



Degree Program in

International Relations

The United States, Iran, and the play of powers
in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Geopolitical
scenarios and the impact of U.S. elections

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A mia madre, il grande amore della mia vita

A mio padre, il principe della mia fiaba

A mio fratello, il mio sostegno costante.

Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has its roots in ancient times and is still today an unresolved and tense issue, which have generated violence and destruction over the years. The issue has recently drawn the attention of the international community, raising concerns about its potential threat to global security and stability. The upcoming US add a new level of uncertainty, as the decisions of the winners could significantly affect the attitude and actions of the international community. The core of this dispute is a deep and unresolvable split between Palestinians and Israelis, fueled by entrenched mutual distrust. This conflict involves different actors, including the United States, Israel, Iran and Palestine, whose fragile balances define the framework of severe geopolitical instability in the region.

The first part of the document deals with the historical context, meticulously examined, from the roots to contemporary events starting from the first intifada up to the clashes of today allowing us to understand the complexity of the phenomenon and the interests at stake. It proceeds by analyzing the central role of Hezbollah, an antagonist of the United States and Israel, but a powerful ally and supporter of the Palestinian question.

The second part focuses on Iran's nuclear program, considered both as a tool for deterrence and as a potential weapon of mass destruction, which, constantly threatening international stability, proves to be a valuable tool for diplomatic pressure. Then, Iran's change of course with the establishment of the Islamic Republic and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in its efforts to curb nuclear proliferation and limit its use for peaceful purposes is analyzed. Finally, it explores the significant impact of nuclear weapons on power dynamics in the contemporary political scenario and what it would have on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The third section focuses on the protagonists and antagonists of the conflict since, in order to gain a better understanding of the players and the relational dynamics existing between them, it is essential to have an overview of all the main actors involved. The first countries discussed are Palestine and Israel, whose relevant aspects are examined: demography, which has helped shape the history of the region, influencing the ethnic and religious composition of the population and its geographic distribution; economics, which, through

a comparison of the current and past situation of the two countries, sheds light on the contradictions that fuel the climate of tension; and finally politics, which provides insight into how successive organizations and governments have handled the dispute. It then focuses on Iran, an additional key player in the conflict, a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause and a funder of various terrorist groups that threaten regional and international stability. Then the relevant aspects of the United States, a very important actor within the conflict with a predominant past in the Middle East, will be analyzed. After profiling a framework of the major powers, the section will focus on inter-power relations.

The precarious relations between these three powers, Palestine, Israel and Iran, play a crucial role, especially, in reference to the concerns of other Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, about a potential destabilization of the Middle East. Saudi Arabia currently represents an unexpected and prominent actor and could have a major role in the future evolution of the conflict, also considering its relationship with the United States. It is precisely on the latter that the dissertation intends to place particular emphasis, initially by attending to relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine, and then focusing, specifically, on the relationship with Iran. The United States, in fact, by coming to the aid of Israel whose reasons it shares, supporting its cause, and consequently going against Iran, an Islamic republic in clear antithesis to American liberal democracy, plays a complex and significant role in the conflict. Relations between Washington and Tehran have oscillated between alliances and peaceful relations until worsening with the advent of the Iranian revolution, with further tensions arising from decisions made by the Trump administration. Such tensions, however, are not apparent in the relationship the United States has with Israel, which is considered a great ally.

The paper concludes with a look at the U.S. electoral landscape and its potential consequences on the Arab-Israeli issue. A comparative analysis of the contrasting approaches of the Republican and Democratic U.S. administrations of Biden and Trump, respectively, is conducted, highlighting substantial differences in their policies. A final section of the paper focuses on the development of U.S. relations with superpowers, depending on the decisions the winner of the election will take.

The final aim of the work is to reflect on how the hypothetical winner of the election could change the scenario of American foreign policy with inevitable repercussions on

the dynamics of the Middle East conflict and the relationship he will want to establish with Iran.

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Introduction

Geopolitics and world balances reflect substantially the outcomes of political elections in the major powers. It is undisputed that few electoral consultations attract as much global attention as the election of the President of the United States, to the point of rising to an event of planetary resonance. The presidential elections, in addition of being a media "show," play a role of great political significance, considering America's footprint importance on the international scene.

