

**US FOREIGN POLICY UNDER TRUMP AND BIDEN TOWARDS
IRAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**



Researcher

Parsa Shoukat

Reg. No. 210-FSS/MSIR/F22

Supervisor

Ms. Nadia Awan

Lecturer

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their unconditional support and love, who worked hard for my better education and life.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work present in the following thesis is my effort, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that the thesis is my composition. No part of the thesis has been previously presented for any other degree.

Date: _____

SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATE

The thesis entitled US Foreign Policy under Trump and Biden towards Iran: A Comparative Analysis submitted by Parsa Shoukat Registration# 210-FSS/MSIR/F22 in partial fulfillment of MS degree in International Relations has been completed under my guidance and supervision. I am satisfied with the quality of the student's research work and allow her to submit this thesis for further processing as per IIU rules & regulations.

Ms. Nadia Awan

Lecturer

Department of Politics & IR

Faculty of Social Sciences

International Islamic University Islamabad

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List of Abbreviation

BBC	British Broadcasting Company
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GOP	Grand Old Party
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRGC-QF	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
UN	United Nations
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

ABSTRACT

US-Iran relations have historically been characterized by deep distrust, interrupted by brief periods of diplomatic cooperation within ongoing confrontation. The relationship between the US and Iran is a tense one that has never escaped the attention of the international community. This thesis aims to analyze and compare US foreign policy in Iran with a main emphasis on the Trump administration policy and comparison to the current Biden policy towards Iran. While in the US presidency under Trump the US has adopted an aggressive policy on Iran referred to as the maximum pressure policy which entails economic sanctions, isolation from their nuclear program the JCPOA, and confronting Iran's regional influence. On the other hand, the Biden administration has been ambassadors for diplomatic re-engagement with the hope of going back to the JCPOA and multilateral engagement. The primary objective of this thesis is to analyze the contrasts and similarities between the strategies and priorities set by Trump and the Biden administration in their approach to Iran. Key themes explored in this research are the JCPOA, sanctions, and the geopolitical situation of the region. The research is very timely and can add to the understanding of the effects of changes in the policy of the US towards the Middle East over the years and the challenges and opportunities associated with it. The thesis explores that both Trump and Biden adopted neorealist evaluations of Iran's existing power capabilities and strategic intentions. However, their approaches diverged in terms of their preferred instruments of policy. The ongoing negotiations to revive the JCPOA and the shifting geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East are also examined to offer a contemporary perspective. The research is qualitative in nature and is done through a review of the literature which includes books, scholarly articles, reports as well as official documents and statements from both these two presidents. The comparative analysis framework is used to lighten and enhance the understanding of the complexities of U.S.-Iran relations, as well as other broader issues in contemporary foreign politics.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The United States' foreign policy regarding Iran is one of the well-known and most discussed issues in American and international politics. Even though the USA continues to criticize Iran's activities in the region, Iran's multi-dimensional role in the region and its ambitions in developing Nuclear energy have made USA-Iran relations a challenging issue. This multi-dimension relationship has undergone paradigm shifts and changes in political policies over the years with every U.S. administration having its agenda and strategy towards Iran (Katzman, 2018).

The declaration of the Democratic platform in 2016 had pro deal with the Iran while the Republican platform cast strong political conviction against the deal. Trump's decision to withdraw from the agreement in 2018 freed Iran from the conditions that introduced limitations on its nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions. Trump and Biden have established distinct and consistent foreign policies in recent years, for instance, both of them have adopted divergent strategies in dealing with especially Iran one of the most powerful countries in the region (Katzman, 2018).

These administrations though have all succeeded in facing similar issues such as the Iranian nuclear program; sanctions and regional dominance however have preferred to pursue opposing courses of action in regard to these issues. It is equally important to acknowledge that it is difficult to fully understand the nature and character of these changes without analyzing their historical context, their geopolitical context and their policy preferences. The thesis aims to assess the effectiveness of these strategies, assess the strategies and policies of Democrats and

Republicans ,assess the impacts of the strategies on US-Iran relations, and the impact of the strategies on peace and security in the region by providing a comparative analysis of the strategies adopted by the Trump and Biden (Katzman, 2018).

The Democratic Party typically advocates for a stronger role of government in societal affairs, with a focus on promoting social justice, economic equity, and environmental sustainability. Their policy positions often include support for progressive taxation, regulatory oversight of industries, and the implementation of programs such as universal healthcare and public education (Touzani, 2023).

These measures are intended to mitigate inequality and provide a comprehensive safety net for all citizens. Additionally, Democrats prioritize the protection and advancement of civil rights, endorsing policies that foster inclusivity and safeguard the rights of marginalized groups. The party also emphasizes the significance of collective action in addressing systemic challenges, such as climate change and racial injustice (Touzani, 2023).

The Republican Party places a strong emphasis on individual responsibility, limited government intervention, and the principles of a free-market economy. Their policy preferences include advocating for lower taxes reduced regulatory burdens on businesses, and initiatives that promote personal freedom and entrepreneurship. Republicans often uphold traditional values and prioritize a strong national defense, with a particular focus on law and order (Touzani, 2023).

The party tends to favor a decentralized approach to governance, arguing that state and local governments should have greater autonomy in addressing societal issues, rather than the federal government. Additionally, Republicans generally support policies aimed at raising economic growth, supported by the belief that a free-market system is the most effective means

of ensuring prosperity and opportunity for all citizens (Touzani, 2023).

The history of US-Iran relations is based on mutual distrust and aggression, as well as a desire to improve relations and a tentative exchange of certain concessions. Its history dates back to the early days of the 20th century when companies such as Standard Oil established an oil company in Iran. Nazi Germany occupied Iran during World War II with Britain and the Soviet forces and the US sponsoring the militaries. After the WWII period, the US supported Iran in economic transformation and development (Gasiorowski, & Byrne, 2004).

But in the fifties of the last century, the situation became tenser when the Iranian oil industry was nationalized by Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, and the US and the British brought the Shah with a coup in 1953. The Shah had been a staunch ally of the US and got a good deal of assistance. Tensions began in the 1979 Islamic Revolution that saw the deposing of the Shah of Iran and the establishment of the Islamic theocratic state of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini (Gasiorowski, & Byrne, 2004).

The embassy takeover in an attempt to take 52 Americans as hostages marked almost a complete shutdown in diplomatic relations; sanctions imposed by the US government, and tensed relations even until now. Even more worrying for the US was Iran's provision of financial and even political backing for militant groups that threatened the US's interests in the Middle East and beyond this added to the number of US-sponsored sanctions on Iran (Gasiorowski, & Byrne, 2004).

However, in the 2000s there were also several efforts to be made to ensure that there was a good diplomatic relationship between the two states for instance following the election of the reformist President Mohammad Khatami in Iran and President George W. Bush in the United

States. Iran also in 2003 offered the US government considerations on the various issues and the nuclear issue was one of them. Unfortunately, this proposal was not entertained by the Bush administration when it placed Iran in the same group of countries as Iraq and North Korea labeled as an axis of evil' (Peleg, 2009).

There was a shift in an approach towards Iran under President Barack Obama from complete isolation as was the case under President George Bush to carefully engaging Iran, the Obama administration negotiated and endorsed the Iran multilateral nuclear deal of 2015 known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA is also referred to as the Iran nuclear deal, the aim of which was to limit Iran's nuclear capabilities in exchange for relieving it of sanctions this was one of the great achievements in the history of diplomacy and potentially a historic turning points in the great powers' relationship with Iran (Rezaei, 2017).

Donald Trump assumed office in 2017, and his administration pursued a notably distinct strategy concerning Iran. This approach focused on exerting maximum pressure through a combination of economic sanctions and diplomatic channels. In May 2018, President Trump argued the JCPOA and called for sanctions to be imposed on Iran for the uncertain reasons of its ineffectiveness and another Tehran role in the region (Fitzpatrick, Elleman, & Izewicz, 2019).

After this withdrawal, the Trump Administration resumed economic sanctions on Iran and diplomacy on persuading Iran to renegotiate the nuclear deal and reduce Tehran's support of militias in the Middle East. Moreover, the administration proposed to prolong the already decades-old UN arms embargo on Iran, which expired in the last week of October 2020, and also named Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp as a foreign terrorist organization (Fitzpatrick, Elleman, & Izewicz, 2019).

In contrast, the Biden administration, which took office in January 2021, directed that the US had a willingness to engage with Iran in diplomacy and that his administration intended to reintegrate into the nuclear deal. President Biden has been emphasizing the importance of putting pressure on Iran through diplomacy to deal with its nuclear program and regional influences while also trying to overcome difficulties in negotiations. The administration has already suggested three initial policy plans to strengthen relations with Iran as a diplomatically significant state (Brewer, & Rome, 2023).

Among such were the acceptance of the EU's invitation to attend a five+1 meeting, the canceling of the Trump administration's "snapback" sanctions at the UN, and the easing of travel restrictions on Iranian diplomats in New York. The Biden administration has spelled out its intentions which include engagement with Iran to enforce caps imposed by the JCPOA on Iran's nuclear program as well as interventions to bring Iran back within the parameters of missile and regional activity (Brewer, & Rome, 2023).

It is clear that the US has pursued an aggressive strategy against Iran since the Islamic Revolution and has used a number of political and economic policy options that may serve to weaken and ultimately displace the Islamic regime in Tehran. Nevertheless, things changed under the Biden administration, with the US abandoning a highly restrictive and consensus-based foreign policy towards Iran for a more pragmatic and nuanced one (Brewer, & Rome, 2023).

Though it took this shift, it was not able to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions. Security was the main concern for the Iran nuclear deal because the deal undermined the efforts of restricting proliferation and through restriction, it was expected that the Trump and Biden administrations would exercise extreme US foreign policy in the Middle East (Brewer, &

Rome, 2023).

It is apparent from this lens that, unlike Trump, Biden's Iran policy strategy is influenced by domestic and international political forces in addition to individual and political style. Biden's approach to the Iranian nuclear program is focused on preventing nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and providing security for the region by simultaneously employing both dialogue and a set of non-military actions with the support of allies to deter Iran from increasing its military engagement and avoid a direct clash (Brewer, & Rome, 2023).

It is in this case that the ongoing initiatives of the Biden administration on the Middle East may lose the strategy of Trump's administration that combined with the Iran nuclear deal forced it to foster good relations with other countries while shaping strong regional powers (Brewer, & Rome, 2023). Considering the historical background of US-Iran relations and the changing international situation, the research will compare US foreign policy towards Iran under the Trump and Biden presidencies.

The current research will focus on various aspects such as the priority strategies, methods of using diplomacy, and the outcomes of selected administrations. Through this investigation, the research will examine the contrast between a policy of acceptance and one of resistance. By doing so, it aims to highlight both similarities and differences in how these strategies approach the dynamics of US-Iran relations and their implications for future international negotiations.

The research will provide an opportunity to compare and contrast how the two administrations approached Iran to understand why the latter's approach was successful at

eliminating the country from US politics while the former's approach was not. This includes analyzing the results of any diplomatic efforts, determining the results of pressure from internal or external economic and political interests, and determining the regional and global security implications of a policy. In the end, the research aims to offer a richer understanding of the complexity of US-Iran relations as well as future phenomena in other countries' international relations.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The US foreign policy towards Iran, for the past three decades, has fluctuated reformist, influenced by the ideological framework of the different tenures in the US. However, the harmony between the United States of America and Iran shares a bumpy history and has witnessed many changes of direction and policies with the two most recent presidents, Donald J. Trump, and Joseph R. Biden Jr. In 2018, then US President Donald Trump made a major shift toward the Iran policy with his decision to pull America out of the JCPOA and proceed towards the campaign of sanctions pressure. The economic sanctions applied in this campaign also led to building pressure and tensions in the region. Joe Biden who became president in 2021, has taken a more diplomatic approach. The change of power in the White House showed the Biden administration's intentions to return to the Iran nuclear deal framework, indicating that diplomatic approaches are to be in focus. This research attempts to examine and compare the foreign policies of the administrations of Trump and Biden toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. It focuses on their stand in key areas of conflict, including nuclear power, economic boycotts, and military domination in certain areas. Moreover, it explores the effects of such policies on stability and security in the region.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This research is essential for understanding how the policies of the two dominant parties in the United States Government influence their international politics and foreign policies during the Presidential terms of the Trump and Biden Administrations. This study therefore has great implications in the understanding of the existing policies towards Iran as it fills a gap in an organized, side-by-side comparison of their policies towards Iran hence having great implications towards the understanding of international politics given that relations between the US and Iran remain a sensitive subject.

In addition, the present research will contribute to revealing the strategies the Biden administration uses to overcome the current obstacles in the process of restoring with Iran. Altogether, it is stated that through the analysis of both of the administrations' approach to Iranian; foreign policy, sanctions, and challenges and opportunities of the relations between Iran and USA, this research will present a worthy addition to the foreign policy analysis literature. Also, it will contribute to methodological and theoretical approaches for interpreting the changes in the dynamics of relations between the USA and Iran, and, therefore, increase a general understanding of the mechanisms of diplomatic activities of the world states.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the key differences in the ideological frameworks of the Trump and Biden administrations towards Iran.
2. To explore the contrast in Trump and Biden administrations' policies towards Iran in terms of diplomacy and negotiation.
3. To examine the distinct strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations toward Iran and their influence on regional security, stability, and the balance of power in the Middle

East.

1.4 Research Questions of the Study

1. What are the key differences in the ideological frameworks of the Trump and Biden administrations toward Iran?
2. How did the diplomatic strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations towards Iran differ, particularly in their approaches to negotiation and engagement?
3. How have the Trump and Biden administrations' differing approaches to Iran shaped regional security, stability, and the balance of power in the Middle East?

1.5 Delimitation of the study

The delimitation of the study on the title, “US Foreign Policy under Trump and Biden towards Iran: A Comparative Analysis” can be defined as focusing on the following aspects:

1. The purpose of this paper is to identify and contrast the foreign policies of the two administrations, from Donald Trump to Joe Biden, in regard to Iran.
2. The research examines the Trump and Biden administration’s approach to economic sanctions and diplomacy with Iran, looking at the economic repercussions and measures of diplomatic engagement.
3. Information used in research is derived from sources that are publicly available and also include verifiable sources, including official statements, academic literature, and government documents
4. It will further add to the knowledge of the history and nature of the relation between the USA and Iran alongside shedding light on the efficacy of various policy strategies towards Iran.

1.6 Literature Review

In the book *America and Iran: The Past to the Present: From 1720*, Ghazvinian offers a comprehensive analysis of the complex historical relationship between the United States and Iran, tracing its origins from the 18th century to the present day. This extensive study encompasses a wide range of themes that define the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the bilateral relations between the two nations. The book also examines the impact of pivotal events, such as the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the nuclear agreement, which have significantly shaped the trajectory of U.S.-Iran relations (Ghazvinian, 2021).

The author's primary objective is to offer readers a nuanced and insightful understanding of the complicated history between Iran and the United States, moving beyond the simplistic and binary perspectives frequently presented in media portrayals. By doing so, the author seeks to provide a richer and more comprehensive experience that captures the complexity of the relationship between the two nations (Ghazvinian, 2021).

In conclusion, the central aim of the book under analysis is to present an accurate and comprehensive account of the bilateral relations between the United States and Iran over the span of three centuries. The work offers a detailed examination of the various dimensions of engagement, diplomacy, and conflict, as well as the interactions and cross-cultural exchanges that have defined the U.S.-Iran relationship.

Donette Murray's book *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution* offers a comprehensive examination of the tensions between Iran and the United States that have continued since the Islamic Revolution. Murray provides an in-depth historical context, beginning with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 and the subsequent

establishment of the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. She traces how this pivotal event not only reshaped Iran's internal politics but also realigned its external relations. In exploring the pre-Islamic Revolution period, Murray illustrates that American-Iranian relations were notably friendly during the Shah's rule, while also highlighting how American support for the Shah fostered resentment within Iran, ultimately setting the stage for revolution (Murray, 2009).

Through the lens of the Iranian Revolution's conflict, politics, and transformation, Murray identifies significant shifts in U.S.-Iran relations. Murray also addresses the prolonged crisis of the U.S. embassy hostage situation in Tehran, where American hostages were held for 444 days, exacerbating the already strained ties between the two nations. The book further explores how Iran's regional position and its relationships with other Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia and Israel, have influenced the broader U.S.-Iran relationship. Murray critically examines how these dynamics have shaped traditional U.S. foreign policy toward Iran (Murray, 2009).

The contentious issue of Iran's nuclear energy program is also discussed, focusing on its central role in U.S. and international concerns. Murray analyzes the impact of economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies on Iran and the subsequent effects on the Iranian economy. Lastly, the book considers the potential for improvement in U.S.-Iran relations, assessing factors such as internal conditions within each country, regional developments, and the prospects for diplomatic engagement or continued conflict (Murray, 2009).

Trevor Rubenzer's book, *Today's Foreign Policy Issues: Cross of Continuity: Democrats and Republicans (Across the Aisle) Unabridged Edition*, provides a nuanced exploration of the complexities of American foreign policy by examining the distinct approaches and perspectives

of the Democratic and Republican parties. The author highlights how these two political parties diverge in their stances on numerous critical foreign policy issues that define the United States' global role in the twenty-first century. The book is structured around 38 specific foreign policy areas, chosen for their relevance and significance to Americans. To facilitate an understanding of each issue within the broader context of U.S. foreign policy development, Rubenzer provides concise historical overviews (Rubenzer, 2017).

For instance, Rubenzer discusses the political polarization surrounding U.S. foreign policy toward particular nations, such as the impact of President Obama's 2016 visit to Cuba and the decision to reestablish diplomatic relations. In this analysis, Rubenzer offers a scholarly examination of how presidents, key congressional leaders, and a range of voices within the Democratic and Republican parties address these issues. The book sheds light on the common ground that unites the parties, as well as the fundamental ideological differences that shape the United States' political landscape and influence its leadership in foreign policy (Rubenzer, 2017).

Treachous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States by Trita Parsi are a pivotal work for comprehending the complex relationships among these three countries from 1948 to the present. Parsi, an expert in U.S. international relations, explains the covert cooperation, betrayals, and strategic operations that have shaped Middle Eastern stability and influenced U.S. policies in the region. The book sheds light on various significant events, such as Iran's request for Israel to eliminate Khomeini and Israel's appeal to Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War (Parsi, 2007).

It emphasizes the necessity of achieving a balance between the conflicting nations of Israel and Iran to facilitate a possible solution in Iraq and ensure lasting peace in Israel. Parsi's

unique background allows him to approach these issues with the insight of an insider. His interactions with top American and Iranian officials, as well as former Israeli prime ministers, grant him the ability to present an accurate and comprehensive portrayal of the Middle Eastern situation an achievement that distinguishes his work from that of many other authors. In conclusion, *Treacherous Alliance* provides readers with a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics within the Israel-Iran-United States triangle, making it an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the complexities of Middle Eastern politics and the challenges of balancing competing interests in such a deeply divided region (Parsi, 2007).

In *Iran's Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, R.K. Ramazani provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of Iranian foreign policy from the presidency of Mohammad Khatami through Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure. Ramazani precisely examines the shifts in Iran's relations with other states and international organizations during these critical periods in Iranian history. The book delves into the political policies, strategic goals, and historical and geopolitical contexts that were instrumental in shaping Iran's foreign relations under Khatami and Ahmadinejad. Ramazani further explores how Iranian leaders addressed significant challenges such as the nuclear issue, regional conflicts, and international sanctions (Ramazani, 2012).

Drawing on a wide collection of primary sources and secondary literature, he offers a comprehensive explanation of the key developments in Iran's foreign policy during these years. The book also highlights how internal factors, including factional disputes and ideological differences within the Iranian political system, have influenced the formulation and execution of the country's external policies. Additionally, Ramazani provides in-depth insights into Iran's diplomacy with major global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, as well as its

relations with regional actors like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. He assesses the successes and failures of Iran's diplomatic efforts and examines how external pressures have shaped the country's international objectives (Ramazani, 2012).

In *The Iran Wars: Spy Games, Bank Battles, and the Secret Deals That Reshaped the Middle East*; Solomon examines the conflicts between the United States and Iran through the lenses of spying, economic warfare, and secret diplomacy that have significantly influenced Middle Eastern geopolitics. The book provides a comprehensive account of the complex dynamics involving espionage, where both nations engaged in activities to undermine each other, including American intelligence operations aimed at Iran and Iranian counter-espionage efforts to bolster its regional influence (Solomon, 2016).

Solomon details the financial struggle centered around sanctions, explaining how the United States and its allies sought to destabilize Iran's economy by disrupting its financial markets and excluding it from the SWIFT system, with the aim of compelling Iran to abandon its nuclear program. The book examines the impact of these sanctions on Iran's economy and population. A significant focus of Solomon's analysis is the secret and open diplomacy surrounding Iran's nuclear ambitions, including an in-depth look at the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015 (Solomon, 2016).

He explores Iran's strategic efforts to expand its influence in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, and the implications of this expansion for regional rivals like Saudi Arabia and Israel. Solomon's examination includes a detailed analysis of the rivalries and alliances formed in various proxy conflicts, evaluating the implications of U.S. policy decisions on the broader Middle Eastern region. The book highlights the major U.S. administrations' approaches

to Iran, assessing their impacts on regional stability and security. Solomon also discusses the unintended consequences of these policies, such as the strengthening of hardline factions within Iran (Solomon, 2016).

Overall, *The Iran Wars* provides a thorough historical account of the contentious interactions between the United States and Iran, offering insights into the espionage, economic struggles, and covert dealings that have reshaped the Middle East and influenced international relations.

The article *Republican and Democratic Platforms on Iran* explains the divergent perspectives of the Republican and Democratic parties regarding Iran, particularly in relation to the 2015 nuclear deal. Both parties criticized Iran for its regional policies and human rights violations, yet they differed significantly in their views on the nuclear agreement. During the Republican presidential campaign, the party strongly opposed the nuclear deal, dismissing it as a unilateral initiative by President Obama that lacked legally binding assurances for its continuation under future administrations (Touzani, 2023).

Republicans argued that the agreement permitted Iran to advance its nuclear technology, which they believed intensified tensions in the Middle East. They expressed their intention to oppose Iran's ongoing funding of terrorism and other aggressive actions, suggesting that a Republican president might seek to dismantle the deal. In contrast, the Democratic Party supported the nuclear agreement, asserting that it effectively blocked Iran's pathways to acquiring nuclear weapons without resorting to military action (Touzani, 2023).

Democrats opposed that the deal contributed to regional stability through diplomatic means and advanced non-proliferation objectives. While they also criticized Iran's regional

conduct and human rights record, Democrats emphasized their commitment to reducing Iran's destabilizing activities and combating its support for terrorism. Concurrently, both parties expressed an interest in fostering cultural and academic exchanges with the Iranian people (Touzani, 2023).

In the article *Why America Must Lead Again: Recasting U.S. Foreign Policy after Trump*, published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2020, Joseph R. Biden Jr. articulates his vision for the future direction of U.S. foreign policy. Biden advocates for a foreign policy framework centered on diplomacy, democracy, and human rights, contrasting sharply with the populist isolationism of the Trump administration. He emphasizes the importance of strategic coordination, bipartisan cooperation, and support from international allies in addressing global challenges such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, and pandemics (Biden Jr., 2020).

