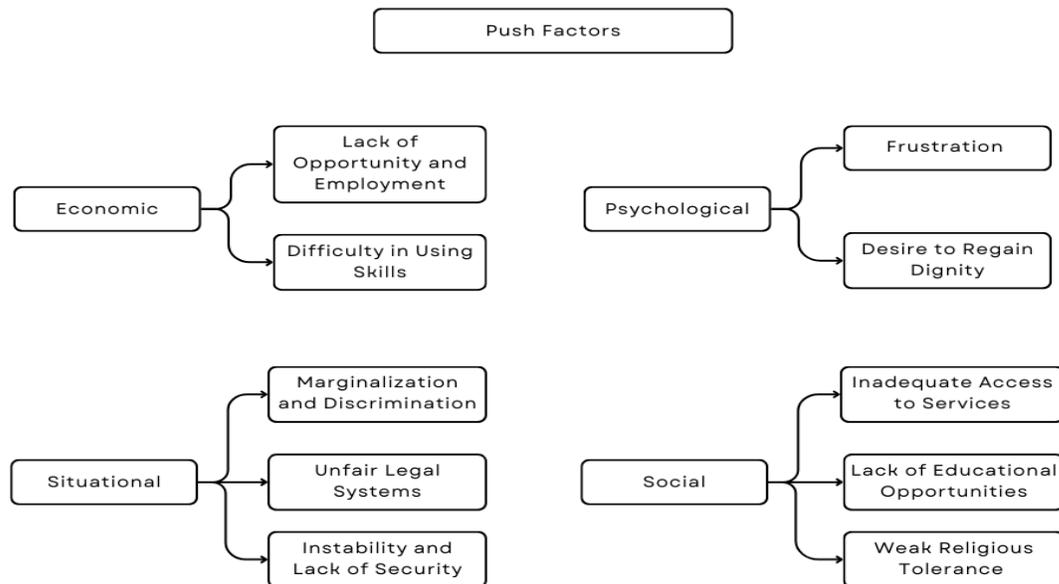


Note;: This diagram was created by the author and represents key factors from the literature (Cerase, 1974; Gmelch, 1980; Husein & Wagner, 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Mohamed & Abdul-Talib, 2020)

Figure Two



Note;: This diagram was created by the author and represents key factors from the literature (Cerase, 1974; Gmelch, 1980; Husein & Wagner, 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Mohamed & Abdul-Talib, 2020)

## Propaganda Model

In order to assess the effect of propaganda on the push factors affecting Syrian refugees in Türkiye, the propaganda model will be employed. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), the propaganda model focuses on the extent of the effect power and wealth have over mass media and its production of propaganda. This model outlines 5 sets of filters that interact and reinforce one another. These are the size and ownership of the media, having advertising as a primary income, the reliance on government, business, and 'experts' information, flak as a means of disciplining the media, and anti-communism. The raw material of news must pass through these successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print and thus greatly impact or limit the premises of discourse and interpretation, and set the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place

(Herman and Chomsky 1988). Thus, these filters explain the basis and operations of what amounts to propaganda campaigns (Herman and Chomsky 1988).

## Case study

With the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime, Syrian refugees are faced with an unprecedented situation. In order to assess how they would perceive this change and whether this would incite return intentions, this paper will discuss the push and pull factors of return migration as influenced by these new developments.

## Methodology

This paper applied a qualitative research methodology through the use of a secondary literature-based approach in order to effectively comprehend and analyze push and pull factors affecting Syrian refugees in Türkiye. It selected relevant academic literature in addition to reports from established organizations. Since this paper explores a recent development, there is a lack of academic scholarship on the subject (especially for the pull factors to Syria). Thus, this paper used a mixture of existing academic articles and credible newspaper articles from a variety of sources.

## Push Factors from Türkiye

**Economic factors.** Many Syrians experienced great job loss and resorted to working less secure short-term jobs due to the pandemic (UNHCR, 2022). A large portion are employed in the informal and low-skilled sector and are often hired illegally at minimum wage which has decreased over time (Erdoğan et al., 2021; Krasilova, 2024).

**Situational Factors**. Türkiye has deported thousands of Syrians back to Syria even before the fall of the regime, oftentimes while ignoring their legal status having many placed in safe-zones (BBC News Türkçe, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025b; Içduygu and Nimer, 2020; Rifai,

2022).[9] In addition to these weak legal protections, state repression, lack of granting citizenships, denial of legal residency contribute to great insecurity and instability faced by Syrians (BBC News Türkçe, 2024; Uludağ, 2024).[10] With Erdogan aiming to reduce the mounting domestic pressure on his party against the Syrian refugees, this development is a golden opportunity to start driving refugees back to Syria and the Turkish government has undertaken the necessary procedures to facilitate the Syrian people's return including the facilitation of voluntary return and go-and-see visits (Elcano Royal Institute, 2025; Rifai, 2022). Furthermore, the Turkish Interior Minister has announced that heads of Syrian families have the right to visit Syria three times from January to June of 2025, which can facilitate their decision to return (Altayli and Al-Masri, 2025).

**Social Factors.** Social solidarity and acceptance towards Syrians are at a steeping low where 80% of Turkish citizens see Syrians as a financial burden on the Turkish state (UNHCR, 2022).[11] Discrimination and anti-immigration sentiments are at an all-time high due to the ongoing economic crisis, inflation, rising food costs, decrease in incomes and perceived competition for the labor market (Erdoğan et al., 2021; Global Finance, 2024; Krasilova, 2024; Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 2024; Rifai, 2022). This rise in discrimination and hostility has led to a great decrease in social cohesion (Erdoğan et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2022). Furthermore, only 1.4 million out of 3.7 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye received assistance from Turkish institutions in 2022 and currently they are facing restrictions on access to humanitarian services (Uludağ, 2024; UNHCR, 2022). Moreover, 450,000 refugee children remain out of school (Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 2024).

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[9] Many were also kept in detention camps at the border and were sent to 'Safe -Zones' inside Syria (Rifai, 2022).
[10] In addition, Turkey is only obligated to guarantee protection to refugees until the cause of their situation has been resolved (Human Rights Watch, 2024).
[11] Syrian refugees are seen as one of the top three problems that their country is facing (UNHCR, 2022).

**Psychological Factors**. There are growing psychosocial needs among adolescents and youth particularly (Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 2024). Life as a 'guest' is inherently lower in terms of quality and takes away from the personal dignity of refugees. With the rising public sentiments against them, Syrians are put in inhumane situations framed as thieves of resources and as having no right to stay.

**Propaganda as a Push Factor: Role in Increasing Hostile Turkish Public Opinion**

A key aspect that plays into all of these push factors is the usage of propaganda by different political entities. In order to mobilize people and gain their support, the framing of Syrians as the 'other' or as the enemy is a tactic often used by Turkish parties. The Turkish media has a huge role in filtering the information that is passed down to Turkish society, especially affecting public discourse surrounding certain issues like migration and refugees. Hostility towards the Syrian refugees has risen, as seen in the anti-Syrian riots of 2024, which Turkish President Erdogan has said is being fuelled by the opposing party in Türkiye (Aljazeera, 2024). To determine the extent of influence that the media has exerted on Turkish society with regards to driving anti-refugee rhetoric and xenophobic sentiments, thus exacerbating the divide between Turkish society and Syrian refugees, this paper will use the propaganda model.

The Turkish media filtering of information is consistent with at least four of the five filters used in the propaganda model. The first filter looks at who owns the media, and in Türkiye, the eight most popular TV networks that are not state-controlled but are all owned by 5 private companies. Although they are independent news outlets, they still have ties to the government or private businesses, for example, Halk TV an independent outlet was owned by the CHP's Türkiye's opposing party (Tahiroglu, 2022). The second filter investigates if advertising is the main source of income for media outlets. Turkish advertising is mainly owned by private companies that have

links to the government (Yanatma, 2016). The advertising share of newspapers that are critical of the government has dramatically declined, whereas the share of newspapers widely seen as operating as mouthpieces of the government, has sharply increased (Yanatma, 2016). The third filter focuses on how mass media relies on information provided by the Government. In 2022 a new law was introduced that focused on 'disinformation' where it gives the government complete access and control of what information is given out and what is censored, thus greatly increasing government involvement. Flak is the fourth filter of the model and its main focus is on how the government can discipline the media which the aforementioned bill is greatly linked with it where it outlines that you can be given a criminal record if you are deemed to be spreading disinformation which will allow those in power to criminalize people who could be seen as spreading disinformation with no real criteria to back this (Human Rights Watch 2022). On top of this, there is a lot of evidence that points towards the Turkish government punishing journalists for speaking out or against mainstream media. Many received fines and bans from RTUK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) (Tahiroglu, 2022). Lastly, to see if Turkish media fits the fifth filter of Anti-communism there would need to be extensive research into Turkish communist history.

To sum up, this provides a sufficient basis that powerful groups such as the government and opposition parties greatly shape the media and information propagated in society. This drives public opinion, backs narratives, and shapes public discourses which can be considered a main driving factor in the Turkish society's rising disdain for the Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2022). A key indication of this could be the anti-Syrian riots of 2024. The recent fall of the Regime in Syria and the negative discourse around Syrian refugees could be seen as a significant push factor for Syrians to migrate back to Syria due to fear of public outcry and an increase in discrimination against them. Negative propaganda framing has already led to increased social insecurities and

discrimination against Syrian refugees, with a rise in intercommunal violence (Narli et al., 2025). Propaganda has led some Turkish citizens to believe that they are disadvantaged, where Syrians receive more privileges such as more public services and have increased economic competition, leading to Turkish citizens perceiving "false victimhood" (Dinçşahin and Çakın, 2025; Narli et al., 2025). This creates discord, which could lead Syrian refugees to migrate back to Syria in fear, with a disdain for Turkish society, which could cause rifts as the Syrian government is rebuilt, thus having policy implications in the long run.

**Pull Factors to Syria**

      **Economic Factors.** Economic prospects are vital to informing the Syrian refugees' decision-making (Alrababah et al., 2023). Syria's economy was severely debilitated due to war and sanctions (Kirk et al., 2024). To remedy this, Syria's new leadership has undertaken a radical economic overhaul through privatization of state-run companies and slashing of many public sector jobs in an attempt to shift to "a competitive free-market economy" (Alkousaa, 2025). With the EU's elimination of sanctions and approval of aid, and Türkiye opening its border for trade, Saudi Arabia and Qatar planning to settle Syria's debt to the World Bank, economic prospects are looking up (Al Jazeera, 2025; Hokayem, 2025; Pinfold, 2025). Turkish exports have risen by more than 38% since the fall of the previous regime, and talks have started to revive a Free Trade Agreement (Caglayan, 2025). Thus, economic opportunities are bound to follow, which would encourage returns of innovation (Gmelch, 1980).