Indeed, the United States has always had great influence on the international community, conditioning and shaping the political, economic, and cultural destinies of the modern world. Its leadership has always been evident and predominant in a wide range of areas: from economics to technology, from diplomacy to international security. U.S. supremacy, together with the undeniable power to mediate and relate to various countries, translated into the objective ability to implement an international policy agenda, aimed at weaving global alliances, through the creation and maintenance of strategic agreements, thus revealing itself as the America is, a valuable anchor in the crucial maintenance of the stability and security of the entire Planet. All administrations, both republican and democratic, that have succeeded each other in the leadership of the nation have always exerted significant influence on the fate of the partner countries, proving to be prime actors in multiple conflicts, for some of which they have decided the destiny. In the international scenario the dispute that stands out as permanently unresolved is the issue between Israel and Palestine, one of the longest wars in history, which has led to the shedding of blood, devastation, and death. In this context are two additional key players who have played and still play a determinate role within the war: the United States and Iran.

Iran has historically been deeply animated by a deep dissent toward Israel, considering it as a clear expression of Western imperialism; a Shiite Muslim country in contrast to Israel a Jewish country, a deep difference in beliefs between the two nations too often propounded to justify Iranian opposition to Israel. Ideologically, Iran is a revolutionary Islamic country that supports the cause of Palestine, fully convinced that the creation of Israel was an injustice, almost an affront to the Palestinian people, and that therefore Israel

should be torn down, obliterated, and permanently replaced by a Palestinian state. In fact, Israel has always been a bitter enemy of Iran, there existing between the two an intense animosity that has resulted in numerous clashes over the years. The United States, a superpower that endorses Israeli motives and supports its cause, plays a key role in helping Israel against Iran, an Islamic republic in clear antithesis to American liberal democracy. Moreover, the world climate has been characterized by high tension since after World War II, friction further fueled by The United States and its dualistic attitude toward Iran: having been the architects of Iran's nuclear program, supplying enriched uranium to Tehran, has backfired on it with boomerang effect, justifying the current animosity between the two states. Initial U.S. support has, obviously, encouraged Iran to believe in and thus invest in nuclear power, with not a few international concerns. In addition to the fears already expressed, there is the nightmare of Iran's position in support of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, with the consequent establishment of a proxy war in the region. Therefore, Iran worries Israel not only because of potential threats related to the use of weapons of mass destruction, but also because of its financial support for militias in controlled territories and its willingness to act in the rear, more as a sponsor than a direct actor. Meanwhile, Palestine is still living in extremely difficult conditions with Hamas ruling, which, firm on its points, does not seem to want to grant any glimmer of a truce. On the other hand, Israel, by taking control of the Rafah crossing that serves as a base for Hamas, endangers the lives of many civilians and sours its international alliances, especially with the United States, a strong supporter and financier of its armaments.

On one side of the spectrum there is Iran, which threatens the stability of the Middle East, with its potential arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, and on the other side there is the United States, which is now grappling with the possible consequences of past ill-considered or inadequately thought-out choices. While America's original intent was to promote Iran's nuclear program with the main purpose of exerting some degree of control over the nation, in the current state of affairs the plan has proven unsuccessful by transforming Iran from a potential subject to a direct and concrete threat. Thus, the pro-Iranian American political strategy that implied control over Iran through an apparent cooperation between the two states, with the advent of a determined Islamic Republic first, and with the individualistic Republican administration later, proved ineffective.

Relations between Iran and the United States have been souring. Although they remain clearly aligned in favor of Israel, the actions taken by the American government may have contributed to further escalation of the conflict.

So, in light of recent events could Iran be considered a bitter enemy of the United States?