Biden calls for a revitalization of key alliances, including NATO and the United Nations, and seeks to restore friendly relations with countries that distanced themselves during Trump's "America First" policy. He envisions a return to traditional diplomatic practices, with a focus on enhancing the capabilities of the State Department and its diplomats to address global issues. Biden reaffirms a commitment to human rights and democratic values, rejecting the previous administration's tolerance of authoritarian regimes (Biden Jr., 2020).

He identifies emerging 21st-century challenges, such as cyber warfare and global health crises, and stresses the need for a proactive national security strategy that leverages American innovation, technology, and democratic principles (Biden Jr., 2020).

The article *Iran after Trump: Can Biden Revive the Nuclear Deal and Does Iran Even Want to?* By Hadi Kahalzadeh explores the complexities surrounding the potential revival of the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under the Biden administration. Kahalzadeh highlights that while Biden advocates for renewed engagement with the JCPOA, significant obstacles remain. Domestically, internal political dynamics in Iran, including the influence of hard-line groups resistant to negotiations with the United States, complicate the process (Kahalzadeh, 2022).

The election of Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative and anti-reform figure, in 2021 intensifies these challenges. The article also addresses the impact of Trump's "maximum pressure" policy on Iran, noting that its adverse effects have heightened the Iranian government's push for sanctions relief to achieve economic goals. However, there is considerable debate within Iran about whether rejoining the JCPOA would effectively address these economic strains. Additionally, Iran's role in Middle Eastern conflicts and the opposition from regional actors like Saudi Arabia and Israel further complicate the prospects for normalization of relations with the West (Kahalzadeh, 2022).

In conclusion, Kahalzadeh asserts that while the Biden administration is committed to re-engaging with the JCPOA and pursuing diplomatic solutions, the complexities of Iran's domestic political environment, economic conditions, and regional dynamics pose significant challenges. Both Iranian and American stakeholders will need to navigate these factors carefully through diplomacy to achieve progress (Kahalzadeh, 2022).

Trump vs. Biden on Foreign Policy provides an in-depth examination of the foreign policies supported by Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The article contrasts Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord with Biden's commitment to rejoin the agreement, depending upon Iran's adherence to its provisions. Biden has also proposed a nuanced approach to sanctions, targeting specific issues such as human rights abuses, terrorism in the Middle East,

and the proliferation of ballistic missile systems, in contrast to Trump's broader strategies (ABC News, 2020).

Trump's administration is noted for its acceleration of agreements between Israel and two Arab states, which Trump highlighted as a diplomatic achievement, portraying him as a peacemaker. Biden, however, has expressed a readiness to reverse certain policies from his predecessors, including efforts to negotiate a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians and halting U.S. support for the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen. Another significant area of divergence is Trump's relatively favorable stance towards Russian President Vladimir Putin, which is perceived as lacking in consensus with broader U.S. foreign policy norms. In contrast, Biden is expected to adopt a more critical stance towards Russia, continuing some policies from the Trump administration such as imposing sanctions in response to Russian actions in Ukraine, Syria, and cyber-attacks, as well as the use of chemical agents (ABC News, 2020).

Exploring the Iran Nuclear Deal provides a detailed examination of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, which was signed in July 2015. This agreement represents a significant milestone in international relations, as it involved Iran's commitment to cooperate with global powers, including the United States. Iran agreed to significantly reduce its nuclear activities and permit international monitoring of its nuclear sites, which are key principles of the JCPOA (Robinson, 2017).

In return, the signatory countries were granted access to purchase Iranian oil and oil products, and Iran was promised relief from billions of dollars in sanctions. The deal established comprehensive restrictions to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons capabilities, including limitations on uranium enrichment, plutonium production, and the suppression of nuclear facilities. The article focuses on the economic impact of the JCPOA, particularly the

lifting of sanctions, which created new opportunities for foreign investment in Iran's economy (Robinson, 2017).

This economic potential was a major incentive for Iran to enter into the agreement and comply with its terms. However, post-signing challenges have emerged, including issues related to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran's nuclear program, ongoing geopolitical tensions, and the U.S. withdrawal from the deal in 2018. The withdrawal was met with international disapproval and has introduced uncertainty regarding the future of the agreement (Robinson, 2017).

In summary, this paper offers a clear analysis of the Iran Nuclear Deal, detailing the agreement's specifics, its economic implications for Iran, and the challenges it faces amid renewed efforts to renegotiate the deal within a shifting Middle Eastern political context.

In May 2018, President Trump announced in a national address that the United States would withdraw from the Iran Nuclear Deal. He characterized the agreement as fundamentally flawed, opposing that it failed to adequately address the issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions and did not provide sufficient mechanisms to curb Iran's destabilizing influence in the Middle East. Additionally, in a statement made in January 2018, Trump labeled the Iranian government as the leading global sponsor of terrorism and asserted that the United States needed to adopt a more tough approach in its dealings with Iran (The White House, 2018).

Joe Biden has expressed a clear intention to re-engage with the Iran Nuclear Deal, an agreement originally established by President Obama in 2015 but left out by President Trump in 2018. Biden's approach to Middle East policy significantly contrasts with Trump's particularly regarding the Iran nuclear deal. Biden has criticized Trump's withdrawal from the agreement, arguing that it intensified the risk of conflict in the region (LEE, 2021).

Furthermore, Biden has been critical of Iran's recent advancements in its nuclear program and has advocated for a diplomatic resolution to address these issues. In February 2021, the Biden administration indicated a willingness to negotiate with Iran and other global powers to potentially restore the terms of the 2015 nuclear agreement, which had been dismissed by the Trump administration under its "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran (LEE, 2021)

1.7 Research Gap

Despite the extensive literature available on the comparative analysis of Trump and Biden's approaches to Iran, there is a notable absence of comprehensive studies that explain the changes and continuities in U.S. strategies over time. Existing research typically offers broad overviews of policy frameworks and major events rather than detailed examinations of the specific diplomatic, economic, and military measures implemented by each administration. Moreover, comparative analyses are scarce regarding the effectiveness of these strategies and their potential impacts on regional stability, U.S. alliances in the Middle East, and Iran's internal and external policies.

Therefore, there is a need for further research to investigate the complex dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations and to analyze the distinctive characteristics of these relations under different presidential administrations. This research considers how domestic and electoral politics influence and shape strategic decision-making concerning U.S. policy toward Iran. By addressing these gaps, the study enhances understanding of the continuity and changes in U.S. Iran policy and their implications for both regional and international relations.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

U.S. foreign policy towards Iran has emerged as a significant factor influencing various events and policies at both regional and global levels. Theoretical approaches such as neo-realism and policy models like the rational-actor model provide a coherent framework for analyzing U.S. policy in this context. Neo-realism, also known as structural realism, became a prominent theory of international relations in the mid-twentieth century and is closely associated with scholars such as Kenneth Waltz, who articulated the theory in his 1979 publication, *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz, 1979).

Neo-realism focuses on the international system rather than individual states, emphasizing the structural changes within the system. According to neo-realist theory, the international system is characterized by anarchy, meaning it lacks a central authority or sovereign. This anarchic structure compels states to depend on their own capabilities for security and survival, given the absence of a higher governing authority. The theory suggests that distribution of power the relative influence which each state can exert is the chief thing that shapes their behavior (Waltz, 1979).

In neo-realism, states are viewed as independent entities that actively seek to ensure their security within a system marked by individualism. The distribution of capabilities, whether globally or among states, plays a crucial role in shaping their interactions and relationships. Neo-realism is grounded in the assumption that states act as unitary actors, with internal decision-making processes reflecting a unified calculation of national interest. This contrasts with structural realism, which focuses solely on the structural level of the international system, without considering internal state dynamics. Moreover, neo-realism introduces the concept that states prioritize relative gains over absolute gains. This means that states are more concerned

with enhancing their power relative to other states rather than focusing solely on their own power (Waltz, 1979).

A neo-realist analysis of U.S. foreign policy towards Iran would emphasize how the distribution of power capabilities within the international system influences U.S. behavior. Under the Trump administration, the U.S. shifted from a multilateral, cooperative approach with Iran to a more confrontational stance. This policy included withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and implementing stringent sanctions against Iran. From a neo-realist perspective, this shift reflects the U.S. effort to maintain its dominance in the region, countering what it perceives as a threat posed by Iran (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

According to neo-realist theory, the objective was to limit Iran's regional influence and prevent it from emerging as a hegemonic power. The sanctions were strategically designed to cause economic damage on Iran, compelling it to abandon its defiant position and return to negotiations. The aim was to secure a more advantageous agreement that would address additional concerns, such as Iran's ballistic missile program and its support for proxy militias (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

On the other hand, the Biden administration seeks to re-engage diplomatically with Iran and initiate the process of restoring the nuclear deal. From a neo-realist perspective, Biden's evolving policy aims to balance multiple priorities: emphasizing non-military approaches to address the Iranian nuclear program, managing Iran's regional influence, avoiding direct military conflict, relying on diplomacy, and reassuring allies while aligning them with U.S. preferences (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

This strategy reflects an attempt to minimize conflicts and maintain regional stability in a

manner that reinforces the U.S.'s position as a hegemonic power. Ultimately, both Trump and Biden approached U.S. foreign policy towards Iran through a neo-realist lens, considering the distribution of power capabilities and Iran's intentions. However, their strategies diverged in their preferred methods. Trump favored a blunt approach using sanctions alone, while Biden initially employed diplomacy, with the potential for escalation if necessary to address broader issues (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

The rational actor model offers an additional theoretical framework for analyzing U.S. foreign policy towards Iran. This model suggests that decision-makers act rationally, making choices based on a thorough evaluation of available information. It assumes that decisions are made by weighing the benefits and costs of various options, with the aim of maximizing utility and achieving the greatest returns. The model emphasizes that foreign policy decisions are driven by a rational calculation, where strategic choices are made to adjust outcomes (Snyder, Bruck, & Sapin, 2002).

Key assumptions of the rational actor model include: actions are measured and intentional, decisions are made with a focus on rationality and bounded choice-making, and decision-makers are viewed as economic managers who behave reasonably. In this framework, managers are expected to assess and decide based on a comprehensive analysis of all relevant information. The model focuses on state-level interactions and examines governmental behavior through the lens of rational decision-making (Snyder, Bruck, & Sapin, 2002).

From the perspective of the rational actor model, the Trump administration's policy towards Iran is reflective of a strategic pursuit of U.S. national interests, with a primary focus on addressing security concerns and ensuring stability in the Middle East. Trump's decision to

withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and implement a policy of economic pressure can be interpreted as a calculated effort to achieve specific objectives. These objectives include preventing Iran from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, mitigating Iranian interference in regional affairs, and advancing U.S. interests within the Middle Eastern context (Saniabadi, 2021).

Similarly, the Biden administration's approach to Iran can be analyzed through the rational actor model. Biden's objective to reengage with Iran and the potential rejoining of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) represent a strategic decision aimed at achieving several critical interests. These include preventing regional nuclear proliferation, reducing tensions in the Middle East, and enhancing the U.S. diplomatic presence on the global stage (Saniabadi, 2021). By prioritizing diplomacy and multilateralism, the Biden administration employs negotiation strategies to further its goals across political, economic, and social dimensions, collaborating with aligned international partners to advance its agenda.

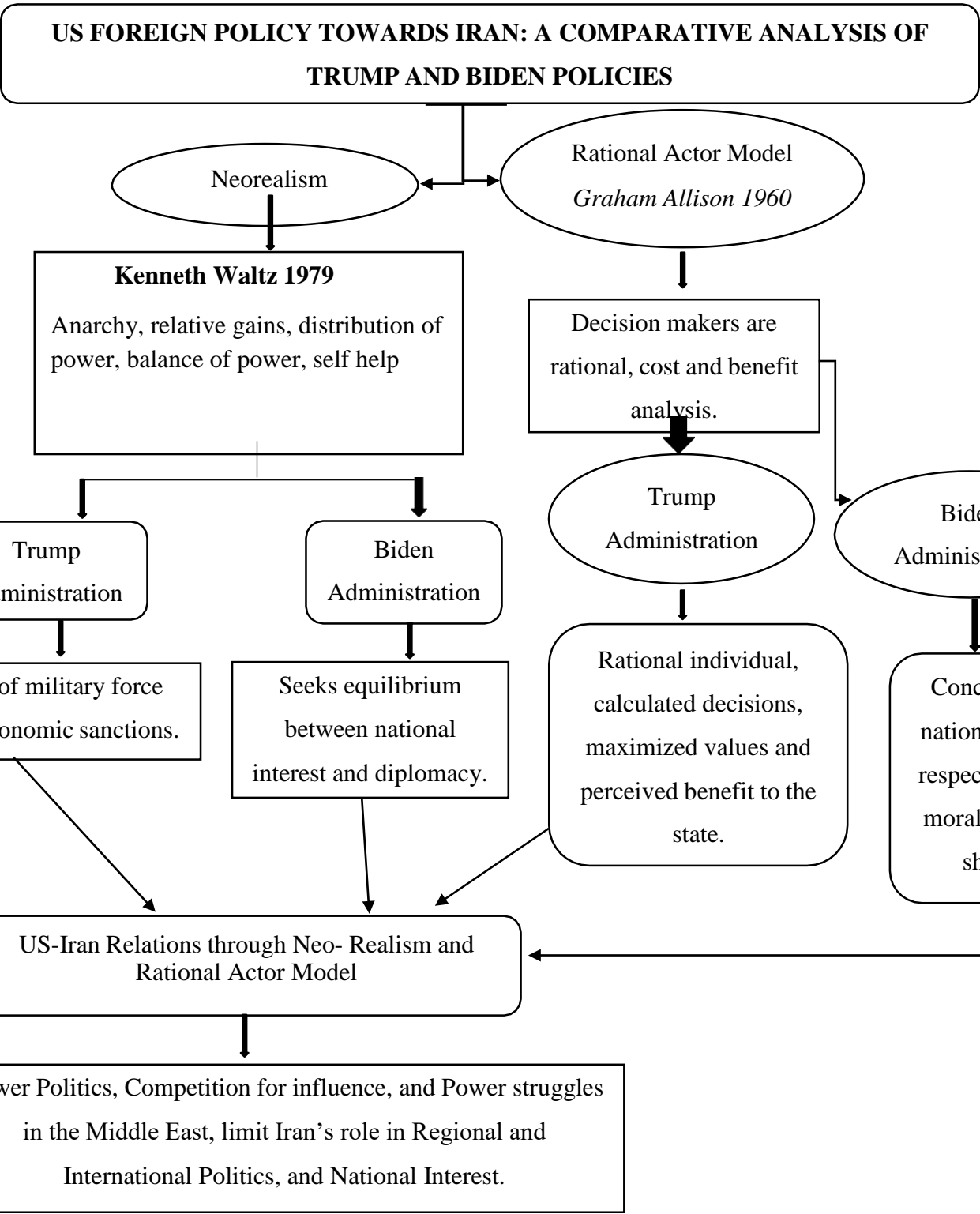


Figure 1 (Kenneth Waltz 1979, and Graham Allison 1960) Compiled by Researcher.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology can be defined in the capacity of the overall or detailed strategy that a researcher applies in the study, data collection and analysis, and pragmatic conclusions. It can be defined as the umbrella term that outlines the overall framework for the overall study process that begins with the formulation of research questions and extends to the distribution of outcomes. Research methodology is the identification of the particular procedure to be employed in conducting the intended research with most appropriateness and efficiency in relation to the validity and reliability of the work. This yields the ways in which the data will be collected, the approaches to analyzing the collected data, and standards that will be used to assess the findings; this makes the research and the findings convincing (Crotty, 1998).

1.9.1 Research Design

The research methodology for this thesis seeks to outline a logical approach that offers a sound and rigorously selected method of analyzing the foreign policies of two successive American administrations toward Iran. This methodology helps in collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data to achieve the overall aims of the research, answer the set research questions and meet the objectives. Specifically, the research utilizes a qualitative research paradigm since it is ideal to relating to complex policy issues and analyzing potential positive and negative effects of foreign policies. In general, this type of research is analytical and in particular, this study elucidates and contrasts the approaches to Iran's foreign policy made by the Trump and Biden's administrations.

1.9.2 Data Collection

The data sources considered most relevant include an analysis of documents made by both administrations of the United States, including speeches, statements, and policy documents. This

offers first-and information on their stance on the matter especially their foreign policies towards Iran. Secondary data is collected from books, academic journals, research papers, think-tank papers, newspapers and magazines, and other official publications. These sources provide important background information and opinions from specialists concerning the subject, thus improving the comprehension of the content extent and the context of the U.S.–Iran connection.

1.9.3 Sampling

1.9.3.1 Case Selection: The case study of particular interest is the analysis of the Trump and Biden administration’s foreign policies surrounding Iran. These two administrations are chosen for this comparison due to their apparent approaches to the U. S. -Iran relations.

1.9.4 Data Analysis

1.9.4.1 Thematic Analysis: The research data collected is qualitative and analyzed thematically, assessing the themes, policy goals, and measures taken by both administrations. As such, it is important to use this method to determine relevant patterns and findings about their attitudes toward US-Iran relations.

1.9.4.2 Comparative Analysis: To ensure clarity between the policies of the two Presidents, a comparative analysis is carried out to show the similarities and differences between the Trump and Biden foreign policy. This type of analysis reveals how changes in specific policystances have affected the balance of the US-Iran relationship, making it possible to understand theimplications of these changes.

1.9.5 Research Ethics

1.9.5.1 Data Privacy and Confidentiality: Any information gathered from primary and secondary researched work is cited and referenced accurately to respect and follow the provisionsof the law as well as protect the rights of inventors and creators in the process. This

approach helps ensure that data sources remain private and that auxiliary data remains confidential to prevent it from being distorted during the study process, thus enhancing credibility.

1.9.6 Ethical Considerations: As for ethical concerns, the study does not lean towards any particular political side or have any political bias or agenda on the part of the researcher. This focus on ethical practice thus strengthens the research's validity and independence to truth, encourages fair and objective reporting, and communicates accountability for scholarly research.

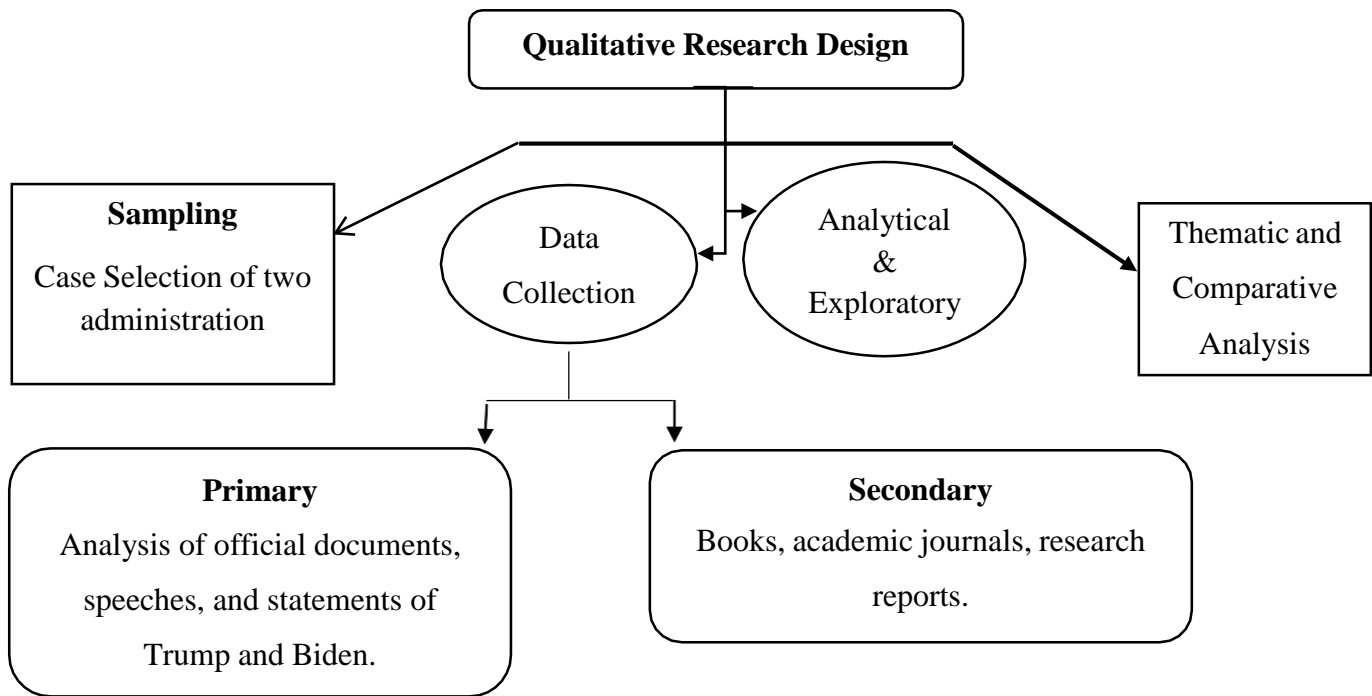


Figure 2 (Crotty, 1998) Complied by Researcher.

1.10 Organization of the Study

1.10.1 Chapter One: This chapter covers a brief introduction of the topic and existing literature related to the history and how it has evolved over time and also highlights the significance of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and methodology.

1.10.2 Chapter Two: This chapter describes the key differences in the ideological frameworks of the Trump and Biden administrations towards Iran.

1.10.3 Chapter Three: This chapter explores the contrast in the Trump and Biden administrations' policies towards Iran in terms of diplomacy and negotiation

1.10.4 Chapter Four: This chapter examines the distinct strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations toward Iran that influenced regional security, stability, and the balance of power in the Middle East.

1.10.5 Chapter Five: This chapter is based on the conclusion findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTRASTING IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE TRUMP AND BIDEN ADMINISTRATIONS TOWARD IRAN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Ideologies typically consist of comprehensive frameworks of individual understanding and normative standards regarding political, economic, or social systems. Knowledge functions as an exploratory tool that facilitates the comprehension of the environment, guides the behavior of specific actors or groups, and reflects on both individual and collective actions and regulations. Ideologies are generally complex systems of thought addressing various significant issues, such as the role and function of power, the scope and protection of individual freedom, the organization and regulation of the economy, the pursuit of social and political justice, and the conduct of inter-state relations. In this context, ideologies influence societies and their development by explaining roles and structures, as well as by prescribing changes (Mannheim, 1936).

The United States' decision-making process concerning Iran involves not only a straightforward consideration of national security interests but also involves broader concepts of geopolitics and the value orientations of U.S. society. To some extent, this policy framework has adapted to new regional and global developments, political conditions, and changes in U.S. leadership. This evolution reflects a balance between pragmatic concerns for physical security and an idealistic emphasis on democracy and human rights.

2.2 Overview of U.S.-Iran Relations

The history of relations between the USA and Iran before the Trump government was highly complex and dynamic with moments like historical events and operational changes that shaped it. To better understand what prompted the U.S. turn in the Trump era, it will be necessary to grasp this historical background. This context involves a series of significant happenings and developments that shaped the bilateral relationship and the factors that preceded the Trump era's approaches and decisions.

2.2.1 Pre-Revolution Era

The pre-Revolution era refers to the period preceding the 1979 Iranian Revolution, during which Tehran and Washington maintained strong bilateral relations under the monarchical rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Therefore, their relations during the early modern period were marked by strong political, economic, and military collaboration, which significantly influenced their subsequent interactions. During the Cold War, Iran held significant value for the United States due to its strategic regional location and its dominant role as a major oil producer (Ansari, 2014).