      **Situational Factors.** Positive relations between Türkiye and the new transitional government under the leadership of Ahmed Al-Sharaa (formerly leader of HTS) entails cooperation and facilitation of return migration (Cagaptay and Zelin, 2025; Kardaş, 2025). Türkiye also has a growing role in shaping Syria's political landscape affirming strategic partnership

between both parties (Bin-Saleem et al., 2025; Reuters, 2025c). Furthermore, the new government affirmed its commitment to the reformation and protection of state institutions and the formation of a unified, centralized government (Pinfold, 2025; Rifai, 2025). They strive for international recognition and balancing the demands of a multitude of actors to consequently lead to a rolling back of sanctions (Pinfold, 2025). That said uncertainty of their commitment to this image is a source of wariness of return especially due to their past terrorist activities as HTS. However, HTS's rule of Idlib where instead of focusing on Islamic rule or strict implementation of Sharia law, they focused on provide necessities and services to the people can ease suspicions (Drevon and Haenni, 2020; Pinfold, 2025). In addition, they adopted civilian technocratic administration thus favoring a pragmatic and effective style of governance prioritizing internal stability and western acceptance (Drevon and Haenni, 2020; Holtz, 2023; Pinfold, 2025).[12] There they also included other factions and civilians to ensure political representation and thus they have made efforts to institutionalize internal authority, align with local norms and establish religious moderation showing their willingness to compromise (Drevon and Haenni, 2020; Holtz, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2021).[13]

Moreover, counterterrorism efforts and semblance of law enforcement campaigns pour into their efforts to appear as a legitimate actor (Holtz, 2023; Zelin, 2023). Currently, HTS leadership as the new government have emphasized the importance of state building, providing access to services such as water, electricity, clearing up public spaces and garbage collection in addition to providing food and fuel (Zelin, 2024). This is also seen in the formation of the new government body, which is largely technocratic in nature and includes ministers from minority groups, however,

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[12] Instead of the common governance methods of Islamic militant group characterized by 'high ideological commitments and harsh governance, HTS employed governance methods more in line with western practices.
[13] That said, HTS has had low tolerance for political opposition and reacted harshly to protests (Holtz, 2023).

it is largely kept under the tight control of Ahmad Al-Sharaa (International Crisis Group, 2025c).[14]

The SDF has also started providing oil to the central government (Reuters, 2025a). This shows

that the current situation is favorable to a return to normalcy and good governance if the new

leadership treads carefully without monopolizing power.

**Social Factors.** The new Syrian government's leadership emphasized their desire for social

unity where they guaranteed minority rights, highlighting the diversity of Syrian culture (Zelin,

2024).[15] In the face of scrutiny over the lack of diversity of leadership, they formed a committee

for inclusion and a complaints committee in Aleppo (Zelin, 2024).[16] Ravaged by the war,

infrastructure in Syria has been severely damaged, which has discouraged the return of refugees

who compare living opportunities with that of Türkiye (Altayli and Al-Masri, 2025). That said,

the EU's suspension of sanctions related to energy, banking, transport and reconstruction and eased

restriction on Syria's central bank will enable the new government's efforts in reconstruction

(Henderson, 2025; Meijer, 2025; Reuters, 2025b). In addition, in the national dialogue conference,

it was agreed that a committee would be assigned to draft a constitution enshrining justice, freedom,

equality, and protection of civic and political liberties of Syrians (Alqahera News, 2025; Azhari,

2025). Social services provision is on the rise where the International Organization for Migration

(IOM) was permitted by the interim government to reestablish permanent staff residence and aims

to mobilize USD 73.2 million to assist over 1.1 million Syrians in addition to initial investments

in housing and infrastructure rehabilitation (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

However, sectarian conflicts in Syria have threatened fragile stability, leading to increased outrage

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[14] Formerly the leader of HTS prior to its dissolution, currently the president of Syria.
[15] They also gave permission for concerts and exhibition saying that they encourage art which is an ideological shift from extremist ideas (Al Shaar et al., 2025)
[16] Thus showing willingness to accept and implement input of citizens. This could also an attempt to copy some elements of western governance to get aid and legitimacy rather than a true attempt at increasing inclusivity.

against the government and exacerbating tensions as the death toll rises (France 24, 2025). This suggests that more reconciliation efforts are needed, and the government needs to ensure that affiliated groups do not engage in armed violence against Syrians.

**Psychological Factors.** Over half of Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon hoped to return to Syria and Husein and Wagner (2023) found that more than two-thirds of respondents in Türkiye hoped to return showing the patriotic sentiments of the Syrians. Also, Türkiye's 'permitted exit-entry' policy is imperative for refugees to better assess the situation and thus gain the required trust in the state institutions where over 80,000 Syrians returned since the fall of Al-Assad's regime (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025; UNHCR Turkey, 2025). However, instability and ambiguity surrounding the new government makes it difficult for refugees to regain trust in Syrian institutions and return.

## Conclusion

Syrian refugees in Türkiye have been met with two difficult conditions in both their COO and Türkiye. Upon examining the push and pull factors affecting them, it is clear that their conditions in Türkiye are worsening (rising domestic pressures) and that while Syria's new government has promising prospects due to their historical and current governance efforts, there is still great instability, and a lot of time is left before infrastructure is completely rehabilitated. Furthermore, since the viability of return is highly dependent on conditions in COO, this paper advises the new leadership to undertake national reconciliation and implement transitional justice, which are critical to bolster social cohesion (Ezzeddin, 2025). They must continue and increase their efforts to provide services, implement policies consistent with good governance, collaborate with international actors and organizations and ensure the reintegration of returning refugees (Dinçer and Şahin-Mencütek, 2025). Reconstructing Syria while prioritizing centralization, unity,

and political representation is a challenge, especially when facing terrorist groups, foreign

interference, and sectarian violence, and thus, this process will take time. That said, the gradual

return of refugees is guaranteed to occur throughout that time, especially if there is more equitable

and transparent distribution of information and the new government implements the

aforementioned policy recommendations.

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**Assessing the shift in Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy: From Oil Diplomacy to assertive regional leadership since 2015.**

Nourallah Tamer Ahmed Sabry

## Introduction

 For the first time, Saudi Arabia led a significant military operation outside of its borders when it began Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen in March 2015. Saudi Arabia's historically cautious and oil-driven diplomacy, which has long placed a higher priority on alliance-building and regional stability than direct conflict, was in sharp contrast to this audacious move. This change begs the fundamental question: why did Saudi Arabia choose assertive regional leadership and abandon its traditional foreign policy stance?

 The aim of this study is to solve the explanation underlying this change. It contends that a complex interplay of internal and external variables led to Saudi Arabia's transition from oil diplomacy to a more assertive foreign policy between 2015 and 2024. Externally, the Kingdom's security situation was put to the test and forced to take more autonomous action due to Iran's growing influence in the area and the United States' slow withdrawal from the Middle East. On the inside, a strategic reorientation based on nationalism, economic reform, and regional ambition was encouraged by the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and the execution of Vision 2030.

 This paper is guided by the research question: how have internal and external variables impacted Saudi Arabia's shift from oil diplomacy to forceful regional leadership between 2015 and 2024? To address this question, the study applies the theoretical lens of neoclassical realism, which combines systemic pressures with domestic-level drivers to explain foreign policy behavior. The analysis demonstrates how changing security dynamics and internal leadership priorities have led the Kingdom to adopt a more offensive realist stance, departing from its long-standing conservative approach.

## Literature Review

 Historically, the survival of the regime and strategic adjustment to regional instability have been the main focusses of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. According to academics like Eilts (2004),

the Kingdom places equal importance on maintaining the Al Saud family and ensuring national security. This was made clear during the Arab Spring when Riyadh intervened militarily in Bahrain because it saw political reform movements as existential threats (Haykel, 2011).

Atta (2023) and Steinberg (2014) highlight how Saudi Arabia employs repression and co-optation to maintain stability. Guzansky and Zalayat (2024) further note the Kingdom's pragmatic diplomatic maneuvers, such as its recent rapprochement with Iran, to consolidate regional influence.

The Middle East's growing instability has significantly shaped Saudi Arabia's foreign policy trajectory. Since 2015, the Kingdom has shifted from a defensive realism to offensive realism, focusing on power maximisation, as demonstrated by its intervention in Yemen to counter Iranian influence and restore a pro-Saudi government (Phillips, 2020; Jacobs, 2023). Saudi Arabia's military doctrine has also changed, with a greater involvement in proxy conflicts, such as arming Syrian rebels (Jacobs, 2023).

Saudi policy has also been impacted by geopolitical changes, most notably the reduction in American involvement in the Middle East. Eilts (2004) and Kamrava (2012) talk on how the Kingdom's security strategy was influenced by the long-standing Saudi American partnership. Saudi Arabia has, however, looked for alternate partnerships as Washington shrinks its regional presence, interacting with BRICS countries and cementing its connections with China and Russia (Borck, 2023; Al Shammeri, 2022). Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has moved beyond oil diplomacy, embracing a more assertive foreign policy (Atta, 2023; Jacobs, 2023). This study examines how these internal and external factors have collectively reshaped Saudi Arabia's regional role from 2015 to 2024.

While the existing literature offers valuable insights into Saudi Arabia's security-oriented foreign policy and its reactions to regional and international developments, it often treats internal and external drivers in isolation. Many works—such as those by Eilts (2004) and Kamrava (2012)—focus predominantly on external security alliances, particularly the U.S.-Saudi relationship, without adequately accounting for the role of domestic leadership changes and ideological transformations under Mohammed bin Salman. Conversely, scholars like Atta (2023) and Guzansky and Zalayat (2024) explore internal political dynamics but do not fully integrate these with global structural shifts in their analysis of foreign policy behaviour. Additionally, while

the Kingdom's assertiveness post-2015 is recognized, there is limited systematic analysis of how these behavioural changes fit into broader theoretical frameworks like neoclassical realism. This leaves a critical gap in understanding how domestic interpretations of international pressures influence strategic choices. This research seeks to fill this void by employing a neoclassical realist lens to analyse how the interplay of internal and external variables has shaped Saudi Arabia's foreign policy transformation between 2015 and 2024—an approach that has yet to be fully explored in the current academic discourse. This makes the study both timely and necessary for deepening our understanding of the Kingdom's evolving role in a multipolar Middle East.

## Theoretical Framework

Neoclassical realism is an international relations theory that integrates both domestic and systemic elements to explain foreign policy. Neoclassical realism, which arose in the 1990s in reaction to the shortcomings of structural realism (or neorealism), contends that although the international system and the balance of power place restrictions on state behaviour, domestic factors influence how states react to these systemic forces (Rose, 1998).

Unlike classical realism, which emphasizes human nature, and neorealism, which focuses solely on the international structure, neoclassical realism incorporates unit-level factors such as leadership perceptions, domestic political institutions, and national identity. Scholars like Gideon Rose, Randall Schweller, and Fareed Zakaria have argued that variations in state behavior cannot be understood solely through systemic pressures; instead, they must account for how states interpret and react to these pressures based on internal dynamics (Rose,1998: Schweller, 2014).

State-society connections, elite perspectives, and relative power capacities are important elements of neoclassical realism (Rose, 1998: Schweller, 2014). For example, two governments may pursue distinct foreign policies despite having identical structural restrictions because of variations in leadership, bureaucratic structures, or domestic political forces. This approach is particularly useful for explaining cases where weaker states challenge stronger ones, or when states act inconsistently with systemic predictions.

Neoclassical realism integrates structural constraints with domestic factors, emphasizing leadership's role in shaping foreign policy. Neoclassical realism sees that leaders understand and react to these limitations based on internal dynamics, whereas structural realism concentrates on

systemic influences (Reichwein, 2024). This perspective provides the greatest understanding of Saudi Arabia's transition from defensive to offensive realism, especially under MBS. In contrast to other presidents who prioritised cautious balancing, he has also sought power maximisation, using economic and military might to build regional dominion. His leadership and the goals of Vision 2030 have accelerated Saudi Arabia's shift from oil diplomacy to interventionist measures.

Neoclassical realism is valuable for analysing foreign policy shifts, such as Saudi Arabia's evolving regional strategy, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of both international constraints and domestic motivations. It is an influential framework in foreign policy, bridging structural and unit-level explanations to provide a more comprehensive account of state behaviour (Rose,1998: Schweller, 2014).

**Offensive vs. Defensive realism:**

Offensive and defensive realism are rooted in neorealism, but they do not agree on ideas about how states should survive an anarchic international order. According to Walt, defensive realism contends that the majority of states need security in order to maintain stability (Snyder, 2014). To avoid inciting counterbalancing coalitions, these powers place a high priority on deterrence and preserving the balance of power (Snyder, 2014). This viewpoint holds that aggressive growth frequently has counterproductive effects because it attracts resistance from other states (Snyder, 2014).

On the other hand, Mearsheimer's offensive realism holds that states must aggressively maximise power to survive. States are motivated to pursue regional hegemony because no amount of security is ever enough, guaranteeing that no opponent can overthrow their authority. Offensive realists contend that revisionist tactics, including military interventions or aggressive diplomacy, are reasonable means of attaining security and that power maximisation is a practical reaction to the realities of anarchy (Snyder, 2014). Offensive realism maintains that forceful power building can be successful, especially if opponents are weak or unable to organise resistance, in contrast to defensive realism, which views expansion as dangerous and frequently ineffective (Snyder, 2014) The concepts of offensive realism are in line with Saudi Arabia's transition from a status-quo power to an interventionist actor after 2015.

**Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology within the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism, which allows for the analysis of how systemic-level pressures and domestic-level dynamics interact to shape state behaviour. The central aim is to trace and explain the evolution of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy between 2015 and 2024 by identifying key internal and external factors that contributed to the Kingdom's shift from oil diplomacy to a more assertive regional posture.

To operationalize this analysis, the study examines specific indicators that reflect both international and domestic variables. On the external level, it considers Iran's expanding influence across the region, particularly in conflict zones such as Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, as well as the observable decline in U.S. strategic engagement in the Middle East during this period. Additionally, the research evaluates changes in Saudi Arabia's regional alignments, including its outreach to non-traditional partners like China and Russia, and normalization efforts with Israel, as signs of a broader geopolitical recalibration.

On the internal level, the study focuses on the consolidation of power under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, especially the centralization of foreign policy decision-making and the promotion of a more confrontational posture. It also analyses the Vision 2030 reform agenda not only as an economic plan but as a framework that informs strategic autonomy and foreign policy assertiveness. Military interventions, particularly in Yemen, and diplomatic initiatives are assessed as manifestations of this new orientation.

Sources were chosen based the relevance to the topic of Saudi foreign policy, Vision 2030, or Middle Eastern geopolitics; credibility of the publication or institution (e.g., peer-reviewed status or international reputation); timeliness, particularly those published within the 2015–2024 timeframe; diversity of perspectives, including Western and Middle Eastern viewpoints, to mitigate bias.

## External Factors

This part of the paper will discuss how external factors such as U.S. retrenchment and declining security guarantees in the Middle East and the expansion of Iran's influence in the Middle East have played a role in the shift the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia.

### *U.S. Retrenchment and Declining Security Guarantees*

The progressive withdrawal of U.S. security obligations in the Middle East is one of the main external pressures behind Saudi Arabia's increasingly assertive foreign policy. Before 2014, the Kingdom depended on a solid alliance with the US, which offered energy cooperation in return for military defence and regional security (Payne, 2024). Nonetheless, Riyadh is unsure about American dependability due to changes in U.S. policy during the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations. This has forced Saudi Arabia to diversify its security alliances, increase the size of its regional military, and embrace a more independent defence posture (Payne, 2024).

The Obama administration's 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), which Saudi Arabia saw as a strategic realignment in Iran's favour, marked a significant turning point (Akbarzadeh, 2024). Tehran was able to increase its regional influence after the deal removed economic sanctions against it. Riyadh was concerned that Iran would further destabilise the region at Saudi Arabia's expense by using these economic advantages to support proxy organisations like Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shia militias in Iraq and Syria. The deal, negotiated without incorporating Saudi or Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) concerns, signalled a shift in U.S. priorities, prioritizing diplomacy with Iran over traditional Gulf alliances (Akbarzadeh, 2024)

The Trump administration's policies further deepened uncertainty. While Trump withdrew from the Iran deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions, his inconsistent Middle East policies created unpredictability. His failure to respond decisively to Iranian-backed attacks on Saudi oil facilities in 2019, particularly the Aramco attacks, raised doubts about U.S. security guarantees. The Biden administration reinforced these concerns by ending support for Saudi-led military operations in Yemen and resuming indirect negotiations with Iran (Payne, 2024).

Saudi concerns were further heightened by the broader U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. America's disorganised 2021 pullout from Afghanistan was viewed as a stark illustration of the country's declining might and commitment to regional security. This retreat has prompted Saudi Arabia to seek alternative economic and military partnerships beyond its longstanding relationship with Washington (Sager, 2024).

Saudi Arabia has consequently improved its security relations with China and Russia. Despite American protests, Riyadh has acquired Russian military hardware, like as the S-400 missile defence system (Sager, 2024). Meanwhile, through cooperative intelligence, arms sales, and joint military drills, Saudi Chinese relations have grown. These shifts reflect Saudi Arabia's efforts to

diversify its security partnerships and reduce dependence on Washington, embracing a multipolar approach to foreign policy while pursuing its own strategic ambitions.

From a neoclassical realist perspective, the shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy behaviour is best understood as a response to structural changes in the international system—namely the relative decline of U.S. hegemonic engagement in the Middle East—filtered through domestic perceptions and strategic calculations. While structural realism would point solely to the redistribution of power and shifting alliances, neoclassical realism emphasizes that these systemic pressures are interpreted and acted upon by domestic actors. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the perceived erosion of U.S. security guarantees has been internalized by the Kingdom's leadership as a threat to national autonomy and regime survival. This has not only triggered a reassessment of external alignments but also spurred internal decisions to pursue military modernization, assert regional influence, and diversify strategic partnerships. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's centralized leadership and assertive vision have translated these perceptions into concrete foreign policy actions. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's pivot toward strategic diversification, including closer ties with China and Russia, can be seen as a product of systemic uncertainty combined with domestic agency and elite interpretation—core components of neoclassical realist analysis.

**Iran's Expanding Regional Influence**

Saudi Arabia's view of Iran as an existential danger is a major factor in its change in foreign policy. Through its backing of proxy organisations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and other Shia militias in Iraq and Syria, Iran has increased its regional influence during the last years. This network has weakened Saudi Arabia's standing in the Middle East while strengthening Tehran's strategic depth. (Ade-Ibijola and Emmanuel, 2024). According to Riyadh, these events are a direct challenge to Saudi Arabia's long-standing hegemony in the Gulf and are part of Iran's larger regional hegemonic aspirations. responding to this, KSA has changed its historically defensive posture to an offensive realist one that prioritises maximum power through diplomatic pressure, military action, and strategic realignments. (Ade-Ibijola and Emmanuel, 2024).

The 2015 Saudi-led operation in Yemen was a direct reaction to the 2014 capture of Sana'a by the Iran-backed Houthi movement. Riyadh was concerned that a Houthi-run Yemen would act as a front for Iran and provide Tehran access to Saudi Arabia's southern border (Walsh, 2024). Saudi

leaders presented the conflict as an essential step to stop Iran from imitating the model of influence it has used in Iraq and Lebanon. But instead of effectively reducing Iranian influence, the war has devolved into a protracted battle of attrition that has depleted Saudi resources, drawn criticism from throughout the world, and exposed the Kingdom to increasing Houthi missile and drone strikes (Walsh, 2024).

Beyond Yemen, Saudi Arabia is now more concerned about security due to Iran's involvement in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Tehran has consolidated its control over the political and security environment in Baghdad by filling the power vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq with Shia militias backed by Iran. In a similar vein, Iran's financial and military assistance to the Assad government in Syria has made it possible for Tehran to enter the Levant, strengthening its strategic route to Lebanon, where Hezbollah continues to be one of Iran's most potent regional proxies. All of these changes have reduced Saudi Arabia's power to shape regional affairs, causing Riyadh to take a more assertive stance.

Saudi Arabia's strategy towards Iran changed in 2023 with a restart of diplomatic relations mediated by China, notwithstanding this intensified conflict. This does not necessarily mean that Saudi Arabia's view of Iran as a danger has changed, even though it might indicate a tactical halt in hostilities. Rather, it supports the claim made by Guzansky & Zalayat (2024) that Saudi Arabia is using a "keep your enemies close" tactic to reduce risks, maintain peace, and concentrate on economic diversification as part of Vision 2030.

## Internal Factors Reinforcing the Shift

This part of the paper will discuss how internal factors such as the rise of MBS and Vision 2030 have played a role in the shift the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia.

### The Rise of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Centralization of Power

MBS' leadership has fundamentally altered Saudi Arabia's domestic power structure and foreign policy trajectory. Since his emergence as Crown Prince in 2017, he has pursued an aggressive policymaking strategy, consolidating power within the royal family and elevating Saudi Arabia's regional ambitions (Brown, 2024). The 2017 Ritz-Carlton crackdown, in which dozens of high-profile Saudi elites, including royal family members and business leaders, were detained under the guise of an anti-corruption purge, served as a turning point in MBS's political ascent (Masaud,

2024).By eliminating internal rivals and securing his authority over key state institutions, MBS gained near-total autonomy in foreign policy decision-making, marking a departure from the previous consensus-driven model of Saudi governance (Al-Rasheed, 2018).

With this consolidation of power, MBS has aggressively pursued a more interventionist and militarized foreign policy, breaking with Saudi Arabia's historically status quo-oriented approach. His leadership has been characterized by bold, often unilateral actions, such as the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, the 2017 blockade of Qatar, and the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. These moves underscore a shift toward offensive realism, wherein Saudi Arabia actively seeks to maximize its regional power rather than merely maintaining security (Masaud, 2024). Unlike previous Saudi rulers, who balanced between global powers, MBS has sought to reduce Saudi Arabia's reliance on traditional Western allies, particularly the United States, and pursue a more autonomous geopolitical strategy (Atta, 2023).

MBS's assertive foreign policy posture is closely linked to his domestic agenda. His governance is defined by a desire to project Saudi strength abroad while ensuring regime stability at home. The concentration of power within his inner circle has enabled swift, decisive foreign policy actions, which were previously constrained by bureaucratic and royal family deliberations. As a result, Saudi Arabia has been more willing to take unilateral and high-risk actions in regional affairs, confident in its ability to withstand external criticism and pressure.