By breaking its ties with Iraq, Iran emerged as a crucial ally of the United States in the region. From the early 1950s until 1979, the United States provided Iran with extensive military assistance, including arms, military training, and various programs, solidifying the Shah of Iran as the cornerstone of America's Middle Eastern strategy. This cooperation arose from what can be described as aligned security interests, most notably exemplified by their shared objective of curbing the expansion of Soviet influence in the region (Ansari, 2014).

Business relations between Iran and the United States were steadily developed during that time, and American companies invested greatly in Iranian oil business and construction.

Significant foreign investment, particularly from the United States, encouraged the Shah's ambitious modernization programs, enhancing their credibility and prestige. Another important aspect that should not be overlooked is cultural exchange; American educational institutions and cultural organizations played a significant role in supporting Iran's efforts to become more developed and modern (Ansari, 2014).

For many years, Iran has been one of the world's most oil-rich countries, positioning it as a strategically important player in global energy markets. The United States was keen to secure access to this valuable resource. For a considerable period before the revolution, the relationship between the United States and Iran was characterized by cooperation, focused on achieving mutual goals and interests, including security, energy resources, and maintaining the balance of power in the Middle East.

2.2.2 1979 Iranian Revolution

The Iranian revolution of 1979 is marked as one of the major revolutionary periods in the history of Iran that signified a paradigm shift in the overall political profile of the country accompanied by changes in the social and cultural sphere.

2.2.2.1 Background and Causes of the Iranian Revolution

The background of the Iranian Revolution is marked by a complex interaction of political, social, economic, and cultural events that are interrelated. The monarchy under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi implemented a program known as the 'White Revolution,' which was a regime focused on modernization and westernization. Although this initiative encouraged various economic and social reforms, it also caused significant discontent among the population due to political domination, human rights violations, and social injustice arising from economic inequality. The political structure of the Shah's regime was highly authoritarian, designed to

suppress any forms of disagreement or opposition parties. Anti-government protesters, independent thinkers, and protestors were silenced through censorship, imprisonment, and torture, leading to a general culture of fear and hostility (Abrahamian, 2008).

Despite economic progress and development, a significant portion of the Iranian population remained in poverty. As a result, the advantages of modernization intensified social inequality and generated widespread discontent with the government elite, who were viewed as corrupt and indifferent to the needs of the general population. As a result, the advantages of modernization intensified social inequality and generated widespread discontent with the government elite, who were viewed as corrupt and indifferent to the needs of the general population (Abrahamian, 2008).

The Shah's reforms, which included modernization and the invasion of Western ideas, contributed to this discontent by inducing a sense of cultural loss among the population, traditionalists, and religious conservatives. For many, the secularization process and Westernization posed a threat to Iranian Islamic identity, leading to a criticism that ultimately facilitated the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Religious leaders, particularly Ruhollah Khomeini, utilized this sentiment to challenge the Shah's regime and mobilize religious conservatives and traditionalists (Abrahamian, 2008).

Khomeini urged the Iranian population to embrace Islam, pursue justice, and resist any foreign interference in Iran. This message resonated with many Iranians, who, unlike the Shah, supported anti-secularization policies. The unrest caused by political repression, economic crises, and perceived cultural marginalization ended in large-scale protests and demonstrations beginning in 1977 (Abrahamian, 2008).

Initially triggered by specific issues such as land reforms and media censorship, these

protests evolved into broader political demonstrations demanding a change in the governance system and the abolition of the monarchy. External factors that significantly influenced the necessary changes included America's support for the unpopular Shah regime and the perceived interference in Iranian affairs. The Shah's close ties with Western nations, particularly the United States, exacerbated perceptions of foreign control and manipulation (Abrahamian, 2008).

2.2.2.2 Consequences and Impact of the Iranian Revolution

The Iranian Revolution brought about significant changes in Iran across political, social, and cultural spheres. For instance, the nomination of Islamic law to govern the civil and criminal jurisdictions, the renovation of the state's administration according to the principles of Islam, fiftyyears of revolution drove out secular and liberal figures of power and caused amendments in the governmental and judicial systems; political opposition and conflict was suppressed (Keddie, 2003).

The revolution also had significant social impacts both regionally and globally. It transformed the dynamics within the Middle East and influenced Islamic movements worldwide. Internationally, the revolution strained Iran's relations with the Western world, particularly with the United States, due to the Iran Hostage Crisis, which has had lasting effects on relations between Iran and the West (Keddie, 2003). In conclusion, the 1979 revolution resulted in a significant shift in Iran's political system, with extensive implications for domestic governance, as well as its relations with neighboring countries and the global community.

2.2.2.3 Hostage Crisis

The Iran hostage crisis was a key event in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and remained a significant aspect of relations between Iran and the United States. On November 4, 1979, a group of Iranians, predominantly students who were organized and supportive of the revolutionary movement, breached the American Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans,

including diplomats and civilians, hostage. The primary demand of the hostage-takers was the return of the overthrown Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was residing in the United States at the time of the invasion, to face legal proceedings in Iran in response to widespread allegations of his oppressive rule (Bowden, 2007).

The hostage crisis endured for 444 days, making it one of the longest such crises in recent history. Despite ongoing diplomatic efforts by both countries throughout the hostage crisis, attempts to secure the release of the hostages were unsuccessful. The crisis acted as a legitimizing factor for the revolutionary government in Iran and portrayed the United States as an imperialistic power threatening Iran. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, supported the embassy takeover, which further consolidated his authority within the country (Bowden, 2007).

The Iran hostage crisis significantly tensed diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States, adding a new layer of complexity to global affairs. Consequently, diplomatic ties were severed, and U.S. ambassadors were withdrawn from Iran. However, efforts were made to negotiate the hostages' release through third-party intermediaries, such as Algerian representatives. The U.S. attempt to rescue the hostages, known as Operation Eagle Claw, in April 1980, ended in tragedy when a helicopter crashed in the Iranian desert, resulting in the deaths of eight American servicemen (Bowden, 2007).

The hostages were ultimately released on January 20, 1981, coinciding with Ronald Reagan's appointment as President of the United States. This release followed extensive negotiations and was marked by the unfreezing of Iranian assets. The crisis had profound and lasting effects on both nations: in Iran, it reinforced anti-American sentiments and solidified the perception of the U.S. as an adversary; in the United States, it contributed to a sense of national

humiliation and profoundly influenced U.S. foreign policy towards Iran for decades (Bowden, 2007).

2.2.2.4 Iran-Iraq War

The Iran-Iraq War, which began on September 22, 1980, and concluded on August 20, 1988, is regarded as one of the prolonged conflicts of the twentieth century, characterized by high-intensity conventional warfare and having a deep and long-term impact on both countries and the broader Middle East. The fundamental causes of the conflict stem from territorial and border disputes, as well as ideological differences between Iran and Iraq, two nations with a historically strained relationship (Pelletier, 1992).

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent establishment of an Islamic Republic were perceived by the Iraqi Baathist regime under President Saddam Hussein as a significant threat to its own stability and regional dominance. Iraq observed Iran in a weak state after its revolution, which compelled Iran into internal unrest and a crippled military force.

The conflict began on September 22, 1980, when Iraq launched a full-scale invasion of Iran with the primary objectives of seizing strategic border areas and oil-rich provinces. The Iraqi regime aimed to control critical crossroads, such as the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and to suppress the Iranian revolutionaries. Although Iraq initially achieved territorial gains, Iranian forces quickly mounted a counter offensive, leading to an extended and brutal war reminiscent of World War I, characterized by drain warfare and substantial human casualties (Pelletier, 1992).

During the Iran-Iraq War, the United States extended significant media and financial support to Iraq, viewing Saddam Hussein's regime as the primary resistant against Iranian revolutionary forces. This support included the provision of weapons, intelligence, and financial

aid, despite evidence of Iraq's use of chemical warfare against Iranian military personnel and civilians. This U.S. assistance was perceived as a betrayal by Iran, further intensifying the existing hostility and distrust between the two nations (Pelletier, 1992).

Iran's defeat in the conflict reinforced perceptions of the United States as an oppositional and imperialistic power intent on destabilizing the Islamic revolutionary government. This perception intensified hostilities, with the U.S. playing an active role in the conflict. Notably, the tragic incident of 1988, in which a U.S. naval vessel shot down an Iranian civilian aircraft, results in the loss of 290 passengers and crew members, further tensed relations. These events had a profound impact on diplomatic relations, leading to the ending of formal diplomatic ties between the United States and Iran in 1980 (Pelletier, 1992).

The absence of diplomatic mechanisms slowed down efforts to address various issues in Iran's relations with its neighbors, leading to heightened hostility. The lasting impact of U.S. support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War is deeply in-built in the Iranian consciousness, influencing Iran's foreign policy and blocking the development of more friendly relations between Tehran and Washington. This historical grievance complicates efforts to resolve the persistent challenges between the two nations (Pelletier, 1992).

2.2.5 Nuclear Program Concerns

The primary source of tension between the United States and Iran has been Iran's nuclear program, particularly its potential to develop nuclear weapons. This concern has necessitated significant diplomatic efforts to address the issue. One notable example is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015, which sought to restrict Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for the partial lifting of sanctions (Iran Primer, 2022).

However, differences regarding the terms and implementation of the JCPOA have led to

renewed tensions and strains in relations between the two countries. A central strategy employed by the United States to mitigate Iran's nuclear threat and its influence in various regions has been the imposition of strict economic sanctions on Iran (Iran Primer, 2022). These sanctions focus on Iran's interests and some essential sectors, leading to variations in Iran's overall financial structure and damaging the Iranian economy for the citizens.

Several key administrations in the Middle East, particularly Israel and the Gulf Arab states, perceive Iran's nuclear ambitions as a significant security threat to the United States. In response, the U.S. has aligned its policies with these allies, resulting in an increased military presence in the region. This buildup includes the deployment of naval forces and military equipment, driven by concerns related to Iran's nuclear program and its regional activities. Iran's statements regarding the construction of nuclear facilities have intensified tensions, raising the likelihood of military escalation and conflict (Iran Primer, 2022).

It is a defined policy to confront Iran and address its pursuit of nuclear capabilities at the earliest opportunity. Additionally, Iran's nuclear program has impacted its political engagement and interactions with other nations within the international system, resulting in a degree of political isolation and scrutiny. In its efforts to counter Iran's nuclear ambitions, the United States seeks to garner international support by participating in initiatives within the United Nations Security Council (Iran Primer, 2022).

2.3 Contrasting Ideological Frameworks of Democrats and Republicans

The ideological distinctions between Democrats and Republicans in the United States are grounded in broader perspectives on the role of government, economic policy, social issues, and foreign affairs. These ideological divergences are reflected in their respective approaches to international relations, including their strategies and policies concerning Iran.

2.3.1 Democrat's Ideology

2.3.1.1 Role of Government

Democrats usually endorse a more interventionist role for the government in economic matters. This perspective includes the implementation of regulatory measures aimed at correcting market inefficiencies, safeguarding consumer rights, and ensuring equitable competition within the market place. They advocate for a progressive tax system, wherein individuals and corporations with higher incomes contribute a proportionally greater share of taxes. Additionally, Democrats support the maintenance and expansion of social welfare programs, such as Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment benefits, as mechanisms to provide economic security and address social inequality (The Iran Primer, 2016).

Democrats generally advocate for the expansion of social programs as a means to mitigate inequality and provide support to marginalized communities. This approach includes allocating resources to enhance healthcare access, exemplified by initiatives such as the Affordable Care Act, as well as investing in educational opportunities and promoting the availability of affordable housing. These efforts are aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting greater social equity across various sectors of society (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.1.2 Economic Policy

Democrats advocate for a tax system that imposes a greater tax burden on higher-income earners, arguing that those with greater financial resources should contribute a larger percentage of their income. They support using the revenue generated from this progressive taxation to fund essential public services and social programs. Additionally, Democrats are strong proponents of regulatory measures designed to protect workers' rights, ensure consumer safety, and safeguard the environment (The Iran Primer, 2016).

This includes the enforcement of labor laws, the maintenance of safe working conditions,

and the implementation of policies aimed at addressing climate change. Furthermore, Democrats frequently call for an increase in the federal minimum wage, with the goal of ensuring that all workers receive a living wage sufficient to meet their basic needs (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.1.2 Social Issues

Democrats strongly uphold a woman's right to choose and advocate for unrestricted access to abortion services. They emphasize the importance of safeguarding reproductive rights through legislative measures and the appointment of judges who are committed to protecting these rights. In addition, Democrats constantly advocate for equality and non-discrimination protections for individuals. This commitment includes supporting the legalization of same-sex marriage, enacting anti-discrimination laws, and advancing policies that specifically address the rights and needs of transgender individuals (The Iran Primer, 2016).

In the context of gun control, Democrats generally favor more strict regulations. They support measures such as comprehensive background checks, restrictions on the sale and possession of assault weapons, and the implementation of policies aimed at reducing gun violence. Regarding immigration, Democrats typically endorse comprehensive reform efforts that include creating a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, offering protections for dreamers those who were brought to the United States as children, and ensuring the humane treatment of asylum seekers (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.1.3 Democrats' Foreign Policy

Democrats place significant emphasis on the role of diplomacy and the importance of collaborating through international institutions. They believe that effectively addressing global challenges requires engaging closely with allies and employing multilateral approaches. This perspective emphasizes the value of collective action and international cooperation in resolving complex global issues. In the context of climate change, Democrats prioritize the need for global

collaboration to combat its effects. They are strong proponents of international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, which aim to unite nations in reducing carbon emissions. Additionally, they advocate for policies that promote the adoption of renewable energy sources and the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.1.4 Democrat's Approaches towards Iran

Democratic ideologies toward Iran have experienced considerable evolution, mirroring broader shifts in geopolitical strategies and international relations. During the Cold War period, Democrats supported the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, recognizing him as a crucial ally in countering Soviet expansionism. This support was predicated on the strategic significance of Iran as a safeguard against communist influence in the Middle East. Democratic administrations of the era, including those led by Presidents Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy, extended military and economic aid to the Shah, perceiving him as a vital partner in sustaining regional stability and advancing Western interests (The Iran Primer, 2016).

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, which resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, represented a significant turning point in U.S.-Iran relations. The subsequent hostage crisis, during which American diplomats were held captive for 444 days, profoundly influenced Democratic views on Iran. Under President Jimmy Carter, the administration's response to the crisis, along with the rise of anti-Western sentiment within Iran encouraged a shift towards a policy of isolation and the imposition of economic sanctions (The Iran Primer, 2016).

This era was marked by a firm stance from both Democratic and Republican administrations, characterized by efforts to sever diplomatic and economic relations in response to Iran's perceived threats and destabilizing activities in the region. In the 1990s and following

years, Democratic strategies toward Iran experienced significant transformations. During the Clinton administration, there was a strategic pivot towards cautious engagement, characterized by a policy of dual containment that sought to address the challenges posed by both Iran and Iraq, while still maintaining limited diplomatic dialogue (Arab News, 2024).

The most significant shift occurred during the Obama administration, which prioritized diplomatic engagement and multilateralism. This approach led to the negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, designed to constrain Iran's nuclear program through diplomatic means and sanctions relief. Democrats perceived the JCPOA as a significant diplomatic achievement that mitigated the potential for military conflict and contributed to regional stability. Currently, the Democratic Party remains committed to diplomatic approaches, struggling to balance the imperative of addressing nuclear proliferation and regional security concerns with attention to human rights issues and Iran's broader regional influence (Arab News, 2024).

2.3.2 Republican's Ideology

2.3.2.1 Government Role

Republicans support a moderated role for government in both economic and individual spheres, positing that reduced governmental intervention promotes enhanced personal liberty and economic efficiency. This perspective is rooted in the belief that individuals are more skillful than the state at making decisions relevant to their personal and economic lives. By constraining governmental involvement, Republicans assert that individuals are afforded greater autonomy and are more motivated to engage in economic activities that foster growth (The Iran Primer, 2016).

This ideological framework extends to fiscal policy, where Republicans advocate for

reductions in government spending, tax cuts, and efforts to decrease the national debt. They oppose that excessive government expenditure can displace private investment and generate inefficiencies; given that government programs may not allocate resources as effectively as the private sector. By implementing tax reductions, Republicans believe that individuals and businesses will have increased financial capacity to spend and invest, which is suggested to stimulate economic activity, promote job creation, and drive overall economic growth (The Iran Primer, 2016).

Republicans additionally recommend policies designed to mitigate the national debt, perceiving it as a threat to long-term economic stability and growth. They argue that reducing the debt will result in lower interest rates, contribute to a more stable economic environment, and prevent future financial obligations for taxpayers. Republicans' advocacy for a reduced government role and lower taxes is predicated on the belief that minimizing government intervention will enhance individual freedom, lead to more efficient economic outcomes, and foster strong economic growth (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.2.2 Economic Policy

Republicans promote tax cuts as a strategy to stimulate economic activity, investment, and job creation. They advocate for reductions in tax rates for both individuals and businesses, positing that lower taxes enhance financial incentives for economic engagement. For individuals, decreased personal income taxes are perceived to increase disposable income, potentially leading to elevated consumer spending and investment in personal initiatives (The Iran Primer, 2016).

For businesses, reduced corporate tax rates are aimed at improving profitability and incentivizing investment in expansion, innovation, and employment opportunities. In

combination with tax cuts, Republicans advocate for deregulation, opposing that excessive regulatory requirements hinder economic growth and innovation. They argue that a substantial regulatory burden can suppress entrepreneurial activities and diminish business efficiency (The Iran Primer, 2016).

By promoting deregulation, especially within sectors such as energy, finance, and healthcare, Republicans seek to establish a more favorable business climate characterized by fewer constraints and increased operational flexibility. This stance is based on the belief that reducing regulatory above enables businesses to more effectively adapt to market demands and opportunities, thereby facilitating economic progress (The Iran Primer, 2016).

Moreover, Republicans typically endorse free-market capitalism, which highlights the importance of competition and private enterprise as pivotal drivers of economic advancement. They contend that a free market, distinguished by minimal governmental interference, allows businesses to compete equitably, fosters efficiency, and stimulates innovation. By supporting free-market principles, Republicans assert that market forces rather than governmental regulations or interventions are most effective in promoting economic growth, efficiently allocating resources, and enhancing overall prosperity (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.2.3. Social Issues

Republicans frequently align with conservative values, which are evident in their positions on social issues. They generally oppose abortion, advocating for restrictions or complete prohibitions based on the belief that life begins at conception and that abortion is ethically impermissible. This perspective is rooted in the principle of preserving what they perceive as the sanctity of life. Republicans are generally cautious about expansive legislative measures (The Iran Primer, 2016).

They may oppose policies that extend legal protections or formalize same-sex marriages beyond the traditional definitions of marriage and family. Their viewpoint often centers on maintaining what they perceive as conventional family structures and values. Concerning the Second Amendment, Republicans are strong defenders of the right to own guns. They assert that the possession and carrying of firearms are fundamental individual rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. As a result, they frequently oppose many forms of gun control legislation, contending that such measures infringe upon constitutional rights and fail to effectively address issues of crime and violence. In the domain of immigration, Republicans generally advocate for more strict policies (The Iran Primer, 2016).

They stress the critical need for strong border security and the hard enforcement of existing immigration laws to deter unauthorized entry into the United States. Their approach often involves promoting enhanced measures to fortify the U.S. borders and placing a stronger emphasis on legal immigration pathways. Republicans typically oppose amnesty measures for undocumented immigrants, arguing that such policies may encourage illegal immigration and disrupt established legal immigration procedures. Their position underscores a broader commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring consistent enforcement of immigration policies (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.2.4 Foreign Policy

In the domain of national security, Republicans prioritize the maintenance of a tough national defense and a well-resourced military. They contend that a strong military is crucial for safeguarding the United States from external threats and for contributing to global stability. This viewpoint frequently leads Republicans to advocate for better defense spending, with the objective of enhancing the capabilities and preparedness of the armed forces (The Iran Primer, 2016).

Their approach generally involves a tough stance toward potential international threats, emphasizing the importance of a strong deterrent and military readiness as fundamental elements of national security. In the context of sovereignty and international relations, Republicans often demonstrate uncertainty towards international institutions and agreements that they believe may invade upon U.S. sovereignty. They express concerns that such agreements could impose limitations on American autonomy or conflict with national interests (The Iran Primer, 2016).

Consequently, Republicans tend to favor unilateral actions or cooperative measures with key allies over participation in multilateral agreements. This preference is rooted in the belief that preserving national decision-making authority and maintaining control over U.S. foreign policy is essential, rather than deferring to international entities or agreements that might constrain American influence or policy options (The Iran Primer, 2016).

2.3.2.5 Republican's Approaches towards Iran

Republican ideologies toward Iran have undergone significant evolution in response to changing geopolitical dynamics and domestic political factors. During the Cold War, the United States, including Republican administrations, sustained a strong alliance with Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran. This alliance was primarily driven by mutual interests in countering Soviet influence and securing access to oil resources. Notably, the Republican administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower supported Iran in several ways, including through the CIA-orchestrated coup of 1953, which replaced the Shah following a brief period during which Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh had nationalized the oil industry (The Iran Primer, 2016).

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, which deposed the Shah and established the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, represented a substantial alteration in U.S.-Iran relations. When Republican President Ronald Reagan assumed office in January 1981, he inherited a contentious

relationship characterized by the Iranian hostage crisis, during which 52 American diplomats and citizens were held captive for 444 days. Reagan's administration adopted a strongly critical stance towards the Iranian government, designating it as a state sponsor of terrorism and implementing a hardline policy approach. Despite its publicly hardline stance, the Reagan administration was implicated in the Iran-Contra Affair, a covert operation in which senior officials facilitated arms sales to Iran, then engaged in the Iran-Iraq War, with the objective of securing the release of American hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon (The Iran Primer, 2016).

The proceeds from these arms sales were diverted to support Contra rebels in Nicaragua, avoiding Congressional restrictions. This incident underscored the complex and at times contradictory nature of U.S. policy toward Iran during the 1980s. Throughout the 1990s, including during the tenure of Republican President George H.W. Bush and his successor, Democratic President Bill Clinton, the United States maintained economic sanctions against Iran. These sanctions were intended to limit Iran's support for terrorism and its development of weapons of mass destruction. Republican viewpoints continued to be critical of Iran, concentrating on its regional activities and nuclear ambitions

Under President George W. Bush, Iran was designated as part of the "Axis of Evil," alongside Iraq and North Korea. The Bush administration implemented a hardline policy toward Iran, highlighting its involvement in terrorism and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. During this period, there was a notable increase in sanctions and international pressure on Iran, with particular emphasis on its nuclear program (Arab News, 2024).

In 2018, President Donald Trump, in alignment with the Republican position, withdrew the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a multilateral agreement

designed to constrain Iran's nuclear capabilities. Trump's administration reintroduced rigorous economic sanctions as part of a "maximum pressure" campaign, to economically isolate Iran and compel it to renegotiate its nuclear program and regional policies. This approach was marked by uncertainty toward multilateral agreements and an emphasis on unilateral pressure (Arab News, 2024).