**Vision 2030 and Economic Diversification**

The Vision 2030 reform agenda, launched in 2016, has further reinforced Saudi Arabia's foreign policy shift by reshaping its economic priorities. Historically, Saudi foreign policy was deeply intertwined with its role as the world's leading oil exporter, using oil diplomacy as a tool of influence (Masaud, 2024). However, fluctuations in global oil prices and the growing urgency to diversify the Kingdom's economy have necessitated a new approach. Vision 2030 aims to reduce Saudi dependence on oil revenues by expanding investments in technology, renewable energy, and tourism, requiring a new set of international partnerships beyond traditional Western allies (Hertog, 2024).

This economic transformation has had direct geopolitical implications, particularly in Saudi Arabia's deepening ties with China and Russia. Riyadh has increasingly sought economic

partnerships with Beijing, including major energy agreements and joint infrastructure projects under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At the same time, Saudi Arabia has strengthened its cooperation with Russia through OPEC+, coordinating oil production cuts to stabilize global energy prices (Borck, 2023). These moves signal a strategic pivot toward a multipolar foreign policy, in which Saudi Arabia balances between global powers rather than aligning exclusively with the West.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's growing interest in joining BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) reflects a broader attempt to integrate into emerging economic blocs that challenge U.S.-led global governance structures. By aligning with BRICS economies, Saudi Arabia seeks to enhance its global economic influence while reducing its vulnerability to Western political pressure (Al Shammeri, 2022). This aligns with MBS's vision of a Saudi Arabia that is not merely a regional power but a global player with diversified economic alliances.

## Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy transformation since 2015 reflects a strategic recalibration shaped by both external pressures and internal shifts. The Kingdom has moved away from its historical reliance on oil diplomacy and U.S. security guarantees, adopting a more assertive and interventionist approach. This transition is driven by two key external factors: the U.S. retrenchment from the Middle East, which has forced Saudi Arabia to seek alternative security and economic partnerships, and Iran's growing regional influence, which has heightened Riyadh's perception of existential threats and led to a more interventionist posture, particularly in Yemen.

Internally, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's consolidation of power and Vision 2030's economic agenda have reinforced this shift. MBS's leadership, marked by centralization of authority and aggressive policymaking, has enabled Saudi Arabia to take unilateral actions with greater autonomy. The push for economic diversification has necessitated closer ties with China, Russia, and potential BRICS membership, reflecting Riyadh's pursuit of regional dominance and strategic autonomy in a multipolar world.

However, this assertive foreign policy presents challenges. The Yemen war has been costly and prolonged, drawing international criticism. While balancing multiple global partnerships poses

long-term risks. As Saudi Arabia continues its geopolitical recalibration, its ability to balance ambition with pragmatism will determine the sustainability of its foreign policy transformation.

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# U.S. Environmental Hypocrisy with a Neglectful Stance on the Military Repercussions in Gaza at 2023

Omniat Fawzy

## Introduction

In recent years, academics and policymakers have paid close attention to the nexus of climate change, security concerns, and geopolitics. Environmental stability is increasingly being portrayed as a national security concern, focusing on how environmental issues, such as climate change, affect regional order and security. However, there appears to be a gap between official rhetoric, notably in the United States, and policy implementation, particularly military acts and their environmental implications. The Gaza war, a long-standing geopolitical struggle, provides a vivid example of how the United States has selectively used environmental themes in its foreign policy. This paper argues that despite the United States' occasional positioning of climate change as a security threat (Balaam & Dillman, 2018; Hopf, 2013), its foreign policy execution specifically, its military assistance for Israel shows a glaring double standard about regional order and environmental stability. **Environmental justice,** which in this context refers to the disproportionate environmental burdens experienced by the Palestinian population in Gaza, and **double standards,** highlighting the inconsistent application of environmental concerns when evaluating the actions of allies versus adversaries. This paper also does not mention a certain administration but proving the point that double standards persist whether it is the Republicans or the Democrats.

By endorsing Israel's military campaign in Gaza, the US betrays a lack of consistency in its foreign policy aims and undercuts its discourse on environmental security.

This paper examines the U.S. role in the Gaza conflict and the associated environmental damage to answer the research question: to what extent does U.S. foreign policy adhere to consistent standards in executing its foreign policy by framing its adversaries as threats to environmental stability and regional order? The U.S. frequently ignores the environmental effects of its military actions, as the Gaza conflict demonstrates. It also reveals a trend of using environmental narratives to further geopolitical objectives.

**Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine the intricate relationship between U.S. foreign policy, climate change, and the Gaza conflict. It does this by consulting various secondary sources, including official U.S. government documents such as national strategy documents from 2001 to 2015, national archives (2017), and White House documents (2014, 2017, 2021). These sources reveal the politicization of climate change within the context of U.S. national security strategy (O'Lear & Dalby, 2015). For instance, President Bush's 2002 State of the Union address and National Security Strategy emphasized the fight against terror and American economic security, establishing a security framework. The subsequent creation of the Millennium Challenge Account in 2004, with significant funding, reflected this focus.

The U.S. National Security Strategy of 2006 highlighted the importance of securing energy markets, acknowledging the dominance of fossil fuels (Bojanic, 2015). The Department of Defense's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report recognized the shifting global distribution of power (Daggett, 2010). The research also incorporates reports from international organizations like UNCTAD (2023, 2024), UNDP (2024), and UNEP (2024), alongside scholarly works and media coverage from outlets such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Grist.org.

Three related analytical techniques are used in the analysis. First, the terminology surrounding U.S. participation in the region is examined using Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Balaam & Dillman, 2018). For example, there may be a discrepancy between the U.S. State Department's public declarations on military assistance to Israel and its statements on climate change. The conversation surrounding military assistance places more emphasis on "strategic partnerships" and "regional stability," frequently downplaying or ignoring any "national security threat" that climate change poses and that calls for rapid action (Floyd, 2010). This selective use of terminology implies a preference for geopolitical objectives above environmental concerns. Second, Framing Analysis explores how various players depict the Gaza war and its environmental consequences (Balaam and Veseth, 2010). U.S. media outlets, for example, may portray Israeli military activities as "self-defence" against "terrorism," emphasising security concerns while downplaying claims of environmental damage and human fatalities. In contrast, reporting from international organisations, such as UN agencies, may characterise the war as a humanitarian catastrophe compounded by environmental degradation, emphasising the impact on Palestinian populations and raising concerns about international accountability. Comparing these various framings exposes how the conflict narrative is produced, as well as how certain viewpoints are preferred over others. Framing theory highlights how U.S. media shapes public perception, influencing narratives both domestically and internationally (Goffman, 1974). For example, past framing focused on immigration costs and fears of nuclear war or oil shortages (Ooi & D'Arcangelis, 2017). While U.S. media, as seen in examples like MSNBC's "Climate Change Threat to National Security-CAPs" (2005) and NBC News's "Obama: Climate Change is 'Serious Threat to Global Security'" (2015), has framed climate change as a national security threat potentially leading to mass

migration and resource conflicts requiring intervention (Center for American Progress, 2009), this perspective contrasts with the framing of the Gaza conflict.

The U.S. often emphasizes Israel's security needs while downplaying the environmental consequences of the conflict, such as damage to Gaza's water resources and agricultural land. This discrepancy exemplifies a double standard in how the U.S. frames security threats and environmental concerns depending on the geopolitical context.

Finally, problematization questions the fundamental assumptions that shape the argument (De Buitrago, 2016). The conventional narrative of the United States as a neutral mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is challenged by an examination of its persistent deployment of military assistance to Israel. This support, despite the acknowledged environmental repercussions of Israeli military activities, calls into question the United States' commitment to environmental justice and its involvement in sustaining the war. Furthermore, the premise that economic growth and security are diametrically opposed is questioned by investigating how environmental deterioration in Gaza hinders long-term economic stability and drives future conflict. The research uses these analytical approaches to show how environmental narratives are selectively used in U.S. foreign policy and how, in the context of the Gaza war, geopolitical reasons frequently take precedence over human rights and environmental concerns.

## Literature Review

The literature on the link between climate change, national security, and foreign policy is substantial, with scholars investigating how nations respond to environmental risks in the context of international relations. According to Balaam and Dillman (2015, 2018), as well as Hopf (2013), climate change is increasingly being considered as a national security threat with global

ramifications. However, these studies frequently neglect the manner in which environmental concerns are politicised to advance national goals, especially in war zones. Other researchers, such as Bigger and Neimark (2023) and Crawford (2019a, 2019b), discuss how militarised interventions, notably by the United States, lead to environmental damage. Lakhani (2024) illustrates the vast environmental harm caused by military activities in Gaza, measuring the conflict's carbon footprint and emphasising the discrepancy between the United States' environmental rhetoric and its backing for military measures that increase climate threats. Amnesty International (different years) provides more data on the human rights implications of such conflicts, which are frequently linked to environmental degradation.

The literature also delves into the United States' double standard in foreign policy, namely its unwavering backing for Israel despite broad worldwide criticism of Israeli military activities in Gaza (Wintour, 2023). This support, according to Chomsky (2015), Falkner (2005), and Falkner and Buzan (2022), is part of a larger pattern of hegemonic objectives driving US foreign policy. The United States plays an important role in supporting military acts that directly contribute to environmental degradation, such as the considerable military carbon footprint caused by its backing for Israel's military operations (Bigger & Neimark, 2023; Crawford, 2019a, 2019b; Lakhani, 2024). These findings highlight the need of rigorously examining how the United States depicts its rivals as dangers to environmental stability while simultaneously pursuing activities that undercut its own climate goals.

The literature also discusses the association between occupation and climate vulnerability. Lakhani (2024), UNCTAD (2023& 2024), and UNDP (2024), and UNEP (2024) demonstrate how Israel's occupation of Palestine exacerbates Palestinian susceptibility to the ramifications of climate change. Israel's restrictions, which include control over water supplies and building materials, as

well as limits on movement and access to land, make it difficult for Palestinians to adapt to the climate catastrophe. This, in turn, as described by Pulido (2017) and Schlosberg (2013), emphasises the convergence of human rights and environmental justice, which is often overlooked in debates concerning climate change security. Furthermore, the U.S.'s participation in defending Israel's activities, despite their environmental effects, represents a larger trend of geopolitical prioritisation above international environmental norms (Wintour, 2023).

The literature also stresses the Palestinian territories' special vulnerability to climate change, which is compounded by the ongoing Israeli occupation (UNCTAD, 2023&2024; UNDP, 2024). Israel's restrictions on Palestinian access to resources, travel, and development greatly impede adaptation attempts, resulting in environmental injustice (Pulido, 2017; Schlosberg, 2013). Furthermore, despite these negative effects on Palestinian environmental security, the United States' continued backing for Israel highlights the double standard inherent in American foreign policy (Wintour, 2023). This raises the question: Given their mutual support for Israel, is there any obvious difference in the responses of previous U.S. administrations, such as Joe Biden and Donald Trump, to the environmental implications of the conflict? While both administrations have expressed strong support for Israel, their views on climate change have diverged. The Biden administration has prioritised climate action, both locally and globally. Sharp (2023) argues that the Biden administration's climate focus clashes with its stagnant policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This discrepancy reveals a prioritization of geopolitical alliances over environmental concerns, creating a double standard where Israel's environmental impact is ignored. Consequently, the administration's climate rhetoric fails to produce policy changes that would address Israel's actions, raising questions about the sincerity of its commitment to environmental justice (Sharp, 2023).

**Theoretical Framework**

This research depends on securitisation theory, which provides a framework for understanding how some challenges are framed as threats to security, justifying particular responses (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998). While the United States has regularly securitised climate change, its actions in Gaza demonstrate a selective use of this concept. The environmental damage produced by Israeli military actions backed by the United States exemplifies a stark conflict between rhetoric and practice. This brings up another key question: Despite possible economic incentives, the U.S. showed little care for the environmental effects of its 2003 invasion of Iraq. So, why would the U.S. prioritise environmental preservation in Gaza, and what measures may be used to encourage Washington to solve these issues? This point emphasises the difficulty of holding strong governments accountable for the environmental consequences of their foreign policy actions, especially when such decisions are motivated by strategic or economic considerations. It emphasises the importance of continued pressure from civil society, international organisations, and other governments to prioritise environmental conservation and human rights in war zones(Sharp, 2023; UNDP,2024).

Regionalism provides another important perspective for testing. While regionalism refers to larger political, economic, and social connections within a geographical area (Hurrell, 1995), regional cooperation particularly refers to cooperative efforts among nations or players to overcome common difficulties (Mansfield & Milner, 1999; Mattli, 1999). Historically, the United States has dominated regional dynamics and influenced cooperative possibilities in the Middle East. The United States' backing for Israel in the Gaza war jeopardises regional stability while also impeding possible regional collaboration on climate change adaptation and mitigation. This brings up an important point: promoting sustainable practices in the Palestinian territories is critical, but who carries the responsibility and financial weight for these efforts? Addressing this challenge

necessitates a comprehensive knowledge of regional power dynamics and international actors' roles in promoting Palestinian self-determination and environmental sustainability.

**Findings**

The United States' involvement in the Gaza conflict demonstrates a major gap between its proclaimed environmental security rhetoric and its actions in the region. The first two months of the battle produced an estimated 281,000 metric tonnes of $CO_2$ equivalent emissions, with Israeli military actions accounting for more than 99% of this total (Lakhani, 2024). Nearly half of these emissions were attributed to U.S. cargo planes transporting military equipment to Israel, blatantly contradicting the U.S.'s claims to prioritise environmental security. The emissions from these military activities equal the yearly carbon production of more than 20 climate vulnerable countries. These findings demonstrate the environmental effects of the U.S. military's backing for Israel, as well as the immorality inherent in the U.S. foreign policy approach.

For instance, repeated bombings in densely populated areas like the Jabaliya refugee camp have not only caused immense human suffering but also resulted in widespread destruction of infrastructure, leading to severe soil and water contamination from debris and unexploded ordnance (ICRC, 2024). Airstrikes have also damaged or destroyed wastewater treatment plants, releasing untreated sewage into the Mediterranean Sea, contaminating water sources and harming marine ecosystems (UNEP, 2024). Furthermore, environmental devastation in Gaza, particularly the demolition of critical infrastructure such as houses, schools, and hospitals, has exacerbated the Palestinian territories' already-existing climatic vulnerabilities. The rebuilding of these structures would emit an estimated 30 million metric tonnes of $CO_2$, aggravating an already terrible environmental situation. The United States' support for Israel's military activities, along with

diplomatic backing in international forums, reveals a clear double standard in its approach to environmental stability and regional order. While the U.S. promotes itself as a worldwide leader in tackling climate change, its actions in Gaza show a considerable disparity between its rhetoric.

In addition to the immediate environmental impact of the Gaza conflict, the U.S. military's overall carbon footprint contributes significantly to global climate change. In 2022, the U.S. military is expected to generate 48 million metric tonnes of $CO_2$, more than the yearly emissions of 150 countries, including climate-vulnerable Norway and Ireland (Crawford, 2022). The U.S. military's actions in the Middle East, notably its involvement in safeguarding fossil fuel interests in the Gulf area, intensify the climate catastrophe, especially in a region already dealing with the repercussions of fast climate change. The United States' inability to address the environmental consequences of its military operations underscores the need for a more consistent approach to climate change in its foreign policy.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the United States' foreign policy in Gaza indicates a significant disparity between its rhetoric on environmental security and its actions in the region. While the United States frequently portrays climate change as a national security threat, its backing for military activities that lead to environmental degradation reveals a clear double standard. The Gaza conflict, with its terrible environmental implications, is a compelling case study of how environmental narratives are selectively used to promote geopolitical goals. The United States' participation in aiding Israel's military activities, along with its sustained backing for the Israeli occupation, increases Palestinian susceptibility to climate change and weakens regional attempts to address the climate catastrophe.

The paper argued that if the United States is to be taken seriously in its commitment to climate change, it must adopt a more consistent foreign policy strategy that prioritises both environmental justice and human rights. The environmental destruction inflicted by military operations in Gaza emphasises the need for more responsibility in U.S. foreign policy, particularly in terms of military emissions. If the United States wants to maintain its environmental security rhetoric, it must go beyond geopolitical considerations and implement policies that address the underlying causes of climate vulnerability, particularly in war zones like Gaza. True environmental justice requires tackling the underlying political factors that worsen climate vulnerability, and the United States must play a leading role in pushing this agenda.

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# Securitizing Cyberwarfare: The Political Ramifications and International Responses to the AI- driven Cyberwarfare in the Russian Ukrainian War

Perihan Abdelgawad

## Introduction:

The integration of AI into military operations has fundamentally changed modern warfare, turning it into an ongoing, embedded security practice rather than an extraordinary event. The Russia-Ukraine conflict demonstrates that AI is no longer just a futuristic tool but rather an everyday mechanism shaping the battlefield. From cyberattacks to autonomous drone strikes and intelligence analysis, AI has become a force that blurs the lines between traditional and digital practices, demonstrating the rise of non-traditional threats of cyber tools in modern warfare. And thus, this paper aims to analyse the increasing utilization of cyberwarfare in the case of Russian Ukrainian war and the fragmented international responses to its utilization. This paper argues that cyberwarfare has become a critical tool for states to advance their strategic objectives, intensify geopolitical tensions, and disrupt traditional power dynamics, further complicating regional stability, while international responses remain fragmented and insufficient, lacking legal codification, unified deterrence strategies, regulatory oversight over non-state actors, and effective enforcement mechanisms.

Through a securitization theory lens, particularly the Paris School, this paper aims to investigate the political ramifications of cyberwarfare in regional conflicts, by particularly focusing on the Russia-Ukraine war. By analysing this case study, the paper looks at how countries use cyber operations to securitize conflicts, shape political narratives, and escalate tensions in ways traditional warfare has not. The paper critically questions the extent to which cyberwarfare shaped political dynamics and security policies in conflicts, and what were the international responses to these operations.

This paper employs a qualitative methodology combining a case study approach, content analysis, and policy analysis. The paper is divided into five sections. Starting out with the first section, it critically explores the theoretical debates surrounding the implications of AI and cyberwarfare in modern-day conflicts. Moving into the second section, it outlines theoretical framework introducing the Paris School of Securitization theory. Then, the third section outlines

the research design and methodology employed in the paper. Moving into the fourth section, it unfolds into three parts, with the first examining Russian and Ukrainian cyberwarfare strategies, the second examining the role of non-state actors within the conflict, and the third critically evaluating the international responses of NATO, EU, and UN to the conflict. And, finally, the fifth section concludes with a summary of the main findings. (In the first draft, I wrote section after each one, so Dr. Johns said to remove it)

## Literature Review

The integration of AI and quantum computing into the cybersecurity landscape has introduced both substantial opportunities and significant risks. AI has become a powerful tool in enhancing cyber defence, enabling systems to detect and prevent attacks more effectively (Eoyang & Keitner, 2021; Tsilonis, 2024). However, its dual nature also opens doors for more sophisticated and damaging cyberattacks (Brenner, 2020; Shackelford, 2020). This dual-edge capability of AI complicates the cybersecurity landscape, making it a persistent challenge for both defence mechanisms and policy makers (Broeders et al., 2021). As cyber defence systems grow more advanced with AI, so too do the strategies of adversaries, who increasingly exploit these technologies for offensive purposes.

Quantum computing further amplifies these risks by threatening traditional encryption methods. With its ability to break cryptographic algorithms in seconds, quantum computing could render existing cybersecurity defences obsolete (Kshetri, 2016; Hossain Faruk et al., 2022). While quantum-resistant cryptography is being developed, the advent of quantum technology presents an existential risk, one that could spark a global "quantum arms race," with nations scrambling to develop and control this potentially destabilizing technology (Petratos, 2014; Maness & Velariano, 2016). As Internet of Things (IoT) devices proliferate, accounting for 43% of current cybersecurity vulnerabilities, the expansion of the connected world further intensifies digital security risks. By 2024, over 207 billion IoT devices are expected to be active globally, each of which may provide an entry point for cybercriminals (Statista, 2024; Brenner, 2020). The financial toll of these threats is staggering, with global data breach costs averaging $4.45 million in 2023, reflecting a 15.3% increase since 2020 (Cybersecurity Ventures, 2024).

At the heart of these growing threats is the role of states in cyberspace. Cyberwarfare has become a key instrument of statecraft, enabling nations to engage in espionage, sabotage, and

influence operations without the need for traditional military engagement (Maness & Valeriano, 2016). However, one of the most significant challenges in the realm of cyberwarfare is attribution. The anonymity provided by cyberattacks makes it difficult for states to confirm or deny involvement, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity (Brenner, 2006; Broeders et al., 2021). Despite the increasing scale of cyber threats, international regulations governing cyberspace remain inadequate. Traditional legal frameworks were not designed to address the complexities of digital conflicts, leaving a gap in global governance that exacerbates the risks associated with state-sponsored cyberattacks (Nocetti et al., 2024).

The ethical dimensions of cyberwarfare and cybercrime are also critical. AI-driven cyberattacks raise serious concerns about privacy, the potential for civilian harm, and the accountability of automated systems (Shackelford et al., 2017; Tsilonis, 2024). The use of cyberattacks to target critical infrastructure, for instance, often crosses the threshold of what is permissible under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), making it imperative for the international community to strengthen global cybersecurity frameworks (Nocetti et al., 2024; Rid & Buchanan, 2015). As AI continues to evolve, these ethical concerns will only intensify, further challenging policymakers to balance security with respect for human rights and privacy.

## Theoretical Framework: Paris School of Securitization

The Paris School of securitization studies builds on and critiques that of the Copenhagen School by shifting the focus from political speech acts to the everyday practices, policies, and institutional mechanisms that shape security (Balzacq, 2011; Bigo, 2002; McDonald, 2008). Unlike the Copenhagen School, which emphasizes how actors frame issues as security threats, the Paris School argues that security is continuously reinforced through governance, surveillance, and bureaucratic processes (Huysmans, 2011; Bigo, 2014).