2.4 Trump Administration's Ideology Towards Iran

The Trump administration's approach to Iran can be characterized by hostility, mistrust, and deterrence, to contain perceived Iranian influence and threats. The strategy involved applying economic pressure and sanctions to compel Iran to review its behavior. Key actions included the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the designation of certain segments of Iran's military as a foreign terrorist organization. These measures were instrumental in intensifying the levels of hostility between the United States and Iran (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

Here are key elements of the Trump administration's ideology towards Iran:

2.4.1 Withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)

A significant policy shift under President Trump's administration was the withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal, commonly known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). On May 8, 2018, Trump administration officials announced the United States' decision to exit the JCPOA, reverberating the President's prior campaign criticisms of the agreement. The JCPOA, negotiated during the Obama administration and implemented in 2015, was designed to oversee Iran's nuclear weapons development activities in exchange for the lifting of certain economic sanctions (The White House, 2018).

However, Trump and his administration criticized the deal for several reasons:

A major critique of the JCPOA was its perceived limitations, as it exclusively focused on Iran's nuclear program while neglecting other critical aspects of the broader conflict. Critics opposed that the agreement failed to address several significant issues, such as Iran's development and testing of ballistic missiles, which were viewed as threats to stability in the Middle East and beyond. Additionally, the JCPOA did not address the Iranian regime's support for militant groups across the Middle East, a factor that many considered a principal source of regional instability (The White House, 2018).

Critics questioned why the deal did not address these broader issues and argued that it allowed Iran to continue engaging in irregular activities that threatened regional stability, despite the constraints placed on its nuclear program. Another significant concern regarding the implementation of the JCPOA was the timelines associated with certain provisions of the agreement. These temporal aspects allowed Iran to gradually resume certain nuclear activities after specified periods. Critics regarded this as a significant flaw, arguing that it permitted Iran to establish a foundation for nuclear weapon development once the agreed-upon terms and conditions expired (The White House, 2018).

Critics opposed that these limitations were merely temporary and could ultimately lead to greater instability in the region and globally. They argued that Iran had the capacity to bide its time until the restrictions imposed by the agreement expired. Critics also argued that the verification mechanisms incorporated into the JCPOA were highly ineffective. They contended that the existing measures did not ensure Iran's complete adherence to the agreement's terms. According to these critics, the inspection process lacked accuracy and was insufficiently capable of detecting any violations or secret activities by Iran. They maintained that without thorough and credible verification procedures, there was no reliable means of determining Iran's

compliance with the agreement. Consequently, they argued that the fundamental objective of the JCPOA to ensure strong security was compromised (The White House, 2018).

President Trump's action of canceling the JCPOA received mixed reactions not only in the United States but also across the globe. Those who agreed with the withdrawal argued that the administration that opposed the deal criticized it for the right reasons. There were concerns that the JCPOA had weaknesses and needed to be fixed concerning the other issues that concerned the US about Iran's behavior. On the other hand, critics argued that this act would complicate the diplomatic agenda, raise tensions in the area, and even perhaps prompt nuclear proliferation in the Middle Eastern country. Abandoning the deal can also result in continued disorder in the region and the absence of successful negotiations on the nuclear problem (The White House, 2018).

Iran announced its willingness to stay in the JCPOA and aimed at completing the efforts to save the deal with the five remaining members of the deal namely China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, in response to the replacement of the U.S. sanctions and what Iran saw as non-implementation of the other side, Iran began to step by step violate the provisions of the JCPOA. This decision was a turning point in the U.S.'s engagement with Iran and led to further weakening of relations with Iran which reached its peak during the Trump presidency. It marked the administration's deviation from prior diplomatic approaches to the nation and provided considerable motivation to the escalating tensions between the US and Iran (The White House, 2018).

2.4.2 Maximum Pressure Campaign by Trump Administration

The Maximum Pressure Campaign was one of the key approaches used by the Trump administration to regulate Iranian behavior. This campaign includes economic pressuring,

diplomatic and military development to apply high pressure on the Iranian government to change its behavior in many fields such as nuclear program, ballistic missiles, support for terrorist groups, and regional interference (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

The bombing campaign started after the U.S. pulled out from the Iran Nuclear Deal also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 and was underscored by the re-imposition and expansion of economic sanctions on the Iranian nation (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Key aspects of the Maximum Pressure Campaign include:

2.4.3 Re-imposition of Sanctions by Trump Administration

Beginning in the Trump period, economic sanctions targeting Iran were renewed and expanded in the main areas of oil and gas, banking and finance, shipping, and precious metals. These measures were intended to cripple Iran's economy by restricting its ability to generate potential revenue. The main purpose was to bring stringent economic burden to compel the Iran administration for a more involving discussion with regards to negotiation that would not only be focused on their nuclear plans but also on other major concerns between the two nations (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

2.4.3.1 Secondary Sanctions

Consequently, the United States applied secondary sanctions, aimed at the nations, entities, and individuals involved in trade with Iran. This particular strategy crippled the Iranian export market and made Iran a pariah state in the global economy. When the U. S. imposed these penalties on people engaging in business with Iran, the intent was to discourage other nations from doing business with Iran which in turn escalated the pressure intensively on the Iranian government (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

2.4.3.2 Diplomatic Isolation

A fundamental aspect of Trump's Iran policy was to engage the world to isolate Iran through support toward the regime's maximum pressure campaign. This entailed engaging in activities that would get other countries to participate in calling for a change of policy in Iran and more specifically, supporting countries' efforts to apply sanctions on the country. More particularly, forming a rather narrow circle of the intended audience, the administration called European partners of the United States and other signatories of the JCPOA to join the states that denied the deal and changed the policy towards Iran. These diplomatic endeavors intended to combine the nations' efforts towards Iran, thus uniting the global community in dealing with Iran and forcing the country into behavioral change across different domains (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

2.4.3.3 Military Posture

In addition to the 'soft power' elements of their economic and diplomatic approach, the Trump administration maintained a strong military strategy where Iran was concerned. This entailed mobilizing more troops, particularly in the Persian Gulf region, and planning military drills. These actions were to discourage possible Iranian attacks and secure US interests as well as friends in the region. The military actions of the administration expressed the readiness of the presidential administration to counter aggressions coming from Iran and to state that it will be able to meet any threats to the stability and balance in the Middle East (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

2.4.3.4 Humanitarian Exemptions

However, to continue exerting significant economic pressure on Iran through the maximum pressure campaign the Trump administration incorporated pragmatic aspects which included humanitarian exemptions. These exemptions aimed to guarantee that deliveries of

recipient products and services necessary for Iranians' well-being were not impeded by sanctions. In offering these exemptions, the administration sought to reduce the impact of the adverse consequences of the campaign on the Iranian populace and recognize that irrespective of overall strategic goals and objectives, the campaign was affecting the day-to-day lives of millions of Iranians, all of whom deserved to have their humanitarian needs met (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

Looking at the outcome of the Maximum Pressure Campaign, it can be safely argued that the relations between Iran and the United States worsened. This was a clear departure from the prior policy of outreach to Iran during the Obama administration and signifies the new policy of confrontation with the Iranian government established by the Trump presidency. Given that the keys to this campaign were economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure, the identified strategy further amplified already tense relations between the two countries (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

It marked a new approach to the previous ways of threats and pressure on Iran and foreign policy ambitions which targeted every aspect of its activities such as the nuclear industry, regional policy, and contributions to different militant groups and organizations. Thus, the relations between the United States and Iran worsened and the rhetoric reached a new level of prejudice with sanctions and tendencies toward increased military actions. This substantive change in foreign policy strategy was already evident in the break from the previous obligations showed the divergence of policy agendas and diplomacy between the two administrations, which further affected deterioration of relations (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

2.4.4 Military Threats and Escalation

It is significant to mention that throughout Trump's presidency, many military threats and escalations were made toward Iran, which led to the further escalation of tensions between the two countries. These instances were quite remarkable for the fact that they were capable of bringing about a conflict and altering the landscapes of this region. Here are some notable examples in the succeeding paragraphs.

2.4.4.1 Assassination of Qasem Soleimani

The key event occurred on January 3, 2020, the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force. Soleimani was assassinated through a drone strike by the U. S. near Baghdad International Airport in Iraq. President Donald Trump pulled the trigger assuring the public that he had to because intelligence reports indicated imminent threats against the US interests in the region (The New York Times, 2020).

Soleimani was indeed an influential and highly-ranked commander who played a critical role as IRGC-QF's director and commander of its extraterritorial operations in predominantly Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. It took the life of a major Iranian military officer and intensified the conflict with the USA increasing concerns about a more extensive military conflict in the area. Iranian officials reacted extremely to this action describing restraint and threatening revenge against the United States in response to the death of Soleimani (The New York Times, 2020).

In the same regard, Iran retaliated by firing missiles at two locations in Iraq that have U.S troops and other individuals were left injured. This event caused numerous discussions and controversies concerning international laws and norms. Still, many people criticized the operation due to its illegality and impropriety arguing that the killing of a top Iranian official would lead to the escalation of the conflict as well as hamper diplomatic efforts in what was then increasing tensions between the US and Iran (The New York Times, 2020).

In general, the killing of Qasem Soleimani and others, as well as the aftermath suggested the complexity and the instability of the relations between the United States and Iran and the consequences that may arise as regards the military operations in the Middle East.

2.4.4.2 Deployment of Military Assets to the Persian Gulf

The Trump administration's decision to deploy additional military assets to the Persian Gulf region, including aircraft carriers, bombers, and missile defense systems, was driven by perceived threats from Iran. These deployments served a dual purpose. Primarily, they were intended to deter any potential military aggression by Iran, signaling the readiness of the United States and its European allies to demonstrate their military capabilities, particularly through naval power. Additionally, these measures aimed to safeguard U.S. interests and those of its regional allies, thereby underscoring a commitment to maintaining security and stability in the area (Entessar, & Afrasiabi, 2019).

In the final years of Trump's presidency, the threat of warfare became a recurrent theme, often articulated through direct threats and signals conveyed by administration officials. These threats varied over time and had the potential to escalate tensions between the United States and Iran. A notable example occurred in June 2019 when Iranian forces attempted to shoot down a U.S. drone. This incident, along with similar actions by Iran, prompted the Trump administration to adopt a more aggressive stance, characterized by heightened diplomatic communications and an increased military presence, in response to what was perceived as an escalating threat from Iran (Entessar, & Afrasiabi, 2019).

As tensions escalated in Iraq, the situation became increasingly complex for the United States, given its alliance with Iran in Iraq, while Iran supported Sunni militias in the neighboring country. This conflict further strained relations between these proxies, as evidenced by specific

incidents that heightened military tensions. For instance, several rocket attacks targeted U.S. diplomatic and military infrastructure in Iraq. These acts of aggression, frequently attributed to Iranian proxy actors, underscored the intricate power dynamics between these groups and further intensified the already fraught relationship between the United States and Iran (Entessar, & Afrasiabi, 2019).

In addition to conventional military actions, the Trump administration also engaged in cyber-attacks against IRGC networks and other Iranian assets. This cyber operation specifically targeted infrastructure related to Iran's nuclear program and certain sectors of the IRGC. Such cyber activities represented a form of asymmetrical warfare, where the United States aimed to disrupt and weaken critical Iranian capabilities and processes through information warfare without engaging in direct military conflict. These cyber-provocations added another layer of complexity to the pressure exerted on Iran during Trump's presidency (Entessar & Afrasiabi, 2019).

These tactical measures further escalated threats and hostilities between the United States and Iran, highlighting the inherently unstable relationship between the two nations during this period as both sought to manage their conflict through diplomatic means and avoid full-scale war.

2.4.5 Support for Regional Allies

The Trump administration actively supported its regional partners in their efforts to counter Iran, particularly through its actions in the Middle East. A key aspect of this strategy was the enhancement of the U.S.-Israel relationship, which had been a central focus of Obama's approach. This involved several significant actions, including the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, and affirming Israel's right to

defend itself against threats from Iran and its allies (BBC News, 2018).

Additionally, the Trump administration maintained a relatively strong partnership with Saudi Arabia, supporting its rivalry with Iran. This support was manifested in the provision of military equipment and weapons, the training of Saudi forces, and political backing for measures led by Saudi Arabia to counter Iran's influence in volatile regions such as Yemen and Syria (BBC News, 2018).

The Trump administration also cultivated strong ties with the UAE, actively supporting the Emirates' efforts to counter Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf and other regions. This support encompassed the sale of military equipment, enhancement of military interoperability, and political endorsement of the UAE's security initiatives. Similarly, the administration maintained close collaboration with Bahrain, assisting its government in addressing threats posed by Iran and Iran-affiliated actors (BBC News, 2018).

On a broader scale, the Trump administration supported the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in their collective efforts to combat security threats emanating from Iran and its proxies. This included providing the GCC member states with military equipment and support, as well as offering political backing for their collective defense initiatives in the Persian Gulf aimed at curbing Iran's growing influence in the region (BBC News, 2018).

The Trump administration's commitment to supporting regional allies in countering Iran's influence was a central element of its broader strategy toward Iran. This approach involved challenging Iran while promoting stability and security in the Middle East. To this end, the administration prioritized strengthening relationships with key allies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain (BBC News, 2018).

This was achieved through arms sales, military training, joint exercises, and political backing. By empowering its regional allies with the resources necessary to deter and halt Iranian activities and advancements, the administration sought to weaken and neutralize Iran's influence, aligning with its overarching objectives in the Middle East (BBC News, 2018).

2.5 Biden Administration's Ideology towards Iran

The Biden administration's Iran policy is primarily centered on diplomacy, marking a significant departure from Trump's "axis of evil" approach. Key components of this strategy include:

2.5.1 Biden's Return to Diplomacy

The JCPOA is the nuclear agreement established and signed in 2015 to achieve its goals, the Biden administration has particularly aimed at diplomatically engaging with Iran. For this reason, the administration has been engaged in behind-the-scenes discussions with Iran in Vienna with the help of the other parties to the JCPOA, namely China, France, Germany, Russia, and the UK. Since April 2021, these talks have focused on the path forward for both Iran and the United States to resume compliance with the obligations they have agreed to under the JCPOA (Hashem, & Abdul-Jabbar, 2022).

2.5.2 Revival of JCPOA

Iran's nuclear program has been a longstanding concern for multiple U.S. administrations; however, the Biden administration has primarily focused its efforts on reactivating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). President Biden has openly expressed his willingness to return to the JCPOA, provided that Iran resumes full compliance with its nuclear-related commitments under the agreement. This stance contrasts sharply with the decision of the previous administration to withdraw the United States from the JCPOA in 2018 (Kahalzadeh,

2022).

The Biden administration views the JCPOA as an effective framework to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and advocates for rejoining the deal as a means of maintaining both regional and global stability. The JCPOA emphasizes that any restoration of the agreement must proceed through a structured interaction in which both the U.S. and Iran adhere to agreed-upon steps to meet their respective obligations. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has reinforced this position, asserting that Iran's compliance with its nuclear commitments is essential before any sanctions can be lifted. Despite the administration's insistence on restoring the JCPOA, it has also demonstrated a willingness to engage in further negotiations with Iran and other relevant parties regarding the possibility of a "JCPOA 2.0." (Kahalzadeh, 2022).

Further discussions could address aspects not covered by the original JCPOA, such as Iran's missile development and its regional policies in the Middle East. However, the Biden administration has indicated that it will only pursue such negotiations after rejoining the JCPOA and securing the consensus of all relevant parties. The administration's emphasis on reviving the JCPOA underscores its commitment to diplomacy, international cooperation, and non-proliferation in relation to Iran's nuclear program. This strategy aims not only to mitigate nuclear threats but also to contribute to the creation of a stable and secure region, and ultimately, a more peaceful world (Kahalzadeh, 2022).

2.5.3 Multilateral Engagement

The Biden administration has consistently favored a multilateral approach toward Iran, working in concert with European allies and other democratic members of the international community. This collaborative effort is evident in consultations with key states such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other nations in the Persian Gulf region. Through these consultations, the administration seeks to coordinate diplomatic strategies, share

information and assessments, and garner support for its objectives concerning Iran (Yuldasheva, 2020).

Additionally, the Biden administration is committed to engaging in various global forums and organizations to address Iran's nuclear program and related issues. This includes participating in United Nations Security Council meetings and coordinating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to oversee Iran's nuclear activities. In these international forums, the Biden administration actively seeks to garner global support for its diplomatic efforts concerning Iran, while operating within the framework of non-proliferation and international law (Yuldasheva, 2020).

This approach is a key element of the administration's policy toward Iran, emphasizing the value of diplomacy, cooperation, and collective action in addressing complex and multifaceted global threats. In pursuing its objectives related to Iran's nuclear program, the administration simultaneously aims to foster regional and global cooperation and security by engaging with allies, partners, and international organizations (Yuldasheva, 2020).

2.5.4 Human Rights and Regional Stability

While Iran's nuclear ambitions remain a primary concern, the Biden administration has also expressed significant concerns regarding Iran's human rights record and its role in regional instability. In addressing these issues, the administration has sought to engage diplomatically by underscoring its commitment to the security and stability of the region and by addressing broader issues related to these concerns (Hashem, & Abdul-Jabbar, 2022).

For example, in its dealings with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the administration has raised and protested human rights abuses, called for the release of political prisoners, and advocated for the protection of civil liberties. The administration has incorporated human rights

considerations into its overall approach to Iran. Additionally, it has emphasized humanitarian exceptions within the framework of U.S. sanctions on Iran (Hashem, & Abdul-Jabbar, 2022).

The administration has worked to ensure the provision of essential humanitarian goods, such as food, medicine, and medical equipment, to the Iranian population despite the stringent sanctions in place. Balancing this effort presents a challenge, as the administration aims to protect human rights in Iran while simultaneously addressing other international relations and security objectives (Hashem, & Abdul-Jabbar, 2022).

On one hand, it consistently condemns human rights abuses and advocates for accountability for those responsible. On the other hand, it seeks to engage in dialogue with Iran on critical issues related to its nuclear program and regional concerns. The administration aims to engage Iran on issues related to nuclear technologies while also fostering improvements in human rights. Additionally, it seeks to achieve broader objectives of enhancing regional stability and security (Hashem, & Abdul-Jabbar, 2022).

2.5.5 Sanctions Policy by Biden Administration

The Biden administration's sanctions policy towards Iran is closely aligned with its broader objectives concerning Iran's nuclear program, regional activities, and human rights practices. Early in its term, the administration undertook a comprehensive review of all American sanctions related to Iran. The primary goal of this assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of these sanctions and their alignment with the administration's policy objectives (Batmanghelidj, & Rouhi, 2023).

This review aimed to analyze the impact of sanctions on various areas, including the Iranian economic system, nuclear ambitions, regional actions, and human rights conditions. Additionally, the review sought to understand how the sanctions regime intersected with U.S.

national security interests and diplomatic strategies. Despite these measures, the Biden administration has consistently emphasized that sanctions are not its preferred approach, and that diplomacy and negotiations remain the preferred methods for addressing concerns related to Iran's nuclear program and regional activities (Batmanghelidj, & Rouhi, 2023).

The White House has indicated a willingness to ease certain sanctions on Iran contingent upon Iran's return to compliance with the JCPOA. The administration has stressed the necessity for Iran to take tangible steps to reverse its nuclear enrichment activities. Furthermore, the current administration has relaxed some existing trade restrictions with a focus on humanitarian needs, allowing essential goods to enter Iran to aid its citizens without benefiting the Iranian government directly (Batmanghelidj, & Rouhi, 2023).

In line with this approach, the administration has continued to impose targeted sanctions on individuals, organizations, and industries linked to Iran's nuclear program, terrorist financing, human rights violations, and actions that contribute to regional instability. These sanctions serve a dual purpose: to deter prohibited activities and to prevent Iran from using illicit means to further its objectives, while also holding violators accountable for breaches of international and U.S. legal standards (Batmanghelidj & Rouhi, 2023).

President Biden has adopted a multifaceted sanctions strategy that integrates pressure on the Iranian state and civil society, humanitarian initiatives, and precise measures. This comprehensive approach aims to address a range of issues while supporting and advancing the United States' national security and strategic objectives (Batmanghelidj & Rouhi, 2023).

2.6 Comparative Analysis of Trump and Biden's Policies towards Iran

Both the Trump and Biden administrations have expressed a general intent to pursue a more favorable nuclear agreement to replace the JCPOA signed in 2015, but their approaches have been markedly different. The Trump administration exacerbated tensions with Iran and

strained relations with U.S. allies by withdrawing from the JCPOA and imposing stringent sanctions. This "maximum pressure" strategy aimed to compel Iran to renegotiate the deal, but instead led to increased Iranian nuclear activity and greater regional instability (Taleihur, 2023).

In the realm of national security, Republicans emphasize the importance of maintaining a robust national defense and a well-funded military. They argue that a strong military is essential for protecting the United States from external threats and for contributing to global stability. This perspective often leads Republicans to advocate for increased defense spending with the goal of enhancing the capabilities and preparedness of the armed forces (Taleihur, 2023).

Their approach typically involves a firm stance toward potential international threats, underscoring the significance of a strong deterrent and military readiness as core components of national security. Regarding sovereignty and international relations, Republicans frequently express skepticism toward international institutions and agreements they perceive as encroaching on U.S. sovereignty. They concerns that such agreements could impose constraints on American autonomy or conflict with national interests (Taleihur, 2023).

In contrast, the Biden administration has adopted a strategy centered on restoring the JCPOA through diplomatic negotiations, representing a significant departure from Trump's approach. This shift underscores a return to multilateral diplomacy and international collaboration, highlighting the importance of working with other countries to effectively address issues related to Iran's nuclear program (Taleihur, 2023).

Democrats emphasize the central role of diplomacy and the importance of collaborating through international institutions. They assert that effectively addressing global challenges necessitates close engagement with allies and the use of multilateral approaches. This

perspective underscores the value of collective action and international cooperation in tackling complex global issues (Taleihur, 2023).

Democrats prioritize global collaboration to mitigate its impacts. They are strong supporters of international agreements such as the Paris Agreement, which seek to unite nations in efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Furthermore, they advocate for policies that encourage the adoption of renewable energy sources and facilitate the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy. This approach reflects their commitment to addressing environmental challenges through coordinated global efforts and innovative policy measures (Taleihur, 2023).

In conclusion, the chapter's analysis of the divergent ideological perspectives of the Trump and Biden administrations concerning Iran offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities within U.S. foreign policy and international relations. It highlights the fundamental distinctions between the two administrations' approaches, with the Trump administration favoring a unilateral "maximum pressure" strategy characterized by withdrawal from the JCPOA, extensive economic sanctions, and a focus on power over diplomacy.

In contrast, the Biden administration has pursued a diplomatic approach aimed at restoring communication with Iran and reviving the JCPOA, marking a significant shift towards multilateralism and collaboration in U.S. foreign policy. This ideological divergence not only underscores the complexities of regional politics and security in the Middle East but also reflects broader debates within the United States regarding the effectiveness of unilateral versus multilateral approaches in achieving American objectives.

The Biden administration's emphasis on diplomacy and multilateral engagement represents a departure from the previous administration's aggressive, military-oriented strategy,

illustrating the evolving nature of U.S. foreign policy and the need for further analysis of these dynamics within the broader context of contemporary global politics.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTRASTING DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES OF THE TRUMP AND BIDEN ADMINISTRATIONS TOWARD IRAN

The diplomatic policies and approaches of the Trump and Biden administrations toward Iran reflect significantly different levels of engagement and strategy. Analyzing these approaches within the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reveals that they were driven by distinct goals and faced unique challenges in achieving their respective objectives. The Trump administration adopted a "maximum pressure" strategy, utilizing economic sanctions as the primary mechanism to compel Iran to meet specific demands (Touzani, 2023).