Influenced by Foucault's theories of power and governmentality, as well as Bourdieu's ideas on social habitus, the Paris School sees security as an ongoing process embedded in institutions and regulatory frameworks (Balzacq et al., 2016; Langwald, 2021). Rather than relying on drastic political statements, it highlights how security is normalized through law enforcement, border control, and administrative measures (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006; Vuori, 2008).

Emerging in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Paris School was developed by scholars such as Didier Bigo, Thierry Balzacq, and Jef Huysmans at Sciences Po's CERI (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2011). They challenged the idea that security is mainly constructed through discourse, arguing instead that it is shaped by institutional routines and security professionals' practices (Balzacq, 2011; McDonald, 2008). The theory gained prominence in the post-9/11 era, as counterterrorism policies, surveillance programs, and intelligence agencies expanded security governance beyond political rhetoric (Balzacq et al., 2016; Abdul, 2020).

While the Paris School primarily examines security at the institutional and bureaucratic level, this framework becomes especially pertinent in the digital age, where the line between public and private security actors is increasingly blurred. Major technology companies, such as Google, Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft, not only manage vast infrastructures of data and digital surveillance, but their executives frequently participate in government advisory roles, cybersecurity partnerships, and defence contracting (Zuboff, 2019; Deibert, 2020). As a result, the governance of digital security cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the symbiotic and sometimes opaque relationship between corporate power and state apparatuses. This interdependency complicates the distinction between who governs and who is governed, raising critical questions about whether governments are leveraging tech corporations as tools of governance, or whether these corporations are themselves shaping policy to entrench their influence (Feldstein, 2019; Pasquale, 2015). Thus, the Paris School's emphasis on the practices and routines of security actors is especially relevant, as it illuminates how power operates through both state institutions and private corporate mechanisms in ways that defy traditional boundaries.

Ultimately, the Paris School broadens securitization theory by emphasizing how security is produced and maintained through material and institutional structures, rather than just political narratives (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006; Williams, 2003).

## Methodology

This paper employs a **qualitative methodology** that combines **case study approach, content analysis, and policy analysis** to examine cyberwarfare as a strategic tool in modern conflicts, with a focus on the **Russia-Ukraine war**. Given the increasing role of cyber operations in global security, this approach allows for a deeper exploration of how cyber threats are framed, responded to, and governed at the international level. By analysing the **Russia-Ukraine war**, the

paper investigates how cyber operations have been deployed by both state and non-state actors to destabilize adversaries, shape political narratives, and escalate geopolitical tensions. This case provides insight into the broader **political and security consequences** of cyberwarfare in regional conflicts.

Through **content analysis**, the paper applies the **Paris School of securitization theory** to understand how cyber threats are constructed. It examines official statements and policy reports to explore how both states justify their cyber operations and how these narratives influence security policies. Additionally, the paper conducts **policy analysis** to assess international responses, including legal frameworks from NATO, EU, and UN. This helps identify governance gaps and evaluate whether existing efforts adequately address the realities of cyberwarfare.

The paper utilizes both primary and secondary resources. The primary sources include official governmental and international organisations publications, statements, official reports and documents. On the other hand, secondary sources include scholarly contributions to the various areas of inquiry.

## Findings

### AI and Cyberwarfare as Everyday Security Practices

This section examines how artificial intelligence and cyberwarfare have become routine security practices in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. It highlights how both states have integrated digital technologies into their military and strategic operations, reflecting the normalisation of cyber capabilities as tools of everyday warfare and national defence.

### AI in Russia's Cyber Military Strategy

Russia's use of AI in cyberwarfare is both calculated and aggressive, aimed at disrupting Ukrainian infrastructure and weakening its defensive capabilities. In the early days of the war, AI-assisted malware such as WhisperGate and HermeticWiper were launched against Ukraine's power grids, financial institutions, and military communication systems, with the intent to cripple the country's ability to function (Canadian Centre for Cybersecurity, 2023; ACIG Journal, 2024). These cyberattacks were not random but part of a broader strategy to erode Ukraine's resilience before physical attacks even began. (NCSC, 2023) Beyond cyberwarfare, AI is also shaping Russia's battlefield strategy. The deployment of AI-enhanced Orlan-10 reconnaissance drones has significantly improved targeting accuracy, allowing Russian forces to locate and strike Ukrainian

positions with precision (Carnegie Endowment, 2024). The use of AI in satellite image analysis further enhances Russia's ability to track troop movements and anticipate Ukrainian countermeasures (Canadian Centre for Cybersecurity, 2023). These applications of AI illustrate how modern conflicts are no longer solely fought with traditional weapons but are increasingly driven by sophisticated algorithms and automated decision-making systems.

Russia's AI-driven disinformation campaigns further highlight the weaponization of digital tools in modern warfare. Automated bot networks and deepfake technology have been deployed to spread false narratives, erode Ukrainian morale, and manipulate international public opinion (NCSC, 2023). This approach aligns with the Paris School's perspective on security, which emphasizes how digital threats and information manipulation contribute to the broader securitization of everyday life.

**Ukraine's AI-Driven Defence Mechanisms**

In response to Russia's technological onslaught, Ukraine has rapidly adapted AI-driven solutions to defend itself both in cyberspace and on the battlefield. This adaptability was catalysed by Ukraine's pre-existing commitment to digital innovation, bolstered by partnerships with tech giants and a robust cybersecurity infrastructure developed post-2014. Recognizing the critical need for resilient communication networks, Ukraine leveraged AI-powered cybersecurity defences to detect and mitigate cyberattacks, drawing on the expertise of companies like Microsoft and Google's Mandiant. These collaborations have provided AI-enhanced threat intelligence, allowing Ukraine to neutralize Russian malware before it spreads, underscoring how cyber resilience has become a key aspect of national security (CSIS, 2024; RUSI, 2024).

AI has also been integrated into Ukraine's battlefield logistics. The AI-enabled Starlink satellite system, provided by SpaceX, plays a crucial role in maintaining secure communications between Ukrainian military units, ensuring real-time coordination in combat zones (Kyiv Independent, 2024). This technological investment reflects Ukraine's adaptive response to its strategic vulnerabilities and underscores the shift from reliance on traditional communication systems to AI-driven technologies as a means of bolstering defence.

Furthermore, Ukraine's use of AI-powered drone technology has revolutionized its military response. Autonomous drones are deployed for reconnaissance, target acquisition, and precision

strikes, enabling Ukrainian forces to counter Russian advances effectively (NCSC, 2023). These technologies have transformed warfare from a purely human-centric effort to a hybrid system where AI plays an active role in shaping military outcomes. By embedding AI into both cybersecurity and physical defence strategies, Ukraine exemplifies how AI has become an essential, rather than exceptional, security practice. This rapid adoption is the result of Ukraine's strategic foresight, which recognized early the necessity of blending digital capabilities with military operations to mitigate vulnerabilities and maximize defensive capabilities (Canadian Centre for Cybersecurity, 2023).

**A Decentralised Approach to Modern Warfare: Private Sector and Hacktivists as Non-State Actors in Cyberwar**

Unlike traditional wars, where nation-states dominate the battlefield, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has underscored the growing influence of private corporations, hacktivists, and cyber militias in shaping modern warfare. The involvement of these non-state actors marks a profound shift in how conflicts are waged in the digital age. As key players in cyber operations, private companies have provided critical cybersecurity infrastructure, while hacktivists and cyber militias have launched both offensive and defensive cyberattacks, further blurring the lines between state and non-state entities. This aligns with the Paris School's argument that security is no longer monopolized by governments but has become decentralized, privatised, and embedded in everyday digital interactions. In this context, traditional conceptions of warfare and security are challenged, as non-state actors now actively contribute to shaping geopolitical outcomes. These dynamics reflect the increasing convergence of technology, security, and warfare, where power is increasingly distributed across a variety of actors, including those operating in the digital and cyber realms.

**Corporate Cybersecurity Interventions**

Private technology companies have played a decisive role in Ukraine's cyber defence. Unlike conventional conflicts where state militaries provide primary support, Ukraine's cyber resilience has been supported by corporate interventions. Microsoft, for instance, helped Ukraine migrate critical government infrastructure to secure cloud environments, preventing Russian cyberattacks from paralyzing essential state functions. (Stimson Centre, 2024). Google's Threat Analysis Group (TAG) has actively countered Russian phishing and espionage campaigns,

demonstrating how cybersecurity has become a shared responsibility between states and private corporations. (NCSC, 2023)

This striking level of corporate intervention highlights a shift in global security dynamics. Rather than just being the 'passive providers' of technology, major firms are now active participants in national defence strategies, shaping the digital battlefield through AI-driven cybersecurity solutions and intelligence-sharing initiatives. (Broeders, 2021; Lilli, 2021; Livingston, 2022) (Nothing got changed in the wording, but Dr. Johns recommended I back this statement with sources, as it did not have any citations in the first draft) And thus, this reflects how modern security is no longer confined to state-centric military operations but extends to the private sector, reinforcing the idea that security is produced through everyday digital practices

**Hacktivist Groups and Cyber Guerrilla Asymmetric Warfare**

In addition to corporate interventions, the conflict has seen the rise of decentralized cyber militias and hacktivist groups. The Ukrainian IT Army, a volunteer-driven cyber force, has carried out distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against Russian government websites and financial institutions, disrupting Moscow's digital infrastructure and countering its cyber offensives (RUSI, 2024; Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2024; CFR, 2024). This new form of cyber guerrilla warfare highlights how individuals and decentralized groups can now influence global conflicts without traditional military structures.

On the other hand, pro-Russian hacking groups such as Killnet and Sandworm have launched their own cyber retaliation campaigns, targeting Western financial institutions and government agencies to destabilize Ukraine's allies (RUSI, 2024; ACIG Journal, 2024). This involvement of non-state cyber actors further blurs the lines between traditional warfare and digital conflict, demonstrating how cyberwarfare has become an arena where governments, private corporations, and independent actors all compete for strategic dominance.

**The International Responses to Cyberwarfare in the context of the Russian Ukrainian War:**

The international responses to AI-driven cyberwarfare in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been complex and evolving. Countries and international organizations have strongly condemned Russia's cyber aggression, yet there is no universal agreement on how international law should handle this new form of warfare. While Ukraine has received relatively significant support from

the international community, AI-enhanced cyber operations remain in a grey zone in global security discussions.

**The Institutional Approaches to AI and Cyberwarfare: NATO Vs EU Vs UN:**

Since the beginning of the war, NATO has emphasized the importance of cybersecurity in modern warfare. The alliance has made it clear that a major cyberattack on a member state could trigger Article 5, its collective defence clause, though this remains a debated issue (NATO, 2024). So far, NATO's response has been centred on helping Ukraine strengthen its cyber defences rather than direct intervention, and this goes back to the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member state (Brennan Centre, 2024). Cyberwarfare exists in a legal and strategic gray zone, making it difficult to determine when a cyberattack constitutes an "act of war."