This approach sought to exert significant economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran to prompt changes in its behavior. In contrast, upon taking office, the Biden administration committed to reengaging with Iran through diplomatic means, aiming to restore and reinforce diplomacy and multilateralism. This shift represents a clear departure from the previous administration's approach, emphasizing negotiation and international collaboration over economic coercion (Touzani, 2023).

3.1 Trump Administration's Approach

3.1.1 Unilateralism and Maximum Pressure

The Trump administration implemented a clearly defined strategy toward Iran known as the "maximum pressure" campaign. This strategy aimed to compel Iran to comply with demands related to its nuclear program, regional activities, and, crucially, its missile technology by employing economic pressure tactics. The administration significantly escalated the scale of

sanctions, with a renewed focus on critical sectors such as oil, banking, and shipping. These measures were designed to weaken Iran by restricting its export capabilities, limiting its access to the global financial system, and constraining its trade activities (Fiedler, 2023).

The Trump administration sought to diplomatically and economically cripple Iran by gaining global support for sanctions and withdrawing from the JCPOA. The goal was to apply significant pressure on the Iranian government to compel it to reconsider the nuclear deal and address other contentious issues. The administration used economic sanctions as a means to signal that further economic hardship would follow if Iran did not meet its demands (Fiedler, 2023).

This strategy was based on the belief that combining economic sanctions with diplomatic pressure would force Iran to alter its stance on its nuclear program and other concerns of the West. The sanctions had serious consequences for Iran, including a devalued currency, high inflation, and a decline in the quality of life for many Iranians. The confrontational approach aimed to create domestic dissatisfaction with the Iranian government due to the negative impact of the sanctions on the population's well-being (Fiedler, 2023).

3.1.2 Economic Sanctions by the Trump Administration

The sanctions imposed by the Trump administration have significantly worsened the Iranian economy, as shown by various negative macroeconomic indicators. These include a sharp fall of the currency, a growing trade deficit, rising fiscal deficits, high inflation rates, and increased poverty levels. Iran's oil exports, which had been around 5 million barrels per day in 2017, dropped to less than 0 (Wong, 2019).

According to historical energy consumption data, total energy consumption was 6.3 million barrels per day in 2013 and was projected to increase to 4 million barrels per day by

2020. Despite these forecasts, Iran's currency lost over 60 percent of its value in the past three years. Unemployment rates are high, and inflation has surged above 42 percent annually. However, it is noteworthy that, contrary to analysts' predictions of a fragile and undiversified economy, Iran has managed to outperform these expectations (Wong, 2019).

In 2021, the Iranian economy showed some signs of recovery from its previous low levels due to eased trade barriers and rising oil prices. The Iranian government has also pursued a "resistance economy" policy, which focuses on increasing local production and strengthening regional partnerships. Despite significant economic losses, the sanctions did not lead to changes in the Iranian government or its behavior, which was the primary goal of the sanctions (Wong, 2019).

Instead, the sanctions appear to have strengthened the authoritarian regime by increasing its support among the newly impoverished middle class. The government can use job creation and economic legitimacy to reinforce its position, making it less susceptible to external economic pressures. On the diplomatic front, the sanctions have strained relations between Tehran and the United States, as well as with its partners (Wong, 2019).

European countries, while critical of the nuclear agreement and having their own issues with Iran, chose to remain involved in the agreement and work to mitigate the impact of the sanctions. This led countries like China, India, and various European nations to seek ways to continue trading with Iran despite the dominance of the U.S. dollar system (Wong, 2019).

Trump's policy of imposing stringent economic sanctions on Iran was designed to pressure the Iranian government on various fronts. While these sanctions significantly exacerbated economic problems in Iran, evaluating the success of this harsh policy in achieving

its broader international objectives remains contentious. Specifically, questions arise regarding its effectiveness in renegotiating the JCPOA or in halting Iran's problematic activities in the Middle East (Wong, 2019).

3.1.3 Unilateral Withdrawal from the JCPOA

President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal in 2018 was primarily driven by his assessment that the agreement was fundamentally flawed and inadequate for preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Trump criticized the deal as unjust, arguing that it did not benefit the United States and failed to contribute to peace or stability in the Middle East. He contended that the U.S. would be better positioned to achieve a more favorable outcome by withdrawing from the deal, thereby strengthening its negotiating leverage for future discussions with Iran (Milani, 2018).

The decision to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal was informed by the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign and his commitment to fulfill a campaign promise to overturn what he labeled as the "worst deal ever." Despite widespread condemnation from American allies in Europe and elsewhere, who expressed concerns about the potential repercussions, Trump viewed the withdrawal as a strategic maneuver to enhance the U.S.'s negotiating leverage in future negotiations, particularly with North Korea (Milani, 2018).

This withdrawal marked a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy, raising questions about the future of nuclear agreements and the stability of Middle Eastern countries. It underscored a move away from the balance of diplomacy that characterized the Obama administration toward a more unilateral approach, reflective of Trump's general skepticism toward multilateralism (Milani, 2018).

3.1.3.1 Consequences of US Withdrawal from JCPOA

The United States' withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal has had profound implications for international relations and the nuclear non-proliferation regime, impacting both U.S.-Iran relations and broader global dynamics. The withdrawal exacerbated the already strained relationship between the United States and Iran. Following the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions, Iran's actions such as exceeding uranium enrichment limits set by the JCPOA escalated tensions in the region, leading to a cycle of increasing hostility (Shad & Abbas, 2018).

This situation significantly diminished the avenues for dialogue and interaction between the two nations. The direct diplomatic engagement established by the JCPOA became less effective, making conflicts between Iran and other states more pronounced and harder to manage. Additionally the U.S. decision to exit the JCPOA cast doubt on the reliability and effectiveness of nuclear agreements, raising concerns among other signatories and the international community about the commitment of parties to uphold such agreements. This erosion of trust could adversely affect future efforts to negotiate and enforce similar agreements (Shad & Abbas, 2018).

The collapse of the JCPOA may lead to increased nuclear proliferation, signaling to other nations that non-proliferation commitments can be disregarded under shifting political conditions. This could prompt other states to develop nuclear weapons capabilities and intensify their nuclear arsenals. The breakdown underscored vulnerabilities in multilateral diplomacy and the fragility of agreements negotiated and endorsed by multiple nations, demonstrating how the unilateral withdrawal of a single country can undermine such agreements (Shad & Abbas, 2018).

It highlighted the necessity for formalizing sanctioning measures and conflict resolution mechanisms within multilateral frameworks. The U.S. decision to withdraw amid rising tensions

with Iran significantly impacted stability in the Middle East. Persistent conflict between Iranian-backed groups and regional rivals, coupled with a lack of diplomatic engagement, contributed to ongoing instability. This situation led to shifts in alliances and partnerships: some countries continued to support and protect the JCPOA, while others aligned with the U.S. decision to adopt a more aggressive stance towards Iran (Shad & Abbas, 2018).

These changes have redefined diplomatic dynamics in the Middle East and beyond. In conclusion, the analysis of the U.S. withdrawal reveals that the decision had far-reaching regional and global implications for international relations and the nuclear non-proliferation regime, affecting U.S.-Iran relations and the broader nuclear proliferation landscape.

3.1.4 Trump' Demand for a New Deal

Trump's move to put new conditions on the JCPOA, which might include other aspects of the Iranian conduct aside from the nuclear issue, such as the ballistic missile program and regional policies, was indicative of a more extensive view of the US strategy towards Iran and the region. Several factors contributed to this stance:

3.1.4.1 Comprehensive Approach: While the Trump administration focused on Iran's nuclear program, placing it as a major threat to the Middle East, there were arguments made that its ballistic missiles, supply of arms, and support of militant groups were as much a threat to regional stability as nuclear power ambitions (Pompeo, 2018). In seeking these talks to address the factual causes of the perceived instability in the region, the administration sought to amplify the negotiation items to cover these aspects.

3.1.4.2 Allied Concerns: The administration's approach reflected the views of some of the United States allies in the Middle East, especially the state of Israel and Saudi Arabia which saw

Iran's ballistic missile program and its regional activities as threats to their national security (Pompeo, 2018). Hence, highlighting of these interests in the negotiations aimed at restoring and fortifying the administration's allies in the region.

3.1.4.3 Maximum Pressure Strategy: Efforts to scrap JCPOA terms or to change them were part of the overall maximum pressure policy aimed at forcing the Iranian regime into a change of its policies. With conductive economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure, the administration sought to get Iran to come to the negotiating table and reach a new deal that would not only focus on the nuclear program of the country but also its missile tests and aggression in the region (Pompeo, 2018).

3.1.4.4 Domestic Politics: Political opponents of President Donald Trump advocated for a reassessment of his administration's approach toward Iran. The prospect of renegotiating the JCPOA presented an opportunity to address a broader array of issues, enabling the administration to demonstrate its commitment to addressing Iran's perceived malign activities while fulfilling its campaign promises (Pompeo, 2018). However, this approach faced several challenges and criticisms:

European partners, along with Russia and China key signatories of the JCPOA were generally reluctant to revisit the agreement or introduce additional issues. They argued that diverting attention from the core international concerns could complicate diplomatic efforts and jeopardize future agreements. The Iranian government also firmly rejected any modifications to the JCPOA, asserting that the deal was not open for renegotiation (Tajbakhsh, 2018).

The Iranian government believed the demands imposed by the Trump administration as illegitimate and viewed the "maximum pressure" campaign as a violation of the JCPOA. Despite withdrawing from the agreement, the Trump administration did not engage in further

negotiations with Iran to address broader concerns. Consequently, the U.S. exit from the JCPOA and the re-imposition of sanctions exacerbated tensions with Iran and led to a further deterioration in diplomatic relations, failing to achieve the administration's intended objectives (Tajbakhsh, 2018).

Efforts to renegotiate the JCPOA and address additional concerns beyond nuclear proliferation, as attempted by the Trump administration, encountered significant practical and reception challenges from both Iran and the other signatories. Iran consistently rejected the idea of renegotiating the agreement, asserting that the JCPOA was non-negotiable. Iranian leaders argued that the deal had been meticulously negotiated and any changes were unacceptable (Nuruzzaman, 2020).

They viewed the Trump administration's demands as unreasonable and saw the maximum pressure policy as a violation of the JCPOA. Similarly, other JCPOA members, including European countries, Russia, and China, opposed reopening the agreement for amendments. They believed that revising the deal could undermine diplomatic progress made and jeopardize future agreements. Consequently, these parties focused on preserving the JCPOA in its original form and insisted that all signatories adhere to the terms of the agreement (Nuruzzaman, 2020).

Iranian reaction to the Trump administration's approach was largely negative. Iranian officials viewed the maximum pressure campaign and the demand for changes to the JCPOA as provocative and an attack on Iran's sovereignty and regional authority. In response, Iran gradually reduced its compliance with the JCPOA, increasing its uranium enrichment beyond the agreement's limits. This move was intended to pressure the remaining signatories to provide more economic support to counteract the U.S. sanctions (Nuruzzaman, 2020).

European partners and other signatories were concerned and discouraged by Trump's withdrawal from the deal and the imposition of sanctions. They reaffirmed their commitment to the JCPOA and sought ways to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions on Iran. This included exploring new methods to facilitate trade and business with Iran (Nuruzzaman, 2020).

Despite efforts to renegotiate the terms of the JCPOA during the Trump administration, the United States faced substantial opposition and criticism from Iran and other signatories of the agreement. This chapter argues that, despite confronting significant challenges and decisions that jeopardized the agreement, the remaining parties did not provide sufficient economic incentives to persuade Iran to engage in renegotiation. Consequently, this failure to offer adequate incentives contributed to the collapse of the agreement and heightened regional tensions.

3.1.5 Social Political and Economic Approaches by Trump Administration

The Trump administration pursued a strict approach to immigration, marked by the implementation of several controversial policies. Particularly, the administration's "zero-tolerance" policy on illegal border crossings resulted in the separation of families at the U.S.-Mexico border, a practice that drew significant domestic and international criticism. Additionally, the administration introduced a travel ban that targeted several predominantly Muslim countries, which was framed as a national security measure but was widely perceived as discriminatory (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

Further, the administration sought to dismantle the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which provided temporary protection from deportation to individuals brought to the U.S. as children, reflecting its broader efforts to limit immigration. In the judicial sphere, President Trump made substantial appointments to the federal judiciary, including the nomination and confirmation of three Supreme Court Justices. These appointments were instrumental in shaping the ideological balance of the Court, with significant implications for

social issues such as abortion, gun rights, and religious freedoms. The appointments were a key element of the administration's long-term strategy to influence the direction of U.S. law and governance (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

The administration also frequently engaged in rhetoric and policies that reverberated with cultural and nationalist sentiments. Emphasizing an "America First" agenda, it appealed to conservative values and sought to restore what it perceived as traditional American identity. This included a deliberate opposition to what the administration and its supporters termed "political correctness," as well as the promotion of traditional American symbols and institutions. These cultural stances were integral to the administration's broader political strategy, which aimed to mobilize its base by appealing to themes of nationalism and cultural preservation (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

The Trump administration's foreign policy was fundamentally driven by the principle of "America First," which emphasized national sovereignty and favored bilateral agreements over multilateral frameworks. This approach led to the United States' withdrawal from several key international agreements, including the Paris Climate Accord and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal. Additionally, the administration sought to renegotiate existing trade agreements to better serve American interests, most notably replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

Domestically, the administration pursued a strategy of deregulation, aiming to improve the regulatory burdens placed on businesses. This was particularly evident in the significant rollback of regulations across various sectors, with a pronounced focus on environmental protections. The administration argued that such measures were necessary to stimulate economic

growth and reduce what it perceived as excessive governmental interference in the economy. A major legislative accomplishment of the Trump administration was the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. This legislation significantly lowered corporate tax rates with the intention of spurring economic growth and investment. However, while the tax reform was celebrated for its potential to stimulate the economy, it also raised concerns about its contribution to the growing federal deficit (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

The Trump administration adopted a strong approach to trade, particularly in its dealings with China, initiating a trade war that involved imposing tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of goods. This strategy was aimed at addressing the trade deficit and shielding American industries from what the administration perceived as unfair foreign competition. The administration's broader economic strategy was underpinned by a commitment to economic nationalism, with a strong emphasis on protecting American jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

This was pursued through the use of tariffs and the renegotiation of trade agreements, with the objective of revitalizing domestic industries and reducing the United States' reliance on foreign economies. In response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the administration implemented substantial economic relief measures. Notably, it supported and enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which included direct financial assistance to American citizens, loans to businesses, and expanded unemployment benefits (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

These measures were designed to mitigate the economic fallout from the pandemic and provide immediate support to individuals and businesses affected by the crisis. Regarding to Iran besides withdrawal from JCPOA and economic sanctions Trump administration employed public

diplomacy to criticize the Iranian regime, utilizing social media and public statements to draw attention to human rights abuses, corruption, and government mismanagement. This approach was intended to delegitimize the Iranian government both domestically and internationally. The administration also expressed support for protests within Iran against economic hardship and political repression, aiming to exert internal pressure on the Iranian government. Although the administration did not officially endorse regime change, some officials and supporters promoted narratives suggesting that the Iranian government was on the edge of collapse, to inspire opposition groups and destabilize the regime (Knoester, & Knoester, 2023).

3.2 Biden Administration's Approach

3.2.1 Revival for Diplomacy

President Biden has consistently emphasized his commitment to reengaging with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and reopening diplomatic dialogue with Iran, marking a departure from the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" strategy and a pivot towards diplomacy. During his campaign, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden indicated that the United States would rejoin the JCPOA contingent upon Iran's return to full compliance, using the agreement as a foundation for more ambitious negotiations aimed at extending and enhancing the deal (Singh, 2021).

Under Biden's administration, efforts to restore diplomatic relations with Iran have included appointing Rob Malley, a key negotiator from the original JCPOA talks, as the Special Envoy for Iran. Additionally, the Biden administration has accepted an offer from the European Union to participate in negotiations aimed at restoring the JCPOA. However, it has become apparent that fully reinstating the agreement will be a protracted process, complicated by intricate political dynamics and timing coordination issues between Iran and the United States (Singh,

2021).

However, the Biden administration encountered multiple challenges in its efforts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which ultimately prevented the full restoration of the agreement. One significant obstacle was Iran's non-compliance with the JCPOA. Following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the agreement, Iran had substantially violated its terms by increasing uranium enrichment and expanding its nuclear program beyond the prescribed limits. This non-compliance created a difficult starting point for negotiations and complicated the process of restoring adherence to the agreement (Singh, 2021).

The negotiation process itself was flawed by complex political and diplomatic obstacles. Coordinating between the United States and Iran proved challenging due to differing terms and conditions for re-engagement. The U.S. had to manage both domestic political pressures and international diplomatic complexities, which further hindered progress. The "maximum pressure" campaign initiated by the Trump administration, which imposed extensive economic sanctions on Iran, also posed a significant challenge (Singh, 2021).

The Biden administration faced the task of addressing these sanctions and finding a balance between easing them and ensuring Iran's compliance. This delicate issue required careful negotiation and was a contentious aspect of the diplomatic process. Additionally, broader regional concerns and conflicts further complicated the negotiations. Iran's involvement in regional conflicts and its support for militant groups added layers of complexity, making it difficult to focus solely on the nuclear issues central to the JCPOA (Singh, 2021).

The Biden administration also faced pressure from both domestic and international stakeholders. European partners and other signatories to the JCPOA expressed concerns about the

potential erosion of the agreement and the implications of U.S. policies on future diplomatic efforts. Changes in Iranian political leadership and shifting priorities within the Iranian government also impacted the negotiations. These changes affected Iran's willingness to negotiate and adhere to the terms of the JCPOA. Finally, efforts to provide economic incentives to Iran to encourage compliance were ultimately inadequate or ineffective. The lack of substantial economic relief or guarantees contributed to Iran's reluctance to return to full compliance with the JCPOA (Singh, 2021).

3.2.2 Conditional Re-engagement

The Biden administration's strategy specifying that Iran must first return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) before any sanctions can be lifted represents a critical component of its diplomatic approach to addressing Iran's nuclear program. This policy is underpinned by several strategic considerations:

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an international agreement involving Iran and several global partners, including the United States, European Union nations, Russia, China, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Adhering to this agreement underscores the importance of meeting established international standards and honoring commitments. Full compliance with the JCPOA allows for accurate assessment of Iran's nuclear activities, which can be objectively verified through inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (AlAlkim, 2021).

This verification process ensures that Iran's nuclear program remains non-military and helps build trust among the parties involved. The requirement for Iran to fully comply with the JCPOA before receiving any sanction relief follows the proper sequence outlined in the agreement, ensuring the reliability of the mutual commitments and preventing actions that could undermine the agreement's objectives (AlAlkim, 2021).

Imposing the condition of full compliance with the JCPOA as a prerequisite for the removal of sanctions serves as a safeguard against the misuse of nuclear energy for destructive purposes. This condition acts as a deterrent to other nations that might otherwise breach their nuclear agreements, thereby supporting global non-proliferation efforts and contributing to international peace. Emphasizing compliance provides the United States and its negotiating partners with a strategic advantage in diplomatic engagements with Iran (AlAlkim, 2021).

This strategy not only reinforces cooperation under the agreement but also presses Iran to adhere to its JCPOA commitments. By upholding multilateral agreements and emphasizing the need for Iran's full compliance before lifting sanctions, the Biden administration demonstrates its commitment to diplomatic solutions and to addressing nuclear issues within the framework of international negotiations (AlAlkim, 2021).

3.2.3 Engagement with Allies

Under the Biden administration, there has been a concerted effort to engage European partners and regional actors in addressing issues related to Iran. Central to this strategy is the administration's intention to collaborate closely with European nations on both Iran's nuclear program and its broader regional activities. This coalition-building policy seeks to mobilize support to enhance sanctions aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear and missile ambitions and addressing its conduct in the Middle East (Wang, & Hu, 2021).

Membership in NATO and active cooperation with European countries, alongside key Middle Eastern allies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, are critical components of this multilateral approach to the Iranian challenge. The Biden administration's strategy focuses on managing security threats in the Middle East through integrated diplomacy, ensuring that any diplomatic initiatives involving Iran are coordinated with other regional factors and stakeholders (Wang, & Hu, 2021).

In its diplomatic efforts, the United States employs a dual strategy aimed at both deterring Iran from further aggressive actions and fostering a united front among its allies in the region and beyond. This approach is designed not only to counter Iran's nuclear ambitions but also to enhance cohesion among American partners in addressing complex regional issues. While the United States and its European allies generally align on the central goal of addressing Iran's ongoing nuclear development, there may be nuanced differences in their respective strategies and the specific measures they advocate (Wang, & Hu, 2021).

For instance, European countries are likely to prioritize diplomatic negotiations with Iran to address issues through dialogue rather than sanctions, contrasting with the more assertive approach favored by the United States. These differences underscore the need for the EU and the U.S. to harmonize their strategies in dealing with Iran. Consequently, the Biden administration's strategy of engaging with European allies and regional partners in shaping Iran policy exemplifies its commitment to a multilateral approach to diplomacy and security (Wang & Hu, 2021).

Through international cooperation and consensus-building, the administration aims to achieve broader objectives in addressing the complex challenges posed by Iran's activities across the region. Overall, Biden's approach reflects a strategic emphasis on forming partnerships, fostering cooperation, and advancing collective interests as foundational elements in responding to the complex issues associated with Iran's actions in the Middle East (Wang & Hu, 2021).

3.2.4 Social Political and Economic Approaches by Biden Administration

The Biden administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by a concerted effort to accelerate the distribution and administration of vaccines across the United States. Central to this strategy was the establishment of mass vaccination sites and ensuring the availability of vaccines to all eligible adults. With the vaccination campaign, the administration placed significant emphasis on public health measures such as masking and social distancing, while also allocating substantial funding for COVID-19 research and treatment to mitigate the effects of the pandemic (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

In addressing social justice and equity, the Biden administration undertook various initiatives aimed at promoting racial equity across federal agencies. Executive orders were issued to tackle systemic racism and to initiate reforms in policing practices. Furthermore, the administration worked to reverse several policies from the previous administration that had negatively impacted. The efforts included reinforcing protections for individuals, both in the military and in educational settings, thereby advancing the administration's commitment to equality and inclusion (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

Immigration reform was another critical area of focus for the Biden administration. Efforts were made to protect and expand the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which provides temporary protection from deportation for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. Additionally, the administration sought to increase the refugee admissions cap, reflecting a more humanitarian approach to immigration. A key priority was also the reunification of families who had been separated at the U.S.-Mexico border under the policies of the previous administration, a move that underscored the administration's commitment to restoring humane treatment in immigration enforcement (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

Politically, the Biden administration pursued a bipartisan approach in several key areas, most notably in the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This legislation aimed to modernize critical aspects of the nation's infrastructure, including transportation, broadband, and utilities, and represented a significant achievement in securing bipartisan support. Simultaneously, the administration focused on strengthening voting rights and protecting democratic institutions, though these efforts were met with considerable political resistance, highlighting the contentious nature of voting rights reforms in the current political climate (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

On the international stage, the Biden administration sought to rebuild traditional alliances, particularly with NATO and European partners, while also engaging in multilateral diplomacy on critical issues such as climate change and global health. The administration's approach to foreign policy, particularly concerning China and Russia, was marked by a careful balancing of competition and cooperation, reflecting the complexities of managing strategic challenges posed by these major global powers. In the labor and employment sector, the administration advocated for raising the federal minimum wage and strengthening labor unions, although achieving legislative success in these areas proved challenging (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

Additionally, the administration emphasized investments in workforce development, particularly in education and training programs, to prepare American workers for emerging industries, with a specific focus on the growing clean energy sector. Regarding to Iran besides JCPOA and giving some leverage in economic sanctions Biden administration socially emphasized human rights in its interactions with Iran. It has condemned the Iranian government's suppression of political opposition, restrictions on freedom of expression, and violations of minority rights (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

The administration has expressed support for the Iranian people's right to peaceful protest and has actively criticized Iran's human rights record in international forums. Moreover, there has been an effort to engage with Iranian civil society and the diaspora, fostering exchanges and dialogue aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and supporting pro-democracy initiatives within Iran.

3.3 Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of President Trump's and President Biden's approaches to negotiations with Iran reveals the contrasts in their methodologies and strategies. Trump's approach was marked by unilateralism and a transactional mindset, in contrast to Biden's emphasis on multilateralism and diplomacy. Trump's administration pursued a unilateral strategy, as evidenced by its decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 without consulting the other signatories (Taleihur, 2023).

This action intensified tensions with European allies, who remained committed to protecting the agreement despite the U.S. withdrawal. The Trump administration's approach was characterized by a focus on exerting maximum pressure through economic sanctions to compel Iran to make concessions. This strategy, driven by the "America First" policy, sought immediate outcomes through direct action without sustained diplomatic engagement (Taleihur, 2023).

In contrast, President Biden's strategy prioritizes multilateralism and cooperative diplomacy. His administration has sought to reengage with European partners and regional actors to coordinate a unified approach to Iran, aiming to restore and enhance diplomatic relations. Biden's approach involves a commitment to negotiation and consultation, intending to leverage "soft power" and rebuild alliances to address Iran's nuclear program and regional behavior (Taleihur, 2023).

However, Biden's efforts to revive the JCPOA have faced significant challenges. The reimposition of U.S. sanctions under Trump had already resulted in substantial economic strain on Iran, complicating efforts to negotiate and provide sufficient sanctions relief. The Biden administration's inability to fully lift sanctions and offer adequate economic incentives has hindered progress in negotiations. Additionally, the need to balance domestic political pressures, international diplomatic concerns, and the complexities of Iran's non-compliance has further constrained Biden's ability to achieve a full revival of the JCPOA (Taleihur, 2023).

The socio-political and economic contexts of the two administrations also highlight key differences. Trump's foreign policy was marked by a lack of consistent vision and strategic coherence, favoring direct action and immediate results over long-term diplomatic solutions. In contrast, Biden's approach reflects a commitment to multilateralism, diplomatic engagement, and the restoration of international agreements (Taleihur, 2023).

The Biden administration's focus on consultation and negotiation contrasts with Trump's more assertive and unilateral tactics, demonstrating a shift from transactional to collaborative diplomacy. Despite these efforts, the challenges of reestablishing the JCPOA, coupled with the constraints imposed by economic sanctions and political complexities, have prevented the Biden administration from fully realizing its diplomatic objectives regarding Iran (Taleihur, 2023).

3.4 Evaluation of Iran's Responses to the Both the Administrations' Approaches

The approaches of Presidents Trump and Biden towards Iran have been shaped by political imperatives, regional and international dynamics, and distinct foreign policy objectives. A comprehensive evaluation of Iran's responses to each administration's strategies reveals the impact of these factors on diplomatic interactions and policy outcomes.

3.4.1 Response to Trump Administration's Approach

In response to President Trump's approach, Iran adopted a stance characterized by strong resistance and opposition. The Trump administration's implementation of a "maximum pressure" campaign led Iran to constantly resist American demands, portraying itself as an unjustly targeted nation. Iranian leaders rejected negotiations under coercion, condemning U.S. sanctions as violations of Iranian sovereignty and attacks on its people. This defiant posture served to assert Iran's independence and foster national unity amidst external pressures (Phillips, 2018).

Additionally, Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA and the subsequent replacement of sanctions further rooted hardline positions within Iran, bolstering the influence of factions advocating for a more confrontational stance toward the United States. In response to increased tensions with the United States, Iran intensified its adversarial stance and expanded its regional operations. This included bolstering its involvement with proxy groups and enhancing its missile capabilities; actions that were intended to assert power and demonstrate resilience against perceived threats and provocations (Phillips, 2018).

Economically, the Iranian regime adopted various strategies to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions. These strategies included diversifying trade routes and establishing new economic partnerships in an effort to circumvent the sanctions. Despite these efforts, the measures proved only partially effective in alleviating the economic crisis caused by the sanctions. The resulting economic downturn exacerbated domestic challenges, leading to increased civil unrest and deteriorating living conditions for the Iranian population (Phillips, 2018).

3.4.2 Response to Biden Administration's Approach

Iran's response to the Biden administration's policies has been characterized by caution and strategic calculation. While Iran has indicated a willingness to engage in negotiations with the Biden administration, its approach has been marked by skepticism and a demand for tangible actions prior to any significant moves towards reinstating the JCPOA. This cautious stance appears to reflect Iran's distrust of U.S. intentions and its desire to maximize benefits without making substantial concessions (Mahasneh & Al-Mashaqbeh, 2023).

Strategically, the Iranian regime has employed a diplomatic approach to negotiate its position in relation to the JCPOA and to address the sanctions imposed on it. Iran has asserted that its rights must be upheld in the negotiations and has signaled its readiness to withdraw from talks if these conditions are not met. This stance demonstrates Iran's commitment to negotiating robustly on issues pertinent to its national interests. Iran has adopted a highly systematic approach in its response to the Biden administration, carefully balancing its actions to avoid provoking the U.S. while positioning itself advantageously in negotiations over the nuclear deal (Mahasneh & Al-Mashaqbeh, 2023).

Despite continuing support for regional proxies and asserting its influence in the region, Tehran has generally refrained from adopting overly aggressive measures that could jeopardize diplomatic relations and disrupt the ongoing negotiations. This measured strategy allows Iran to project strength while preserving the opportunity for constructive dialogue with the United States. In essence, Iran's reactions to the Trump and Biden administrations reflect a complex interplay of resistance and adaptability, characterized by both antagonism and strategic balance (Mahasneh & Al-Mashaqbeh, 2023).

3.5 Global Perception and Alliance Dynamics

3.5.1 Response to Trump's Approach

The responses of major global powers and stakeholders to the management strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations regarding Iran have been varied, reflecting their distinct interests and geopolitical alignments. In reaction to Trump's policies, key European allies—namely the United Kingdom, France, and Germany—urged the United States to maintain its commitment to the JCPOA and to avoid imposing further sanctions on Iran (Kausch, 2018).

Despite the U.S. unilaterally withdrawing from the agreement, these European nations remained steadfast in their support for the JCPOA, highlighting their dedication to multilateralism and non-proliferation efforts. Global powers and key international actors, both allies and adversaries, have exhibited varied responses to the Trump and Biden administrations' approaches to Iran. Specifically, in response to Trump's actions, major European partners such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany urged the United States to remain committed to the JCPOA and to refrain from imposing sanctions on Iran (Kausch, 2018).

While many nations perceived Trump's strategy of exerting maximum pressure on Iran as antagonistic, some Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, supported the policy. They viewed it as a means of countering Iran's regional influence and ambitions, which align with their own strategic interests in the Middle East (Kausch, 2018).

During the Trump presidency, U.S. foreign policy was marked by the unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran, a move that was met with disapproval from key global powers, including Russia and China. Both nations condemned the U.S. decision to exit the JCPOA and criticized the imposition of sanctions, advocating instead for the continuation of the

agreement (Kausch, 2018).

In multiple instances, Russia and China voted in favor of resolutions supporting the JCPOA, while simultaneously working to maintain economic relations with Iran and resisting efforts to further isolate the country, which aligned with their strategic and economic interests. Iran's regional allies, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and various Shia militias in Iraq, also denounced U.S. actions. These groups expressed solidarity with Iran, opposing the sanctions and pressures, and voiced clear support for Iran in the face of what they viewed as acts of aggression from the West (Kausch, 2018).

3.5.2 Response to Biden's Approach

Reactions to President Biden's approach toward Iran vary according to the power dynamics, alliances, and roles of different international actors. Biden's decision to renew diplomatic dialogue with Iran and work toward restoring the nuclear deal has garnered approval from European partners, who have welcomed his administration's diplomatic approach and inclusive consideration of all parties involved in the Iran nuclear issue (Janes, 2021).

This reflects a preference for cooperative diplomacy, a principle favored by European nations. Gulf Arab states, initially skeptical, have shifted to cautious optimism regarding U.S.-Iran engagements. While mindful of the potential implications of renewed U.S.-Iran relations, they generally support diplomatic efforts aimed at reducing tensions and addressing the Iranian nuclear issue through negotiations, driven by their desire to ensure regional stability and avoid conflict. Similarly, Russia and China, though traditionally opposed to U.S. policies, have tentatively welcomed Biden's willingness to rejoin the JCPOA and pursue diplomatic engagement with Iran (Janes, 2021).

They have expressed a positive stance toward cooperation in the international arena to

resolve Iran's nuclear issue and establish diplomatic relations with Iran. This response aligns with their broader political agenda, which prioritizes maintaining global order and addressing international crises through diplomacy. Even Iran's allies have responded with cautious optimism to Biden's diplomatic overtures (Janes, 2021).

While hopeful about the renewed negotiations, they have called upon the United States to lift sanctions and honor its commitments under the JCPOA, reflecting their concern over the impact of sanctions on Iran and the need for tangible progress in the nuclear negotiation process. In summary, the international community's reactions to the strategies of Trump and Biden regarding Iran have varied, driven by national self-interest, adherence to diplomatic norms, and regional specificities (Janes, 2021).

Biden's emphasis on multilateralism has generally gathered more support and cooperation from key global actors, signaling a shift toward forward-looking, collaborative diplomacy on critical international issues.

In conclusion, an analysis of the measures undertaken by the Trump and Biden administrations to reshape U.S. policy toward Iran offers critical insights into the broader contours of American foreign policy and its approach to managing complex relations with a key Middle Eastern power. While both administrations faced similar challenges regarding Iran, their strategies diverged significantly.

The Trump administration adopted an aggressive, unilateral, and coercive form of diplomacy, seeking to impose substantial political and economic pressure on Iran to secure a more restrictive nuclear deal and curb its regional activities. This approach, rooted in Trump's broader 'strategic' unilateralism and preference for power-based, transactional relations,

ultimately exacerbated tensions, drove Iran closer to China and Russia, and diminished U.S. influence globally.

In contrast, the Biden administration has pursued a more diplomatic and cooperative approach, aiming to revive and potentially modify the JCPOA while emphasizing collaboration with allies and multilateral engagement. However, despite this shift from isolationist policies, Biden's approach has witnessed an escalation in Iran's nuclear program and proxy activities, highlighting the need for a well-defined long-term strategy that integrates diplomacy, sanctions, and credible threats.

The socio-political differences between the two administrations further underscore their divergent policies: Trump's nationalist and populist agenda prioritized American sovereignty and economic interests, often at the expense of international cooperation, while Biden's globalist perspective focuses on rebuilding alliances and addressing global challenges collaboratively, including the Iranian nuclear issue. This contrast in approaches reflects the broader ideological differences between the administrations and their impact on U.S.-Iran relations.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACT OF TRUMP AND BIDEN ADMINISTRATIONS' APPROACHES ON REGIONAL SECURITY, STABILITY, AND BALANCE OF POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

4.1 Introduction

President Obama and Ayatollah Khamenei, the current leader of Iran, have played pivotal roles in shaping the security landscape of the Middle East. The rivalry curtailing from the outcomes of the 1979 Iranian Revolution has fueled ongoing tensions and conflicts over regional influence. The United States perceives Iran as a significant threat due to its nuclear ambitions, support for armed forces and militias, and backing of groups designated as terrorist organizations, in addition to its strategic alliances with Russia and China (Kaye, 2022).

Conversely, Iran's objective is to diminish American influence and establish its dominance in the Middle East by supporting various groups, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and others considered terrorist organizations by the U.S. The Cold War-era antagonism between the two nations has persisted for decades, contributing to the current state of insecurity and conflict in the region. The U.S. remains resolute in viewing Iran's nuclear ambitions and its support for militia groups and terrorist organizations as major threats to both regional and international security (Kaye, 2022).

Iran's regional alliances and its connections with other major global powers, such as Russia and China, add a significant layer of complexity to the geopolitical situation and heighten the potential risks. Conversely, Iran seeks to neutralize U.S. influence in the Middle East by bolstering puppet regimes and employing guerrilla warfare tactics. By supporting organizations

and movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah, Iran aims to create leverage against the United States and its allies, undermining their regional security agreements, structures, and strategies (Kaye, 2022).

This multifaceted confrontation underscores the critical and diverse roles that both the United States and Iran play in maintaining security and stability in the Middle East. The escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran have exacerbated regionally based threats, particularly through proxy wars in areas such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, leading to further escalation and instability in the region (Kaye, 2022). The May 2021 attack on Israel by the Iran-backed militant group Hamas, followed by the 11 day conflict between Israel and Hamas in October 2023 heightened concerns about the potential for broader conflict between Israel and Iran. These concerns were further intensified in April 2024 when Iran directly targeted Israeli territory with a missile attack, prompting a retaliatory strike from Israeli forces.

This exchange signaled a significant escalation in the confrontation between Iran and Israel. Additionally, the ongoing conflict between the United States and Iran has further complicated the security landscape in the Middle East, affecting other regional actors and altering the overall security climate. Iran's support for proxy forces and its military provocations pose a serious security threat, while U.S. actions—including sanctions, military deployments, and airstrike responses to perceived threats—also contribute to the heightened security risks in the region (Kaye, 2022)

Iranian hostility towards U.S. interests, the potential for its proxies to initiate a conventional conflict, and the risk of regional warfare all necessitate a reevaluation of the U.S.-Iran relationship as a significant security threat. The foreign policies of both current and previous U.S. administrations towards Iran have profoundly influenced the Middle Eastern geopolitical

landscape. The Trump administration employed a "maximum pressure" strategy, characterized by rigorous economic and political sanctions, while the Biden administration has emphasized genuine diplomacy and collaboration with international partners (Kaye, 2022).

These differing approaches have substantial implications for regional security, stability, and power dynamics in the Middle East. Although these strategies have generated distinct dynamics, the fundamental objective of understanding their impact on the region remains consistent.

4.2 The Trump Administration's Approach

The Trump administration, with support from the U.S. Congress and allied states, implemented a comprehensive sanctions regime targeting Iran and global entities engaged in business with it. This policy followed the United States' withdrawal from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal. From 2018 to 2021, over 1,500 sanctions were imposed on various entities, including the Supreme Leader's office, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Central Bank of Iran, individual military personnel, proxy militias, Iranian scientists and equipment manufacturers, Iranian banks particularly those involved in international transactions business and non-profit foundations, and various shipping companies (Azizi, & Vazirian, 2020).

These sanctions aimed to address Iran's nuclear program, ballistic missile activities, regional interventions, cyber intrusions, and human rights violations. The Trump administration extended its sanctions to foreign companies operating with Iran in at least 21 countries, focusing particularly on the banking and oil sectors. While some restrictions were initially imposed during the Obama administration to limit Tehran's nuclear ambitions, the Trump administration significantly expanded and intensified these measures starting in 2018, with additional sanctions

introduced even during the 2020 election period (Azizi & Vazirian, 2020).

The sanctions targeted a range of entities, including a Bahrain-based militia, Iranian and foreign companies involved in steel production, defense apparatuses, shipping, cyber activities, and media outlets disseminating misinformation. These actions were part of a broader strategy to apply increased economic pressure on Tehran with the goal of compelling Iran to return to the negotiating table under more stringent economic conditions (Azizi & Vazirian, 2020).

The Trump administration's policies, particularly its "maximum pressure" campaign, had a substantial impact on regional dynamics in the Middle East, contributing to heightened tensions and increased instability in various ways:

4.2.1 Escalation of U.S.-Iran Tensions

The period of relative agreement between the United States and Iran prior to the Trump presidency suggests that the subsequent deterioration in relations may be attributed to several significant factors. Notably, in 2018, the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal, which had been negotiated during the Obama administration (Katzman, McInnis, & Thomas, 2019).

This withdrawal was perceived by Iran as a breach of the agreement, leading to increased tensions between the two countries. Following its exit from the JCPOA, the Trump administration initiated a strategy known as the "Maximum Pressure" campaign against Iran. This strategy involved imposing severe economic pressures and efforts to limit Iran's regional influence, with the objective of compelling Iran to renegotiate the nuclear deal (Katzman, McInnis, & Thomas, 2019).

The U.S. also undertook targeted actions against specific Iranian military personnel,

most notably the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Quds Force, in January 2020. In response, Iran retaliated by attacking U.S. military installations in Iraq, escalating the conflict. Additionally, the U.S. and Iran engaged indirectly through their proxies in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, supporting opposing factions. These proxy conflicts contributed to regional destabilization and heightened the risk of direct confrontation between the two nations (Katzman, McInnis, & Thomas, 2019).

4.2.2 Regional Proxy Conflicts

During the Trump administration, new proxy conflicts emerged, particularly involving Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia and Israel on the other. In terms of security, Iran continued to support various militant groups, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and several Shia militias in Iraq, thereby contributing to instability in these regions. This situation prompted Saudi Arabia and its allies to more directly confront Iran, which exacerbated the Yemeni civil war (Jose, & Fathun, 2021).

The conflict in Yemen intensified during Trump's presidency, often characterized as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia, supported by the United States, and Iran. The Trump administration significantly increased military sales and support to Saudi Arabia and its allies, prolonging the conflict. In response, Iran provided substantial support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, including weapons and military advisors, which further escalated the violence and exacerbated the humanitarian crisis (Jose, & Fathun, 2021).

Iran's involvement in Syria was pivotal in bolstering the Assad regime's stability and influence through its support of the government and its allies. During Donald Trump's presidency, actions such as air strikes on Syrian government installations and support for

Kurdish-led forces in northeastern Syria further escalated tensions with Iran and its allies, resulting in a complex proxy war involving multiple actors, including Russia and various non-state entities. In Iraq, the U.S.-Iran confrontation was particularly pronounced, with the presence of Shia militias sponsored by Iran further complicating the situation (Jose, & Fathun, 2021).

The Trump administration's aggressive policies, including the "maximum pressure campaign," which involved sanctions and the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad, significantly heightened tensions and intensified proxy conflicts. Iranian-backed groups, such as Hezbollah, continued to target U.S. interests and personnel in Iraq, contributing to increased instability and insecurity in the region (Jose, & Fathun, 2021).

In Lebanon, Shia militants, notably Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran, continued to wield significant influence. The Trump administration's policies towards Iran, including the imposition of sanctions and the adoption of a pressure-driven approach, contributed to rising tensions between Hezbollah and its adversaries, particularly Israel. The security situation along the Israel-Lebanon border remained tense, characterized by sporadic acts of hostility (Jose & Fathun, 2021).

By antagonizing Iran and its proxies, the Trump administration intensified the frequency and severity of proxy conflicts in the Middle East. Given the complex interplay of geopolitical interests, sectarian divisions, and regional hostilities, these conflicts proved challenging to manage and remained a focal point throughout the Trump administration (Jose & Fathun, 2021).

4.2.3 Humanitarian Crises

The continuation and escalation of regional conflicts, intensified by the policies of the Trump administration, have led to profound humanitarian crises. In Yemen, the ongoing civil war has been exacerbated by the geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, leading to increasingly terrible conditions. The blockade imposed by the coalition has severely restricted the flow of food, medicine, and fuel, critically endangering the nation and contributing to escalating food insecurity, disease, and malnutrition (Krieg, 2017).

Over time, millions of Yemenis have been displaced, with the country becoming a major focus of humanitarian concern. Similarly, the Syrian civil war, characterized by intense internal conflict and extensive regional and international intervention, has devastated the country's humanitarian landscape. Civilians, including children and the elderly, have endured severe human rights violations, acute food insecurity, and a lack of water and medical care (Krieg, 2017). This has resulted in widespread internal displacement and significant numbers of Syrians seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

The humanitarian crisis in Iraq was further intensified by the re-emergence of ISIS in certain regions, which introduced new pressures. The situation worsened due to ongoing conflict, the resurgence of ISIS, and regional dynamics involving Iran. Despite the ceasefire declared by the Trump administration, ISIS remained active, particularly in areas predominantly inhabited by Sunni Arabs. Additionally, the broader conflict between the U.S. and Iran, which played out within Iraqi territory, likely contributed to heightened insecurity and increased violence (Krieg, 2017).

As a result, millions of Iraqis, whether displaced within the country or seeking refuge in neighboring countries or across the Middle East and North Africa, continued to face severe challenges in accessing basic services and were at significant risk of violence and exploitation (Krieg, 2017).

4.2.4 Impact on Energy Markets

The policies of the Trump administration towards Iran, including the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the subsequent imposition of sanctions, significantly impacted the volatility of oil prices. These policies highlighted several critical factors, such as the unpredictability of disruptions to Iranian oil supplies and the fluctuating intensity of regional tensions, which were perceived as threats to oil price stability and affected energy markets and investor sentiment (Shokri Kalehsar, 2021).

Trump's confrontational stance towards Iran elevated regional tensions and heightened the risk of supply disruptions in the Middle East. Furthermore, a series of attacks on oil infrastructure in the Persian Gulf exacerbated concerns regarding the security of oil supplies from the region.

This uncertainty had a direct impact on the Energy Exchanges market, as traders closely monitored geopolitical developments and their volatile effects on market expectations. Additionally, the Trump administration's policies regarding Iran, and more broadly the Middle East, influenced investor decisions and infrastructure activities within the power and energy sectors (Shokri Kalehsar, 2021).

Political and security concerns related to potential conflicts significantly affected investment decisions; in contexts where political stability was perceived to be low or security

risks were high, investment projects were either delayed or abandoned. Consequently, this greatly impacted long-term investment in energy projects and export capabilities in the Middle East, as potential investors were reluctant to commit funds due to the risk of conflict jeopardizing their investments (Shokri Kalehsar, 2021).

4.2.5 Regional Perspectives

4.2.5.1 Israel

Iran presents a significant challenge to regional security due to its nuclear ambitions and its support for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, which are concerns for Israel. Analysis indicates that Israel finds itself in a precarious position regarding its relations with Iran. It must balance the need to contain Iran's nuclear advancements with the risk of provoking a severe backlash. An Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities could potentially accelerate Iran's nuclear program and trigger a series of escalating events. Such an attack might not neutralize the nuclear threat but could instead compel Iran to intensify its nuclear activities, thereby increasing the risk of conflict (Weisser, 2016).

Israel faces several risks and uncertainties in addressing this issue. It must prevent further aggressive actions by Iran while avoiding provocation that could lead to a large-scale regional war. Currently, Israel is considering several options, including diplomatic efforts to form protective coalitions, limited kinetic operations targeting nuclear or missile facilities, and more extensive kinetic actions such as missile or air strikes within Iran. Maintaining and enhancing deterrence, as well as imposing costs on Iran for supporting attacks on Israeli territory, are crucial components of Israel's strategy (Weisser, 2016).