Beyond immediate support, NATO has been struggling with long-term questions about AI-driven cyber threats. Sophisticated tactics like autonomous malware and deepfake disinformation challenge traditional deterrence strategies (CCDCOE, 2024; CEPA, 2024). Should NATO adapt its military doctrines to include AI warfare, or should it develop separate cyber-specific deterrence policies? (Brennan Centre, 2024; CCDCOE, 2024) These discussions are ongoing, reflecting the growing realization that cyber operations are no longer just a tool of warfare but a core battlefield in themselves.

With cyber warfare becoming a routine part of modern conflicts, some analysts argue that NATO should establish a dedicated cyber alliance, informally referred to as a "Cyber NATO," to centralize and strengthen collective cyber defence (CCDCOE, 2024; CEPA, 2024; Carnegie Endowment, 2024). This proposed structure would likely involve enhanced coordination among existing NATO members, including unified cyber defence strategies, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and potentially joint cyber retaliation against state-sponsored attacks (European Leadership Network, 2024; CCDCOE, 2024). However, debates remain about whether such an alliance would be limited to NATO's current members or whether it could extend to non-member states facing shared cyber threats, suggesting the potential for more flexible or issue-based cyber coalitions that transcend traditional geographic or political boundaries.

However, cyber deterrence is not as straightforward as conventional military deterrence. Unlike missile launches or troop movements, cyberattacks can be difficult to trace back to their

true source, especially when AI-generated misinformation is involved (Lieber Institute, 2024). This raise concerns that aggressive cyber retaliation could escalate conflicts without clear accountability (Lawfare, 2024). The debate continues over whether NATO should adopt a more assertive cyber posture or focus solely on defence (Lawfare, 2024).

As cyber warfare redefines the boundaries of modern conflict, traditional regional actors like the European Union are increasingly stepping into roles that go beyond economic and diplomatic coordination. This section illustrates how supranational institutions are adapting to the evolving threat landscape by proactively engaging in cybersecurity defence, supporting this paper's broader argument that security in the digital age is no longer confined to state actors alone, but is distributed across various levels of governance and practice.

The European Union has played a direct role in helping Ukraine defend against cyber threats. It deployed a Cyber Rapid Response Team (CRRT) to assist Ukrainian cybersecurity forces in detecting and mitigating Russian attacks (EEAS, 2024). The EU also helped establish a cyber laboratory for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, where AI-driven cyber threats can be simulated and countered in real time (EEAS, 2024).

On a policy level, European leaders have pushed for stronger international regulations on cyberwarfare. The European Parliament has called for legally binding agreements to limit the use of AI in cyber espionage and disinformation (European Leadership Network, 2024). However, a major roadblock remains, due to countries like Russia and China having resisted Western-led cybersecurity frameworks, making a universal agreement difficult (CCDCOE, 2024).

The United Nations has been a key forum for debates on AI and cyberwarfare, but progress still has been slow. Ukraine has actively pushed for the UN to recognize Russian cyberattacks as violations of international law, particularly attacks targeting civilian infrastructure (UNODA, 2024; Ukraine MFA, 2024). While the UN has condemned these actions, enforcement remains a challenge (CSIS, 2024).

Adding to the complexity, Russia has proposed its own vision for cyberspace governance at the UN, one that emphasizes state sovereignty and centralized control over the internet, rather than transparency or accountability for cyber warfare (UN, 2024; RUSI, 2024; CCDCOE, 2024). Western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and members of the

European Union (Dr. John recommended examples) have strongly opposed this framework, contending that it legitimizes digital authoritarianism and fails to address the realities of cross-border cyber aggression (UN, 2024; RUSI, 2024). The situation is further complicated by Russia's position as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, which gives it veto power and significant influence over international norm-setting. And the result at the end remains the exact same: a global cybersecurity framework remains out of reach, leaving states to rely on informal uncodified norms rather than clear legal standards with clear boundaries (Sukumar et al., 2024).

## Ukraine's Fight for Recognition of Cyberwarfare as an Act of War

Ukraine has been at the forefront of efforts to establish cyberwarfare as a recognized domain of conflict. Ukrainian officials have urged international bodies to impose sanctions on countries engaged in cyber aggression and to treat cyberattacks on critical infrastructure as acts of war (Kerr, 2023; Ukraine MFA, 2024; Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2024). Ukraine is in the process of establishing a dedicated Cyber Forces unit within its military structure, highlighting its strategic commitment to institutionalizing long-term cybersecurity capabilities. (Kerr, 2023; Kvartsiana, 2023; Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2024; Military Ukraine, 2024) Meanwhile, Ukraine's IT Army, a volunteer-led cyber unit, has played a significant role in countering Russian cyber operations. (Duguin & Pavlova, 2023; Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2024; Military Ukraine, 2024) While this effort has been praised for its effectiveness, some Western policymakers worry it could set a dangerous precedent for state-sponsored cyber militias (RUSI, 2024; CFR, 2024). As mentioned before, the ethical implications of AI-driven cyberwarfare are also a growing concern, particularly as automated attacks become more sophisticated.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has made it evident that cyberwarfare and AI-driven security are no longer abstract or futuristic ideas, but integral aspects of modern warfare. Security today extends beyond military might and government policies; it is influenced by a diverse array of actors, including states, private tech companies, and decentralized cyber militias. This reflects the Paris School's view of security as a decentralized phenomenon, where AI-powered attacks and defences have fundamentally reshaped the nature of the battlefield.

Russia has leveraged AI to launch sophisticated cyber offensives, while Ukraine has responded with AI-powered defence mechanisms, pushing the fight beyond physical borders into digital and informational spaces. Private companies have also played a critical role, providing cybersecurity support, satellite data, and AI-driven intelligence, proving that national security is no longer under sole purview of governments. The future of warfare will likely follow this trajectory, where digital resilience and AI capabilities are just as crucial as conventional military power.

This shift in security dynamics forces everyone to rethink what does 'security' actually mean within the modern era. Cyber threats are now an everyday challenge, demanding a collective approach from the international community that integrates AI, cybersecurity, and decentralized defence strategies into international security frameworks.

This paper focused on the utilization of emerging technologies in modern warfare in the context of the Russian Ukrainian War, alongside global responses addressing the issue. To ensure a thorough and focused analysis, this paper has been conducted within the specific context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, it is important to note that the findings, while grounded in this particular case, can be indicative of broader trends in the evolving landscape of cyberwarfare. The changes discussed are not isolated to this conflict alone; for instance, NATO's consideration of altering its alliance structure or establishing a more robust cyber defence framework suggests that these developments are part of a larger shift in how cyber threats are perceived and addressed globally. Therefore, the implications of this paper extend beyond a single conflict, reflecting a broader transformation in modern warfare.

Future research could explore the impact of cyberwarfare on global security frameworks, comparing how different states and alliances integrate cyber defence into their broader military strategies. And in conclusion, this paper argued that the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlights the shift in warfare dynamics, where cyber capabilities and AI technologies are no longer peripheral but integral to modern conflict, reshaping both national defence strategies and international security norms.

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# The U.S.-China Power Transition: Navigating the Thucydides Trap.

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## Introduction

The escalating conflict between the United States and China has emerged as one of the most significant geopolitical disputes of the twenty-first century. As China's economic and military power grows, challenging the global hegemony of the United States, a critical question arises: is the international order shifting toward a model of controlled strategic competition, or is it veering toward inevitable warfare?

This study examines whether the U.S.–China power shift during the Trump administration (2017–2021) aligns with the Thucydides Trap—the theory that rising powers challenging dominant hegemons often lead to conflict—or whether strategic competition between the two nations can be effectively managed through diplomatic and economic means.

This paper argues that while Trump's actions heightened tensions between the United States and China, particularly through economic competition (e.g., trade wars, technology sanctions), military posturing (e.g., South China Sea operations, Taiwan arms sales), and aggressive diplomatic rhetoric, they did not escalate into open conflict. Power transition theory (PTT) provides a framework for understanding this dynamic: although the U.S. (as the established hegemon) sought to counter China's rise through these measures, the outcome was strategic rivalry rather than inevitable war. By analyzing Trump's policies, this paper demonstrates that the relationship, despite its volatility, remained within the bounds of managed competition—challenging deterministic predictions like the Thucydides Trap.

This paper is divided into 4 sections in addition to the introduction and conclusion. the literature review contrasts conflict-based and managed competition perspectives; (3) Historical Analysis compares past power transitions through Anglo-German and U.S.-Soviet case studies; (4) Policy Examination dissects Trump's economic, military and ideological strategies; (5) Theoretical Evaluation judges whether findings support inevitable conflict or controllable competition models; (6) Conclusion offers stabilization strategies for future relations. Each section builds on Power transition theory to analyze whether this modern power shift follows historical conflict patterns or represents a new competitive paradigm.

## Research Problem

The study addresses a critical question in power transition dynamics: to what extent did the Trump administration's recalibration of U.S.-China relations reflect a strategic embrace of managed rivalry? This question emerges from observed tensions during 2017-2021 that tested Power transition theory's predictive capacity

## Literature Review

Scholarly debates on U.S.-China relations have intensified due to shifting global power dynamics, especially when viewed through the lenses of the Thucydides Trap and Power transition theory. According to PTT, major changes in the balance of power in the world happen when a developing country challenges an established hegemon's supremacy, which may result in conflict (Organski, 1958, p. 45). Many people have used this approach to examine China's quick rise and how it affects U.S. leadership in the world. In his critical analysis of PTT in the context of U.S.-China relations, Chan (2022, p. 112) contends that although China's rise threatens U.S. dominance, war is not a given.

This scenario for conflict is further explored by the idea of the Thucydides Trap, which was made popular by Allison (2017, p. 89). It draws comparisons to historical situations where established powers confronted rising ones, frequently leading to war. Allison's thesis suggests China and the U.S. may be headed for similar collision. However, critics argue this perspective oversimplifies contemporary international relations (Lee, 2020, p. 56). Specifically, Ikenberry (2018, p. 22) and others identify three key moderating factors absent in historical cases: (1) global institutions like the WTO and UN provide conflict-resolution mechanisms absent in pre-1914 or Cold War eras; (2) nuclear deterrence creates mutually assured destruction thresholds that discourage direct military escalation; and (3) economic interdependence – with $650 billion in annual trade pre-Trump – makes conflict economically catastrophic for both nations. These structural constraints suggest modern power transitions may follow different rules than past cases.

Recent authoritative analyses–including Mearsheimer's (2021) and the U.S. National Defense Strategy (2022) –demonstrate how U.S.-China competition operates within institutional guardrails. This evidence informs the paper's core question: whether Trump-era policies reflected Thucydides Trap escalation or Power transition theory's framework of managed rivalry.

Scholarly debates diverge on whether great-power transitions must culminate in conflict. While Power transition theory (Organski, 1958) provides a framework for analyzing hegemonic responses to challengers, contemporary scholars like Chan (2022) argue that structural factors economic interdependence, nuclear deterrence, and institutional mediation can prevent inevitable escalation. Applied to the Trump era, these competing perspectives raise a key question for examination: Did the administration's policies (trade wars, military posturing, and diplomatic maneuvers) reflect the Thucydides Trap's conflict determinism or PTT's possibility of regulated competition?

This study consequently examines whether Trump-era U.S.-China relations better align with the Thucydides Trap's conflict trajectory or PTT's managed competition framework through analysis of three policy domains.