Recent incidents have heightened the threat dynamics between Israel and Iran, particularly following the Israeli airstrike near the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Center in

response to Iranian drone and missile attacks. This situation underscores the necessity for more nuanced diplomatic strategies aimed at mitigating Iran's nuclear capabilities to reduce regional instability in the Middle East. It also highlights the enduring challenges and constraints faced by Israel as it seeks to address Iran's actions and intentions without disrupting the strategic balance of power in the region and beyond (The New York Times, 2024).

Israel's concerns are further exacerbated by Iran's ambitions to extend its influence across the Middle East. Iran's involvement in conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as its support for various Shia militias and proxies, poses a potential threat of encroachment on Israel's borders and increasing hostility towards the Israeli state (The New York Times, 2024). These factors illustrate the dynamic and volatile nature of the Middle Eastern region and underscore the complexities Israel faces in safeguarding itself against threats posed by Iran.

In this context, Israel is confronted with the challenges associated with Iran's near-threshold nuclear capability, which could become a viable target for potential airstrikes. This issue is further complicated by the potentially adversarial nuclear relations between Israel and Iran, generating significant concerns within the international community (The New York Times, 2024). For instance, as a regional nuclear power, Israel faces a critical dilemma in managing Iran's pursuit of nuclear capability while preventing the escalation of conflict to a more severe level in the Middle East.

4.2.5.2 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia views Iran as a significant regional competitor due to substantial differences in religious affiliation and political interests, with both nations competing for dominance in the Middle East. A key factor in the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is their sectarian divide: Saudi Arabia is a Sunni state, positioning itself as the spiritual leader of Sunni Muslims,

while Iran is a Shia state and presents itself as the defender of Shia Muslims (Van der Heiden & Krijger, 2018)

This sectarian rivalry has exacerbated regional conflicts, with both nations backing opposing sides in various conflicts, such as the Syrian civil war and the Yemeni crisis. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia has led a military coalition against the Houthi rebels, who are allied with Iran, perceiving their support as part of a broader Iranian strategy to extend its influence towards the southern borders of Saudi Arabia (Van der Heiden & Krijger, 2018).

In the Syrian civil war, Saudi Arabia has aligned with rebel groups opposing the Iran-backed Assad government, viewing it as a direct threat to its security and a means for Iran to augment its regional influence. More broadly, Saudi Arabia perceives Iran's growing involvement in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern states as a significant challenge to its own regional dominance (Van der Heiden & Krijger, 2018).

The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which dismantled a Sunni Arab regime and replaced it with a Shia-led government in Baghdad, was interpreted by the Saudis as a strategic advantage for Iran, heightening their concerns (Van der Heiden & Krijger, 2018). Consequently, Saudi Arabia has sought to counterbalance Iran's influence through a combination of military interventions, financial support to allied groups, and soft power strategies.

4.2.5.3 Palestine

The Palestinian perspective on U.S.-Iran relations under the Trump administration, particularly regarding regional security and the balance of power in the Middle East, is complex. From the Palestinian viewpoint, the intensification of U.S.-Iran tensions under Trump, marked by the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the subsequent "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, was likely perceived as destabilizing for

the region. This instability could be seen as intensifying the already complex dynamics between Israel, the U.S., and Palestine (Del Sarto, 2024).

The intensified U.S.-Iran tensions were likely viewed by Palestinians as a threat to regional security. Increased conflict between the U.S. and Iran had the potential to exacerbate proxy conflicts in the region, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, where significant numbers of Palestinian refugees reside. The prospect of a broader regional war could have further destabilized these areas, worsening the humanitarian situation for Palestinians (Del Sarto, 2024).

Moreover, the Trump administration's hardline stance on Iran might have been interpreted by Palestinians as part of a broader U.S. strategy to reinforce Israeli dominance in the region. The administration's strong support for Israel, evident in its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and endorsement of Israeli settlements, combined with its antagonism towards Iran, could be seen as efforts to shift the regional balance of power in favor of Israel. This would further marginalize the Palestinian cause on the international stage (Del Sarto, 2024).

There was also a concern among Palestinians that the U.S. focus on countering Iran would further sideline their issues. The Trump administration's policies appeared to deprioritize the Palestinian cause, especially with initiatives like the "Deal of the Century," which was widely rejected by Palestinians as biased towards Israel. In this context, U.S.-Iran tensions could be perceived as part of a broader strategy to diminish Palestinian leverage and align regional powers more closely with Israeli interests (Del Sarto, 2024).

Iran has historically positioned itself as a supporter of the Palestinian cause, using its opposition to Israel to garner support within the Arab world and beyond. The Trump administration's starkly pro-Israel policies may have prompted Iran to strengthen its support for

Palestinian groups such as Hamas, to counterbalance the U.S.-Israel alliance. This dynamic could have escalated tensions, as U.S. actions in support of Israel, particularly those undermining Palestinian claims, might have been viewed by Iran as part of a broader agenda to weaken its influence in the region (Del Sarto, 2024).

The increased U.S. pressure on Iran might have also indirectly influenced Palestinian resistance movements. Given Iran's support for groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, any weakening of Iran's position due to U.S. policies could have impacted these groups' ability to resist Israeli policies. Conversely, the U.S. stance against Iran might have encouraged these movements to seek stronger ties with Tehran as a counterbalance to U.S.-Israel relations thereby interlinking the Palestinian issue with U.S.-Iran tensions (Del Sarto, 2024).

Furthermore, the Palestinian leadership might have sought to leverage the U.S.-Iran rivalry to gain support from other regional players who were concerned about the balance of power, particularly countries like Turkey or Qatar. These countries could have seen an opportunity to mediate or influence the U.S.-Iran dynamic in ways that might benefit the Palestinian cause, especially in countering Israeli policies that were bolstered by U.S. support (Del Sarto, 2024).

4.2.5.4 Saudi Arabia and Israel Welcome to Trump's Tough Stance on Iran

Saudi Arabia and Israel perceive Iran as their primary adversary within the broader strategic landscape of the Middle East, competing for regional hegemony. This perception is grounded in Iran's support for proxy groups such as the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon, both of which pose significant challenges to Saudi national interests and security. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has engaged in conflicts where Iranian proxies are active, notably in Yemen (Beck, 2020).

Trump's policies toward Iran reinforced Riyadh's narrative of depicting Iran as a regional

threat that must be contained to restore balance in the Middle East. For the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran's nuclear ambitions and its pursuit of regional dominance represent existential threats (Beck, 2020). Specific Trump administration policies, such as the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the imposition of heavy sanctions, heightened Saudi concerns over Iran's destabilizing activities. Similarly, Israel views Iran's nuclear program and its sponsorship of terrorism as significant threats to its security and survival.

Furthermore, Iran has historically employed rhetoric that analysts consider hostile, including calls for the destruction of Israel. Israel, as a key player in regional security, has vested interests in countries such as Syria and Lebanon, both of which are significantly influenced by Iranian allies. The Trump administration's measures to counter Iran's influence in these areas were leveraged by Israel as it sought to prevent Iran from establishing a permanent military presence near its borders (Beck, 2020).

Israel and the United States share robust economic and military cooperation, and the Trump administration's support for Israel's security and interests, particularly its policies on Iran, further solidified their bilateral relationship. Particularly, Israeli leadership endorsed the administration's actions regarding the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital (Beck, 2020).

4.2.6 Domestic and Electoral Politics

Trump's administration, largely composed of highly conservative individuals, strongly supported his aggressive stance on international security. During his campaign leading up to the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Trump criticized the JCPOA, labeling it as one of the worst agreements, arguing that it not only allowed Iran to continue its nuclear development but also failed to address Iran's aggressive behavior in the Middle East and its missile development

programs (Milani, 2018).

By prompting Iran to withdraw from the JCPOA in May 2018, Trump bolstered his position among his supporters. The "maximum pressure" campaign was presented as a measure to safeguard U.S. interests and those of its allies, resonating with evangelical and pro-Israel lobbies. However, Democrats opposed the withdrawal, arguing that it undermined a multilateral agreement that had effectively restrained Iran's nuclear ambitions while increasing the risk of conflict, thereby exposing the deep political divisions within Congress (Milani, 2018).

The support from Congressional Republicans and the alignment of Trump's rhetoric with the views of his voter allowed him to maintain a consistent narrative on Iran policy, despite frequent shifts in his decisions, which were often framed as rejections of the previous administration's policies. Throughout his presidency, Trump persistently argued that the JCPOA was fundamentally flawed, using this stance to justify the continuation of his "maximum pressure" campaign and related mobilization efforts (Singh, 2021).

Prominent GOP senators, such as Mitch McConnell and Lindsey Graham, supported Trump's foreign policy approach towards Iran, while Democratic leaders like Nancy Pelosi and Chris Murphy advocated for a return to diplomatic engagement. This dynamic was particularly evident in the strategies and discourse of the current GOP. The U.S. President's attempts to renegotiate with the Iranian regime reflect internal politico-cultural factors aimed at normalizing dialogue while achieving key bipartisan objectives concerning Iran's regional behavior and missile program (Singh, 2021). Overall, an analysis of the Trump administration's Iran policy reveals that political factors and electoral considerations had a profound impact on U.S. foreign policy and the broader political debate.

4.3 The Biden Administration's Approach

Joe Biden's approach to Iran represents a significant departure from that of Donald Trump, who actively pursued a strategy of maximum pressure and unilateralism. The Biden administration has signaled a willingness to diplomatically revive the Iran deal to address issues related to Iran's nuclear program and its actions in the Middle East. In contrast to Trump's unilateral approach, the Biden administration has prioritized collaboration with U.S. allies and partners (Harb, 2021).

It has adopted a step-by-step strategy for engaging with Iran, including gestures indicating a readiness to lift some of the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration, though not allowing Iran to fully benefit from the removal of nuclear sanctions as outlined in the JCPOA (Harb, 2021). Nevertheless, the administration has emphasized the necessity for Iran to respond with mutual actions and to address concerns regarding its nuclear ambitions and regional activities.

This suggests that the Biden administration is aware of the regional and sub-regional conflicts in the Middle East and recognizes how the issue of Iran integrates into the broader and complex dynamics of the region. Iran's role as a state that sponsors proxy actors, develops ballistic missiles, and is willing to confront these challenges diplomatically underscores the administration's approach (Harb, 2021).

The Biden administration's shift towards diplomacy and multilateralism, in contrast to its predecessor's more aggressive and unilateral stance, reflects a commitment to addressing the nuclear issue and regional conflicts through cooperative engagement with allies and like-minded partners in the Middle East (Harb, 2021). This approach signifies a deliberate move away from Trump's confrontational policies, emphasizing consultation, communication, and the pursuit of

diplomatic solutions to regional issues through international organizations and collaborative frameworks.

4.3.1 Biden Administration's Recognition of the Limitations of Maximum Pressure Strategy

The current administration has conducted a thorough evaluation of the Trump administration's approach towards Iran, characterized by its "maximum pressure" strategy. Despite implementing severe economic sanctions and a comprehensive diplomatic boycott, this approach failed to achieve meaningful changes in Iran's nuclear program or its regional activities. The current administration recognizes that this liberal international pressure strategy did not induce significant modifications in Tehran's behavior or its nuclear stance (Toossi, 2021). However, it heightened regional tensions and exacerbated unrest, leading to an increase in Iran's uranium enrichment activities and further regional aggression.

The Biden administration has emphasized a diplomatic approach as the most viable means for addressing Iran's nuclear program. It contends that diplomacy is the most effective method for reaching a durable and verifiable agreement on Iran's nuclear ambitions while also enhancing regional security. The administration has adopted a step-by-step diplomatic strategy, involving incremental measures aimed at alleviating tensions and building trust between the two nations (Toossi, 2021).

This approach includes offering minor concessions, such as the gradual removal of certain sanctions, contingent upon Iran's adherence to the JCPOA. The Biden administration's major policy decision to engage in diplomatic negotiations addresses not only the nuclear issue but also broader regional concerns. The administration recognizes that, for achieving long-term stability, diplomacy represents the sole viable solution to the complexities of the Iran issue in the Middle East (Toossi, 2021).

4.3.2 Concerns and Challenges for Israel and Saudi Arabia

Both Israel and Saudi Arabia face a range of internal and external challenges that significantly influence their foreign policies and defense strategies. Both nations harbor concerns that any diplomatic resolution to the conflict between the United States and Iran may not adequately serve their security interests, given their strategic partnership with the U.S. in the region. They are particularly apprehensive about the potential for the U.S. to prioritize the Iran issue over their security concerns. Israel and Saudi Arabia fear that re-engagement with the JCPOA without adequately addressing Iran's broader regional activities could jeopardize regional stability. Their principal concerns regarding the potential revival of the JCPOA include:

4.3.2.1 Revival of the JCPOA

Israel has consistently opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) from its inception, with Saudi Arabia also expressing reservations regarding the nuclear agreement during its negotiation phase under the Obama administration. Critics, including both Israeli and Saudi voices, contended that the JCPOA failed to effectively curb Iran's nuclear ambitions and lacked sufficient measures to address Iran's assertive regional behavior (AlAlkiml, 2022).

The Trump administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA and its subsequent adoption of a more confrontational stance, referred to as the "maximum pressure campaign," were generally welcomed by both Israel and Saudi Arabia. However, the Biden administration's signals, particularly its renewed interest in engaging with Tehran and its intention to potentially re-enter the JCPOA, have generated significant concern in both Tel Aviv and Riyadh.

These concerns primarily stem from the apprehension that the renewal of the JCPOA could alleviate economic pressures on Iran without adequately addressing other critical aspects of its regional conduct, such as its support for militant groups and its role in fomenting instability

in countries like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. Israel and Saudi Arabia are concerned that the economic benefits and enhanced trade relations resulting from the lifting of sanctions under a renewed JCPOA could bolster Iran's regional dominance (AlAlkiml, 2022). This potential increase in Iran's regional influence is perceived as a shift in the balance of power away from Western interests and towards Iran, posing a perceived threat to their national security.

4.3.2.2 Iran's Broader Regional Activities

Two countries in the Middle East most concerned about Iranian influence are Israel and Saudi Arabia, the latter due to its involvement with proxy groups throughout the region. Iran's antagonistic actions in the Middle East include supporting militant groups and exhibiting hostility towards other nations. This support encompasses military and financial aid to organizations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and Shia militias in Iraq and Yemen (AlAlkiml, 2022).

These proxy groups are adversarial to both Israelis and Saudis, with some involved in ongoing conflicts and acts of terrorism. The Israeli government is apprehensive that the reactivation of the JCPOA may incentivize Iran to increase its support for these proxy groups, thereby amplifying the threats to Israel (AlAlkiml, 2022).

Similarly, Saudi Arabia perceives Iran's regional activities as an existential threat to its stability and security, particularly in light of the ongoing conflict in Yemen, where Iranian-backed Houthis continue to target Saudi territory. The regional tensions and alliances, shaped by Iran's support for proxy groups, have contributed to a highly volatile and charged environment. The Gulf Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have sought to navigate a complex diplomatic path by balancing their relations with both Iran and Israel (AlAlkiml, 2022).

These states aim to foster constructive relationships with both nations while simultaneously achieving their security objectives. This balancing act becomes even more intricate given the Gaza conflict and Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran, as Iran exerts pressure on Israel to halt its military actions in Gaza, thereby threatening retaliation against countries that support Israel and potentially escalating the conflict on a broader scale (AlAlkiml, 2022).

4.3.2.3 Concerns and Challenges for Israel over Iran's Support for Palestine

Israel's primary concerns regarding Iranian support to proxy groups are centered on the security threats posed by these entities. Iran's backing of militant organizations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and various Shia militias in Iraq and Yemen presents both direct and indirect threats to Israeli security. These groups have been involved in acts of terrorism and military aggression against Israel, which exacerbates Israel's security concerns and complicates its regional stability (AlAlkiml, 2022).

The military threat posed by Hezbollah and Hamas, which are armed and financed by Iran, includes the potential for rocket attacks and other forms of aggression against Israeli territory. This persistent threat necessitates substantial defense resources from Israel. Additionally, the activities of these proxy groups contribute to broader regional instability, which affects Israel's strategic environment and complicates its diplomatic efforts. The support Iran provides to these groups also heightens the risk of escalation and conflict, as any confrontation with these proxies could potentially involve Iranian forces or lead to wider regional conflicts (AlAlkiml, 2022).

The role of the United States in the dynamics between Israel and Iran is significant, influencing the geopolitical landscape through its policies and diplomatic engagements. During the Trump administration, the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, including the withdrawal from the JCPOA and the imposition of stringent sanctions, was seen positively by

Israel. This approach aimed to limit Iran's regional influence and nuclear ambitions, aligning with Israeli interests in countering Iranian aggression (AlAlkiml, 2022).

In contrast, the Biden administration has sought to reengage with Iran through diplomacy and has shown interest in potentially rejoining the JCPOA. This shift has raised concerns in Israel, as the potential reactivation of the deal might reduce economic pressures on Iran without adequately addressing its regional behavior. The Biden administration's attempt to balance diplomatic engagement with Iran while maintaining support for Israel involves complex negotiations and considerations (AlAlkiml, 2022).

Under the Biden administration, the U.S. has pursued a more diplomatic approach towards Iran, focusing on the possible revival of the JCPOA. This strategy aims to address Iran's nuclear program while engaging in broader regional diplomacy. The Biden administration emphasizes a balanced approach, attempting to manage both Iranian nuclear ambitions and regional destabilization. However, Israel remains apprehensive about these diplomatic efforts, fearing that concessions to Iran might enhance its regional position and support for proxy groups, thereby exacerbating security threats (AlAlkiml, 2022).

The policies of the Biden administration also affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While seeking to address humanitarian issues and promote peace talks, the U.S. faces challenges in balancing its support for Israel with addressing Palestinian aspirations and grievances. The approach to Iran indirectly impacts this context, as Iranian support for Palestinian militant groups adds another layer of complexity to the conflict (AlAlkiml, 2022).

4.3.2.4 Ballistic Missile Development

A principal concern for both Israel and Saudi Arabia is Iran's development of ballistic missile capabilities. Iran has made notable advancements in its missile technology, which poses a

direct threat to both nations. The production and enhancement of ballistic missiles that could destabilize the surrounding region are significant issues. Given these missile capabilities, both Israel and Saudi Arabia emphasize the importance of negotiating a treaty addressing Iran's missile program, particularly in the context of potential nuclear warheads. The lack of transparency and resolution regarding Iran's missile capabilities may further exacerbate regional tensions and increase the likelihood of conflict (AlAlkiml, 2022).

Both Saudi Arabia and Israel regard Iran's ballistic missile capabilities as a significant threat to their national security, asserting that this issue should be prioritized in any negotiation process concerning Iran. Neglecting to address this aspect could potentially undermine regional security and stability, increasing the risk of escalating tensions and the possibility of military conflict. The Biden administration's efforts to engage diplomatically with Iran, while maintaining relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia, have encountered resistance from both of these countries (AlAlkiml, 2022).

Their concerns center on the perception that the U.S. diplomatic approach prioritizes engagement with Iran without adequately addressing the security needs of Israel and Saudi Arabia. This perception has contributed to heightened stress and complications in the administration's Middle East policy.

4.3.3 Domestic and Electoral Politics

President Biden faces significant pressure from various political entities concerning his approach to Iran. Radical Democrats advocate for a focus on diplomacy and a return to the JCPOA, arguing that such measures are essential to prevent conflict and avoid military engagement. In contrast, moderate Democrats and Republicans call for more robust actions against Iran's regional activities, including its support for proxy groups and the development of

ballistic missiles, which they perceive as direct threats to U.S. allies in the region, particularly Israel and Saudi Arabia (Sing, 2021).

This divergence of perspectives places Biden in a challenging position, necessitating a balance between demonstrating the United States' commitment to diplomacy and peace, while also safeguarding national interests and supporting regional allies. Among the eight U.S. administrative perceptions related to the Iran nuclear crisis, electoral considerations exert the most significant influence on the country's policy decisions regarding Iran (Sing, 2021).

The Biden administration aims to present its foreign policy approach as more effective and competent compared to the unilateral and transactional policies of the Trump administration, which were perceived as detrimental to alliances and provocative. For instance, Biden's efforts to reinstate the JCPOA are partially intended to restore American international partnerships and enhance the perception of U.S. foreign policy as constructive and collaborative (Sing, 2021).

This strategy is particularly important for appealing to moderate voters who prioritize stability and a pragmatic foreign policy. With upcoming elections in both the U.S. and Iran, Biden's approach to addressing Iran's nuclear program in a manner that avoids escalating tensions is crucial. It is designed to demonstrate that his policies are both effective and manageable in the contemporary international context, thereby bolstering his administration's credibility and supporting his prospects for re-election (Sing, 2021).

4.4 Impact on Regional Security, Stability, and Balance of Power

The Trump and Biden administrations have paid attention to the Middle Eastern countries, particularly in the regional security and stability issue. The following is an analysis of the impact of their respective strategies:

4.4.1 Trump Administration

The Trump administration played a pivotal role in facilitating normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab nations, including the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, collectively known as the Abraham Accords. These agreements marked a significant shift in regional relations and were viewed as a step towards greater stability in the Middle East. Concurrently, the Trump administration bolstered relations with long-standing allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, providing substantial support and protection (Lazin, 2023).

This enhanced support contributed to strengthening their security frameworks and fostering relative regional stability, notwithstanding criticisms regarding human rights issues in Saudi Arabia. The administration's "maximum pressure" strategy, which sought to apply significant pressure on Iran alongside the normalization agreements, had a mixed but arguably constructive impact across various regions (Lazin, 2023). While this approach may have mitigated certain aggressive actions by Iran, it also acted as a catalyst for increased conflict potential.

While the normalization agreements signed during the Trump administration brought about positive changes in the region, they did not address fundamental issues such as the Arab-Israeli or, more specifically, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Instead of providing clarity and stability in Middle Eastern policies, the Trump administration's offshore balancing, unpredictability, and systematic inconsistency in its approach to Middle Eastern affairs exacerbated tensions, instabilities, and uncertainties regarding U.S. strategic objectives in the region (Lazin, 2023).

These characteristics raised concerns about the sustainability and effectiveness of the "America First" foreign policy throughout Trump's presidency. Despite employing

unconventional methods in handling Middle Eastern geopolitics, the Trump administration introduced stabilizing elements by challenging established paradigms and implementing policies such as withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal.

4.4.2 Biden Administration

The Biden administration has officially expressed support for the Abraham Accords, indicating its intention to continue promoting the recognition of Israel by additional Arab nations and to uphold and advance the interests of the parties involved in the accords. This policy continuity aims to sustain the positive dynamics established during the early days of the Trump presidency. Concurrently, the Biden administration's re-engagement with Iran and its emphasis on human rights signify a departure from the previous administration's approach to regional security issues (Naef & Kara, 2022).

While diplomatic efforts towards Iran may contribute to reducing tensions, concerns persist regarding the potential effects of rejoining the JCPOA without addressing Iran's regional activities. Such an approach could inadvertently embolden Tehran and exacerbate regional destabilization. Furthermore, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations is seen as a means to mitigate rising tensions between nations. For Western leaders, including Biden, advocating for diplomacy with various nations, particularly those in the Middle East, remains a central strategy. This approach involves managing communication channels to prevent conflict while achieving incremental successes (Naef & Kara, 2022).