## Theoretical framework: Power Transition Theory and the U.S.-China Rivalry

First presented by A.F.K. Organski in 1958, Power transition theory provides an engaging framework for examining the changing balance of power between the US and China. International stability, according to the idea, is primarily predicated on the domination of a single, satisfied hegemon, challenging the conventional framework of the balance of power. Conflict is going to arise when a growing power approaches parity with a fading dominant power, according to PTT, particularly if the rival is unsatisfied with the current international system (Organski & Kugler, 1980, p. 4). China is in a potentially unstable situation in relation to the U.S. because of its rapid economic rise and expanding geopolitical ambitions, which challenge U.S. dominance and heighten the risk of confrontation (Örmeci et al., 2024, p. 5).

### Power Parity and the Risk of Conflict:

Power transition theory posits that conflict likelihood peaks when a rising power nears parity with a dominant state, especially if dissatisfied with the existing order (Organski & Kugler, 1980). While historical cases show hegemonic transitions often lead to conflict (Zhao, 2022),

Contemporary research emphasizes that power parity alone is insufficient - the challenger's level of discontent determines outcomes (Kim & Gates, 2015). China's BRI and military modernization demonstrate growing power, but its continued participation in U.S.-led institutions suggests complex, non-deterministic transition dynamics.

**Dissatisfaction and the Role of the International Order:**

According to PTT, emerging countries that are unhappy are more likely to start a war because they want to change the international order to suit their interests (Organski & Kugler, 1980, p. 8). There are questions regarding whether China is a revisionist power aiming for systemic change given its increasing aggressiveness in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and international financial organizations like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Kim & Gates, 2015, p. 222). Although the growth of China creates systemic tensions, Lai (2011, p. 9) argues that the country's integration into the international economy and multilateral institutions may serve as a stabilizing factor, lowering the possibility of direct armed conflict.

**Power Transition Theory vs. the Thucydides Trap:**

As bargaining processes rather than deterministic conflicts. China's dual strategy, creating parallel institutions (AIIB) while participating in U.S.-led systems (WTO) demonstrates how rising powers calibrate dissatisfaction (Örmeci et al., 2024). PTT explains why post-2017 U.S.-China tensions diverge from historical precedents: institutional binding (WTO disputes) and nuclear signaling mechanisms absorb pressures that previously caused war. The theory reveals a critical gap between rhetorical escalation (Taiwan threats, tech decoupling) and operational restraint (ongoing trade interdependence, military hotlines). This study applies PTT's three key variables (1) the challenger's institutional stake, (2) the hegemon's strategic flexibility, and (3) available de-escalation channels to assess whether contemporary competition reflects manageable rivalry or dangerous transition. Tang's (2024) findings on China's "controlled revisionism" further validate PTT's analytical edge over structural determinism.

While Power transition theory typically emphasizes long-term structural shifts in the global order, the Thucydides Trap highlights the short-term risks of miscalculation and crisis escalation during moments of perceived power convergence. Accordingly, this paper uses the first Trump administration (2017–2021) as a critical juncture to examine how recalibrated U.S. policies reflect the evolving balance between strategic restraint and intensifying rivalry within this transitional window.

## Cooperation to Competition: The Strategic Shift in U.S.-China Relations

While the Trump administration's (2017–2021) U.S.–China power shift has certain similarities to previous transitions, it also differs significantly, especially in the areas of technology and the economy.  The U.S.-China situation is very different, though, in that direct military combat is made more difficult by the two countries' economic interdependence, leading to a situation in which trade wars and economic pressure take the place of conventional military warfare (Wei, 2019, p. 520).

**U.S.-China Rivalry: Economic Warfare under Trump**

Unlike the Cold War rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the current U.S.-China competition is shaped by deep economic interdependence, making conflict more likely to manifest through trade, technology, and institutional influence rather than direct military confrontation. This research now turns to the U.S.-China power transition under President Donald Trump as a focused case study. Under his leadership, economic warfare, not military conflict became the primary method through which the strategic rivalry intensified. The Trump administration sought to curb China's ascent while safeguarding American economic dominance through protectionist tariffs, decoupling efforts, and an aggressive campaign against Chinese technological advancements, most notably the sanctions targeting Huawei (Wei, 2019, p. 530). These actions marked a significant departure from earlier periods of engagement and reflected a shift toward containment through economic and technological pressure rather than traditional military deterrence.

**Indo-Pacific Strategy: Military Presence and Economic Pressure**

As part of its strategic approach during the Trump administration, the United States reinforced its military presence in the Indo-Pacific, particularly through freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea to challenge China's expansive territorial claims (Gerval & Henderson, 2022, p. 1). This region became a critical arena for projecting geopolitical influence. Unlike previous eras where naval dominance alone shaped global power dynamics, Trump's strategy blended traditional military signaling with aggressive economic measures, reflecting a multi-dimensional approach to managing China's rise.

This section explores how the Trump administration's strategy combined military and economic tools to manage the shifting power balance with China.

**Trump's U.S.-China Rivalry: A Shift in Power Underway**

The relationship between the United States and China got worse dramatically under President Donald Trump (2017–2021), marked by ideological disagreements, strategic military

tensions, and economic conflicts. As envisioned by Power transition theory,this period was a pivotal stage in the continuing power shift. Trump's U.S.-China rivalry focused on economic warfare, geopolitical position, and ideological conflict, in contrast to earlier transitions that were mostly military. However, according to PTT, power shifts are influenced by the strategic choices and policies of both the dominant and emerging powers, and they don't necessarily lead to open confrontation.

**Economic Competition and the Trade War:**

Trump's imposition of tariffs on Chinese imports in 2018, targeting $50 billion worth of goods, sparked a trade war aimed at reducing the U.S. trade deficit and countering China's alleged unfair practices (Wei, 2019, p. 520). China responded with retaliatory tariffs on U.S. agricultural products, escalating tensions. Power transition theory suggests that a dominant power may attempt to limit the rise of a challenger, especially one seeking to reshape the international order. While China has operated within global institutions, its creation of alternatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank signals ambitions to influence and potentially restructure global norms. This supports the view that China is not just a rising power, but a revisionist one—making PTT a useful lens for analyzing U.S.-China rivalry under Trump.

 **Assessing Military and Strategic Tensions**

Under Trump, military posture in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea increased. To combat China's fortification of manmade islands, the United States expanded its Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS), reaffirming its commitment to an open Indo-Pacific (Gaddis, 2005, p. 12). In a similar vein, the Trump administration approved significant armament shipments to Taiwan, strengthening ties with the country that Beijing saw as a direct provocation (Gerval & Henderson, 2022, p. 1). According to PTT, the hegemon's attempt to reestablish its dominance in the face of an aggressive emerging power is reflected in such military actions.

But in response to the U.S.'s efforts to stop Chinese growth, Beijing raised military spending and improved its asymmetric warfare capabilities. This reaction is similar to past shifts in which a new power tries to confront the established state in important strategic domains rather than retreating (Wei, 2019, p. 530). Instead of a full-scale conflict, the outcome was heightened military rivalry, indicating a move toward long-term strategic rivalry.

**Political and Ideological Competition**

The competition between the United States and China has permeated the political and intellectual spheres. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a project intended to increase Beijing's worldwide influence, stood in contrast to Trump's "America First" strategy. According to PTT, China's advocacy of an alternative governance model centered on authoritarian capitalism is indicative of emerging countries' frequent attempts to modify the international order to suit their objectives (Lippert & Perthes, 2020, p. 25).

Finally, the power shift between the United States and China accelerated under Trump on a number of fronts, including ideological, military, and economic. Although the Trump administration's policies show how an incumbent power's strategic decisions may alter the character of the transition, the Power transition theory contends that such changes frequently result in increased competition and possible conflict. Even while military tensions and economic separation increased, neither side went to war, suggesting that power shifts in a closely integrated world system may go differently than previous hegemonic battles. Whether this shift is restrained or intensifies further will depend on future U.S. policy, which will influence the world order for years to come.

## Evaluating Trump's Policies: Comparing Managed Rivalry with the Thucydides Trap

Power transition theory suggests that conflicts arise when a rising power challenges a dominant hegemon, while the Thucydides Trap argues that such rivalries usually led to war. In the case of U.S.-China relations during Trump's era, these frameworks serve as a basis for analyzing whether heightened tensions between the two nations would lead to an irreversible shift in global power dynamics or remain within the bounds of managed rivalry.

**Trump's Policies and Their Impact**

Under President Trump, U.S. - China relations were marked by escalating economic competition, military posturing, and aggressive diplomatic rhetoric. Key actions, such as the trade war and sanctions on Chinese technology firms, signaled a clear attempt by the U.S. to curb China's growing influence (Pavicevic & Polentas, 2018). However, despite the intensity of these actions, they did not result in open conflict. For instance, the Phase One Trade Deal (2020) successfully maintained economic interdependence between the two nations, preventing the

complete decoupling of their economies (Chukwuma et al., 2024). This strategic maneuver illustrates the focus on managing rivalry rather than allowing it to escalate.

**Strategic Rivalry, Not War.** China's response to Trump's policies was marked by strategic restraint, with Beijing focusing on diplomatic and economic countermeasures instead of military escalation (Teixeira, 2019). This restraint reflects the concept of managed rivalry, where both powers engage in competition without resorting to conflict. While Trump's policies certainly intensified the rivalry, they did not push the two powers into war, contradicting the deterministic view of the Thucydides Trap.

**Managed Rivalry and Continuity.** In the end, Trump's foreign policy against China demonstrated a rivalry that stayed inside the preexisting international framework, supporting the idea of controlled competition rather than an unavoidable change in the balance of power in the world. Despite its intensity, the contest did not significantly alter the world order, defying the Thucydides Trap and PTT's predictions of conflict.

## Conclusion and Future Outlook

Trump's policies, while increasing tensions, did not lead to a direct confrontation between the U.S. and China. His policies mainly shifted the rivalry from military to economic competition, with a focus on technological sectors, particularly through the trade war and sanctions on Chinese tech. companies. While these economic measures increasing the tensions, they remained within the framework of strategic rivalry rather than conflict. However, the onset of COVID-19 had a profound impact on global relations, altering the competitive dynamics and temporarily shifting the focus from direct economic competition to managing the global pandemic. This disruption complicated the trajectory of U.S.-China relations, and the world economy had to adapt to new realities.

Looking ahead, it remains uncertain whether Trump's second presidency would revive his aggressive economic stance toward China. There are three potential scenarios for future U.S.-China relations: (1) continued strategic competition, where economic and military tensions persist, (2) escalation into conflict if more aggressive policies are reintroduced, or (3) stabilization through managed competition, where both powers create mechanisms for transparent coexistence.

Diplomatic engagement, military de-escalation tactics, and economic collaboration will be crucial in preventing further escalation.

Future leadership decisions, both in the U.S. and China, will play a decisive role in shaping the outcome of this rivalry. Whether the U.S.-China competition falls victim to the Thucydides Trap or remains a controlled rivalry will depend on diplomatic efforts, multilateral cooperation, and strategic realignments in the coming years.

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