To enhance cooperation, strengthen military capabilities, and facilitate genuine dialogue necessary for resolving emerging differences with China, the Biden administration seeks to avoid direct conflict. Additionally, its diplomatic initiatives aim to strengthen America's role within the international community. Despite these efforts, the administration faces considerable challenges, particularly in terms of clearly communicating its objectives and demonstrating perseverance to

counteract adversarial actions (Naef & Kara, 2022).

Particularly, there have been criticisms regarding the administration's handling of the Gaza conflict and the perceived stagnation in advancing the Abraham Accords with Saudi Arabia. Accusations of mismanagement in regional conflicts and Iran-related policies have contributed to heightened threats and tensions in the Middle East (Naef & Kara, 2022). It is essential to recognize that both the Trump and Biden administrations have significantly influenced the security and stability of the Middle East. While Trump's approach, though unconventional, achieved a degree of stability, Biden's policies have been criticized for their impact on the region's dynamics and stability, reflecting diverse critiques from various stakeholders.

4.5 Theoretical Analysis

4.5.1 Neo-Realism

This chapter explores how neo-realism has been under-working in the Trump and Biden era within the US foreign policy towards Iran. Neo-realism also known as 'structural realism' emphasizes structural properties that have been described by Kenneth Waltz namely the system of international anarchy power distribution and the perpetual pursuit of state's self-help. In other words, this is a good way of saying that with the help of this theoretical framework, it is possible to comprehend evolutionary changes and the evolutionary stability of relations between the US and Iran under these two presidents.

4.5.2 Trump Administration's Approach: Maximum Pressure

On May 8, 2018, President Donald Trump exercised his executive authority to withdraw the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an agreement previously negotiated during the Obama administration. This decision aligned with neo-realist

principles, which emphasize nationalism and argue that states should avoid agreements that potentially compromise their sovereignty, including multilateral treaties. Additionally, the Trump administration reinstated and intensified a series of economic sanctions aimed at weakening the Iranian economy and limiting its capacity to support regional paramilitary organizations (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

This approach aligns closely with neo-realism, as it aims to leverage economic power to maintain hegemonic stability. Furthermore, the U.S. military increased its presence in the Persian Gulf, conducted operations such as the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, and expanded cooperation with Israel and Gulf states. These actions reflect neo-realist principles that emphasize both the acquisition of military capabilities and diplomatic strategies to address perceived threats. The hallmark of Trump's foreign policy was its emphasis on bilateral and individualistic approaches, often bypassing multilateral organizations in favor of direct bilateral pressures on specific countries (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

This approach aligns with neo-realist skepticism regarding the effectiveness of international organizations and an emphasis on the significance of state power politics.

4.5.3 Biden Administration's Approach: Deterrence and Countermeasures

Biden administration has been engaged to regain the JCPOA, dependent on conditions applying to Tehran. The change in this direction of diplomatic overture and multilateralism can be seen contrary to the previous administration which took the bold decision of leaving TPP, but still, the strategic move from a neo-realist perspective is to contain nuclear and regulate power dynamics of the region. Although the new administration has kept some of the pressures to maintain pressure on Iran, it has relied more on diplomacy to address not only the predicament of the nuclear program but also other aspects of Iran's conduct in the region. This strategy

characterizes a carefully orchestrated balance between economic threats and dialogue to achieve national security policy goals (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

Moreover, the current American President, Joe Biden, has mentioned the gradual reduction of the American military presence in the Middle East and the development of power mosaics and soft power. This strategic directionality can be encapsulated within a neo-realist understanding of the conduct of power projection and the need to avoid missteps. This policy involved cooperation with European partners and aggressive participation in the institutional processes to counter the potential Iranian threat. While this approach may be understood more in line with the progressive liberal idea, it can be noted that it is a neo-realist plan that can be interpreted as the reinforcement of the USA through frameworks based on cooperative measures in the society of security (Javadi, Mottaghi, & Abtahi, 2023).

4.5.4 Comparative Analysis through Neo-Realism

Trump's Iran policy exemplified a model of power and coercion, emphasizing the use of force and aggressive diplomacy to assert dominance in the Middle East. In contrast, President Biden's approach reflects international relations theory through a nuanced application of power politics and diplomacy. This strategy aims to foster regional stability while simultaneously reinforcing and maintaining the U.S. presence in the area. This strategy included an economic squeeze on Iran, exerting pressure through sanctions and, in certain instances, military threats. It involved reaffirming partnerships with key regional stakeholders, particularly Israel and the Gulf states, to strategically encircle Iran (Taleihur, 2023).

In contrast, President Biden adopts a more moderate approach, not solely concentrating on exerting pressure but also considering diplomacy as a viable tool. His strategy involves indirectly confronting Iran and leveraging local allies to counterbalance Iran's influence, thereby

contributing to a more equitable power structure in the region. Trump's approach emphasized the demonstration of power through military strikes and sanctions designed to curtail Iran's actions and showcase American strength. In contrast, while Trump has employed short-term tactics aimed at achieving immediate objectives through direct pressure, Biden's strategy focuses on asserting long-term control through more subtle means (Taleihur, 2023).

This approach involves reducing reliance on force and instead utilizing diplomatic and economic instruments to advance national security goals and address regional dynamics. In conclusion, the actions of the Trump and Biden administrations regarding Iran can be effectively analyzed through the lens of neo-realist theory. These strategies represent different approaches by the United States to advance its national interests within an anarchic international system. Trump's approach, characterized by unilateralism and the application of force, reflected a preference for hard power. Conversely, Biden's strategy employs diplomacy and multilateralism to realign the balance of power and security in favor of the United States and its allies (Taleihur, 2023).

4.5.5 Rational Actor Model

Theories of rationality, central to political science and international relations, posit that states and their leaders make deliberate and systematic decisions to achieve their objectives, based on a thorough assessment of their goals and resources. Within this framework, the actions of the Trump and Biden administrations regarding Iran can be evaluated comprehensively. During Trump's tenure, the United States pursued a strategy of maximum pressure, exemplified by the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and the imposition of stringent sanctions (Saniabadi, 2021).

This approach aimed to compel Iran to negotiate under more favorable terms for the

U.S., addressing not only the nuclear issue but also concerns about Iran's ballistic missile program and regional activities. According to rational actor theory, the Trump administration anticipated that increased economic and diplomatic pressure would lead Iran to make concessions. However, the strategy had unforeseen consequences, including heightened economic strain on Iran and increased regional aggression, while also straining relations with European allies committed to the JCPOA (Saniabadi, 2021).

In contrast, the Biden administration adopted a markedly different approach upon taking office in 2021. Biden's strategy emphasized diplomacy and multilateralism, seeking to reengage with Iran and restore the JCPOA as a means to address the nuclear issue and regional conduct. This approach was grounded in the rational actor theory, which suggests that integrated diplomacy and multilateral cooperation would more effectively resolve the challenges posed by Iran compared to the Trump administration's unilateralism. By pursuing negotiations and rebuilding relationships with estranged allies, the Biden administration aimed to reduce tensions and stabilize the region (Saniabadi, 2021).

However, the administration faced challenges, including disagreements over the JCPOA's terms and concerns from regional allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia. Internal political factors in both the U.S. and Iran further complicated the process. Despite these efforts, the Biden administration's diplomatic approach contrasted with the Trump administration's coercive tactics, potentially offering a path to reduced tensions and greater stability in the Middle East if successful negotiations and cooperation are achieved.

In conclusion, from the perspective of energy sector security and regional stability, both the Trump and Biden administrations have had significant impacts on the Middle East. The Trump administration adopted a pragmatic and cost-benefit approach, characterized by unilateral

actions and a focus on securitization, often disregarding international structures and conflict reduction strategies. Key actions during Trump's tenure included the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), relocation of the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, and the formal recognition of Israel by several Arab states. These measures aimed to fortify U.S. alliances, exert pressure on Iran, and foster regional cooperation.

However, they also contributed to increased regional tensions, polarization, and volatility. Conversely, the Biden administration has pursued a more diplomatic approach, emphasizing engagement and negotiations to address the Middle East's complex dynamics. The Biden administration's strategy includes efforts to revive the JCPOA, mitigate conflicts, and address the underlying sources of instability. This shift contrasts sharply with the previous administration's escalation-focused policies, though challenges persist, including local hostilities, domestic political constraints and deep-rooted patterns of conflict.

The Palestinian factor has significantly influenced U.S.-Iran relations under both administrations. During the Trump administration, the U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and support for Israel's policies exacerbated tensions with Iran, which views itself as a staunch advocate for Palestinian rights. This alignment with Israel and the perceived marginalization of Palestinian issues contributed to the deterioration of U.S.-Iran relations and Iran's increased regional assertiveness.

In contrast, the Biden administration has aimed to recalibrate U.S. foreign policy by re-engaging with Iran diplomatically and addressing broader regional issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Biden's focus on rejoining the JCPOA and pursuing a balanced approach to regional diplomacy has sought to address some of the grievances exacerbated by the Trump

administration's policies. Nonetheless, the challenge remains in balancing U.S. support for Israel with efforts to address Palestinian aspirations and maintain stability in U.S.-Iran relations.

Chapter no 5

CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of the Trump and Biden administrations' policies toward Iran highlights significant geopolitical and diplomatic shifts, reflecting divergent ideological orientations. Under President Trump, the approach was characterized by unilateralism and a focus on coercive measures, including the abrupt withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018. This decision was driven by a neo-realist perspective, which emphasizes the preservation of state sovereignty and the pursuit of national interests through hard power.

Trump's administration implemented a “maximum pressure” campaign, imposing extensive economic sanctions targeting critical sectors of the Iranian economy such as oil, gas, and banking. These measures aimed to compel Iran to renegotiate the nuclear deal under more favorable terms for the U.S., while also addressing broader concerns like Iran's ballistic missile program and regional activities. However, this approach had mixed results, escalating tensions rather than achieving a comprehensive agreement.

The administration's policies also deepened regional cleavages, notably through strengthened alliances with Israel and Gulf States and efforts to normalize relations between Israel and several Arab nations. This strategy, while solidifying U.S. ties with regional allies, failed to contain Iran's regional influence or achieve a better nuclear deal, as evidenced by heightened hostilities and Iranian retaliation.

In contrast, President Biden's strategy has been marked by a more diplomatic and

multilateral approach, reflecting a shift from the aggressive tactics of his predecessor. Biden's administration has sought to re-engage with Iran and revive the JCPOA, emphasizing diplomacy and cooperative international frameworks over unilateral pressure. This strategy aligns with a rational actor theory perspective, which advocates for the use of diplomacy and multilateralism to address complex international issues.

By rejoining the JCPOA and working with European partners, Biden aims to mitigate tensions and address Iran's nuclear ambitions through negotiation and incremental concessions. This approach also involves a strategic balance between maintaining economic sanctions as leverage and fostering diplomatic dialogue. Despite these efforts, the Biden administration faces challenges, including resistance from domestic opponents of the JCPOA and Iran's continued regional assertiveness. The complexities of U.S.-Iran relations are further compounded by ongoing regional conflicts and the influence of proxy militias supported by Iran.

The impact of the Palestinian issue on U.S.-Iran relations is also significant, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a central point of contention in the Middle East. Trump's policies, including the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and support for normalization agreements with Arab states, exacerbated tensions with Iran, which views itself as a defender of Palestinian rights.

Biden's approach, while focusing on diplomacy and multilateralism, must navigate these longstanding regional dynamics, which influence both U.S. policy and Iran's behavior. From a neo-realist perspective, both administrations' strategies reflect their attempts to secure national interests and manage regional power dynamics, albeit through different means. Trump's reliance on direct coercion and unilateral actions contrasts with Biden's emphasis on diplomatic engagement and multilateral cooperation, highlighting the diverse methods employed to achieve

strategic objectives in a complex and volatile geopolitical landscape.

Comparative Analysis

Policy Aspect	Trump Administration	Biden Administration
JCPOA	Withdrawn from the JCPOA in 2018, arguing it was flawed and too lenient on Iran.	Expressed intent to rejoin the JCPOA, but faced significant challenges, including Iran's demands for sanctions relief and the complexities of renegotiating the agreement.
Challenges in JCPOA Re-engagement	No intention to renegotiate or re-enter the JCPOA.	Could not easily rejoin due to domestic political opposition, Iranian demands, and the need to address additional issues such as missile programs and regional activities.
Sanctions Policies	Implemented a "maximum pressure" campaign, reimposing and expanding sanctions to cripple Iran's economy.	Maintained many of Trump's sanctions as leverage in negotiations but faced difficulties in providing relief without significant concessions from Iran.
Challenges in Sanctions Relief	No intention to provide sanctions relief, seeking instead to intensify economic pressure.	Could not provide sanctions relief without risking political criticism and weakening negotiation positions, while Iran demanded full sanctions removal as a precondition.
Military Strategies	Took a hardline stance, including the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, signaling a readiness for military action.	Preferred diplomacy over military engagement, although maintaining a military presence and capabilities in the region as a deterrent.

**Regional
Perspective
(Israel/Pales
tine)**

Strongly aligned with Israel, recognized Jerusalem as its capital, facilitated normalization with Arab states, leading to heightened tensions with Iran.

Sought to balance relations with Israel while re-engaging diplomatically with Iran, addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and managing regional dynamics more cautiously.

**Impact on
U.S.-Iran
Relations**

Polarized regional alliances, pushing Iran closer to Russia and China, and escalating tensions.

Attempted to reduce tensions through diplomatic means, but faced challenges due to Iran's skepticism and the deep-rooted complexities of the region.

**Social and
Political
Strategies
(U.S.)**

Adopted a nationalist, populist approach, focusing on American sovereignty, economic interests, and a transactional foreign policy.

Emphasized multilateralism, rebuilding alliances, and addressing global challenges collectively, while attempting to manage domestic political divisions.

**Social and
Political
Strategies
(Iran)**

Favored coercion and pressure, aiming to force Iran into submission through isolation and economic hardship.

Sought diplomatic engagement and dialogue, with a focus on re-entering the JCPOA, despite facing significant obstacles and skepticism from Iran and domestic opponents.

Compiled by Researcher

FINDINGS

Both Trump and Biden's potential presidency have received much attention in academic literature and comparative research regarding the probable Iran-related foreign policy agendas. That is why, in essence, this work is focused on understanding how they do it and: how it differs, and how it is presumably the same. Even with a common narrative of Iran as the strategic threat to the US and its allies, their operational methods and tactics were quite different.

Strategic Similarities

The Trump and Biden administrations consider Iran as a major enemy of the United States as well as its allies in the Middle East region. Many contributors are discussed as experts, who state that Iran is a strategic threat, and they identify several things we do not like, namely Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, slowing down its missile program, and counteracting the influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the region. These are all things that both administrations are interested in because they are the administrations aligned on the same strategic level.

A significant objective for both administrations is to contain Iran's malevolent activities and support to terrorist organizations. The Biden administration has been eager to emphasize that they do not want Iran to develop nuclear weapons that might pose a threat to Israel. They are standing firmly against Iranian harmful deeds and their support of the terrorist groups. Also, the United States still wants to deter Iran from causing a negative influence and continues to provide support for terrorists. This commitment is more stay throughout the different administrations and guarantees a continuous procedure of looking for ideals of substantial objectives.

Tactical Differences

President Biden's efforts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) were impeded by multiple factors. Domestically, the administration encountered significant resistance from Congress and influential stakeholders who were critical of the JCPOA and wary of

concessions to Iran. Internationally tensed relations with European allies despite, their commitment to the JCPOA complicated negotiations as they had concerns regarding Iran's nuclear activities and regional behavior. Additionally, Iran's response to U.S. sanctions and its advancements in nuclear technology further obstructed progress. The administration's attempt to address broader issues, including Iran's regional conduct and missile program, added further complexity, thereby hindering the effective revival of the JCPOA.

Sanctions and Economic Pressure

Sanctions became heavy on Iran under the Trump term as the administration implemented the “maximum pressure” policy. These sanctions were meant to cripple Iran economically and put lots of pressure on the Iran regime to talk about its nuclear program. President Biden appears to be, however, a little more inclined to ease such sanctions in exchange for solutions. President Biden’s difficulty in leveraging economic sanctions effectively arises from a combination of factors.

The administration's approach, which combined sanctions with diplomatic efforts, was constrained by the broader geopolitical context. Biden's focus on re-engaging with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and employing multilateral diplomacy necessitated a balance between sanctions and negotiations, thereby reducing their impact. Domestic opposition from Congress and international strains with European allies further limited the efficacy of the sanctions strategy.

The integration of economic pressures with diplomatic incentives ultimately constrained the ability of sanctions to induce significant Iranian concessions.

Military Action and Deterrence

President Trump's strategy was fundamentally grounded in the use of military force, exemplified by the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, which was intended to

bolster U.S. military strength and deter further Iranian aggression. In contrast, President Biden has adopted a more measured approach, emphasizing the avoidance of direct military confrontation with Iran. While Biden's administration prioritizes diplomatic and nuanced strategies, it does not entirely exclude the possibility of military action if deemed necessary to address issues related to Iran. This approach reflects a commitment to diplomacy while maintaining readiness to employ force if required.

Support for Iranian Opposition

The Trump administration's strategy was the type that aimed at empowering the people and demonizing the government of Iran. They believed that this assistance was a deceitful strategy to bring a new change within the government while portraying the negative side. Biden is not like Trump a loud and impulsive decisiveness, but he has a more calculated strategy in mind. He said he has sympathy for people's rights in Iran and the lack of democracy there, but he is not in support of any of the groups that act against the government. They have been reminding people that it is high time they were given better plans that are intelligent and sustainable so that changes can be enhanced in Iran.

Nuclear Negotiations

This thesis considers the nuclear debate as suitable funding for the conflict between the United States and Iran. Its strategy was distinguished by leaving the JCPOA and the adoption of new sanctioning regimes. President Biden has tried to rejoin the JCPOA and begin discussions for a new deal to address American concerns over Iran's nuclear endeavors.

Regional Dynamics

Presidents Trump and Biden both emphasized the importance of regional actors in addressing issues related to Iran, albeit through distinct approaches. Trump's policy was

characterized by efforts to apply pressure on Iran through the formation of a coalition with Arab states and Israel, leveraging shared interests and security concerns. Conversely, the Biden administration has favored a return to multilateralism, emphasizing the restoration of relationships with European allies to address regional security challenges.

While Trump's administration was notably pro-Israel and pursued a confrontational stance towards Iran, Biden's approach appears more balanced, reflecting a nuanced stance on Israel and the Palestinian territories. Notably, Trump's administration, including UN envoy Nikki Haley's push for a U.S. draft resolution combating anti-Semitism, contrasts with Biden's willingness to re-engage in negotiations regarding the JCPOA, contingent on specific preconditions.

This diplomatic shift reflects an intent to renew engagement rather than unilaterally withdraw. The Palestinian factor further complicates the dynamic, as the U.S.'s stance on Israeli-Palestinian issues influences regional relations and Iran's positioning within the broader Middle Eastern context.

Recent Developments

The Trump administration, U.S. policy towards Iran was characterized by the "maximum pressure" strategy, which employed a combination of stringent sanctions and military presence to curb Iranian aggression and nuclear ambitions. This approach, while putting significant pressure on Iran, faced criticism for its unilateral nature and neo-imperialist undertones, as well as its failure to address underlying issues comprehensively. The Biden administration, in contrast, has recognized the complexities of managing Middle Eastern crises and the importance of managing perceptions of American foreign policy in addition to taking action.

The recent death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is anticipated to significantly influence U.S. policy towards Iran. The potential rise of either a more moderate or a more militant leader could shift the dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations and impact ongoing negotiations

regarding the JCPOA. Furthermore, changes in Iran's leadership might alter its interactions with regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Russia, and could affect U.S. foreign policy in response to Iranian activities in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq.

The upcoming U.S. elections will also play a critical role in shaping future policy directions. If the democratic candidate is re-elected, efforts to re-engage diplomatically with Iran may continue. Conversely, a victory by a Republican candidate, potentially a proponent of Trump's maximum-pressure approach, could lead to a return to a more confrontational stance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions could aid the United States in maintaining an efficient approach, to policy concerning Iran.

Consistent Diplomacy

The United States must maintain a consistent policy orientation regarding Iran, rather than frequently altering strategies with each change in administration. Long-term diplomatic engagement with Iran should be prioritized, ensuring that diplomatic processes remain stable and ongoing despite shifts in U.S. foreign policy leadership. To achieve this, it is essential to sustain permanent diplomatic teams and maintain back-channel communications, thereby ensuring continuity and adherence to established protocols. Implementing these measures can mitigate the risk of abrupt escalations, such as those observed during the transition from the Obama to the Trump administration, and foster sustainable stability. Effective crisis and conflict management are thus best supported through enduring and consistent diplomatic relations.

Multilateral Engagement

The United States must continue to closely coordinate its efforts with its European partners in addition to Russia and China all signatories to the JCPOA. This new international coalition on

Iran is to ensure that even world powers such as Russia and China are taken firmly into the agreements on Global governance. For instance, the E3 group, which is France, Germany, and the UK, played a significant role in the signing of the JCPOA initially. Russia and China are not only core members of Iran's axis of influence or alliance system but also Iran's significant economic and political partners – their support for a more comprehensive and improved JCPOA will help to expand the number of states supporting this deal and enhance its efficiency.

Integrated Strategy

Relying solely on diplomacy to address issues with Iran proves to be insufficient. A more comprehensive approach, integrating diplomatic, economic, and military measures, is essential for effectively addressing not only Iran's nuclear ambitions but also its assertive behavior in the Middle East and its ongoing development of ballistic missiles. This integrated strategy should encompass diplomatic efforts facilitated through spokesperson negotiations and dialogue forums, economic measures including the conditional lifting of sanctions in alignment with Iran's compliance with stipulated requirements, and targeted military actions. The latter might involve limited operations and the formation of coalitions with regional allies to counteract Iran's aggression. Such a multifaceted approach ensures a robust and effective response to the various facets of the Iranian threat.

Human Rights Focus

Human Rights should play a role in the political relationship between the US and Iran; the US should fight for the Iranian people during the negotiation process. In this regard, for example, U.S. negotiators may find it as critical as large agreements with the government involve demanding political prisoners' release, while an improved treatment of dissidents shows a signal for U.S. demands and benefits. In this regard, the U.S. sanctions Iran to spread freedom to the Iranian

people, as well as for fortifying its ethical position, and for garnering the support of other nations across the globe. This approach makes it possible to combine geopolitical gains and ethical ideals, and this makes a comprehensive and moral stand on foreign policy possible.

Regional Security Framework

It is crucial to develop an integrated regional stability framework that includes key stakeholders to prevent the emergence of tensions and rivalries in security management. For example, the United States could facilitate discussions and collaborative actions among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Israel, and Iraq to address mutual security threats, such as terrorism and maritime security concerns. By promoting regional cooperation, the US could contribute to Middle Eastern stability, countering Iran's attempts to expand its influence.

Effective measures could include joint military exercises, information sharing, and coordinated counter-terrorism efforts. Coupling these actions with balanced diplomatic engagement and international support could advance multiple objectives, such as regional security and human rights. Future US policy in the region would benefit from an evaluation of Trump's and Biden's strategies, aiming to refine approaches for enhancing stability and security while limiting Iran's nuclear ambitions. Such a strategy would require a unified international coalition and a focus on human rights to ensure sustainable, long-term outcomes.

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