Well Iran could be a real ticking time bomb in the Middle East conflict, likely triggered by the rising tensions fomented by the U.S. conduct in the region. Not only has the Trump administration inherited an already compromised image of the United States in the Middle East due to previous occupations and military interference in the regions, but it has also contributed to further aggravating the situation with a series of measures, questionable in the view of the Eastern world. The decision to withdraw from the JCPOA in 2018, an international agreement aimed at preventing nuclear proliferation in Iran, was perceived as a unilateral act with the result of undermining previous diplomatic efforts and designs; the proclamation of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the subsequent relocation of the U.S. embassy provoked strong reactions and protests throughout the Middle East, fueling anti-American sentiments; and finally, the introduction of sanctions directed against Iran for its nuclear program contributed to increasing regional unrest and undermined efforts for dialogue and cooperation. These decisions have had the effect of increasingly eroding trust in the American people and undermining stability in the region, making the situation a veritable reactor of tension ready to explode.

Biden, with his election success, tried to reclaim this long-lost cooperation; as vice president, in fact, he initially played an active role in promoting the JCPOA, pledging to convince his former Democratic colleagues to support it in Congress. During his campaign, he sharply criticized President Trump for his withdrawal from the agreement, arguing that it would undermine the only diplomatic tool to control Iran in nuclear weapons research and development. Biden also praised diplomacy, claiming its great effectiveness, instead of the use of force, as a successful weapon to counter the Iranian regime, and criticized Trump for the killing of General Soleimani, warning Americans of the risk of a spiral of violence that would ensue.

Despite differences on many issues, Biden has developed a close personal relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and has expressed his support for maintaining the two-state solution: Israel and Palestine, setting three main goals in his

government. The First among them is support for Israel then protection of Palestinian civilians and finally the containment of the conflict.

The evolution of the war in the Middle East, in the run-up to the new elections in the United States, is the subject of great interest and speculation. On one side are Biden and the Democrats with a position of great delicacy as, while supporting any Israeli response after October 7, they are beginning to urge Netanyahu's government to be cautious, on the other the Republicans stand with their candidate Trump who declares that, if he had been president, these hostilities would never have escalated, accusing Biden of leading, with his irresponsible policies, the whole world towards a potential third world war.

Wondering: will the November 5 election, with Trump in a clear lead, result in a radical change in the Middle East geopolitical order? How will the winner handle foreign policy? Will Trump adopt a more pacifist policy toward Iran or risk bringing the world to the brink of catastrophe? Will Biden condemn Israel's acts and continue to ignore pro-Gaza demonstrations, or will he take a more balanced line? The international community is deeply concerned about a possible widening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relies on the idea of America as the supreme state and defender of democracy and freedom. But then, will the new U.S. president be able to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East and avoid a war escalation? So many questions, no answers. And indeed, these critically important questions for international peace and stability require thoughtful answers and strong, responsible leadership.

The objective of this paper is to try to provide some answers to these questions through the careful and timely analysis of the relations between the key players in the Middle East question, examining its emergence and evolution, as well as the alliances and divergences that characterize the world stage. Particular attention will be paid to Iran, whose behavior is causing considerable concern, fueling fears regarding its potential threat to the very existence of the State of Israel.

The paper will also focus on the U.S. administrations' handling of the conflict and their relations with the countries involved, through an examination of the specific weight of U.S. foreign policy. It will assess, in this regard, the possible scenarios that would open up upon a change in American political leadership in the direction of a possible appeasement of tempers that would lead to Peace pacts or, on the contrary, toward an

irrepressible bitterness that would result in the degeneration of the war itself, even to the point of becoming worldwide.

Some reflections are necessary, therefore. Each of us should seriously ask ourselves whether the issue, which has become conflict and then war, so protracted in time and humanly annihilating, is really worthy of persisting and whether America can prove to be the "savior" or lead to annihilation, devastation and death.

Chapter 1: Historical context

1.1 The genesis of terror

"A conflict ends when the two rivals, one unable to defeat the other, and tired of chasing something unachievable, seek compromise."

It would be great to associate this quote with the denouement of the historic Arab-Israeli conflict. Both states have become aware of the bloody revolutionary motion accomplished for almost a century and a half, and have finally reached a compromise, which will guarantee peace and prosperity to the entire region. These would be the words we would all wish to hear on the news, glad to learn of the awareness of how much this continuous bloodshed, has brought only desolation, resentment, and pain. This is only a remote dream, far from being realized. There are too many interests and too deep-rooted reasons for a conflict that transcends religious or ethnic issues and is grafted onto a larger pattern of hegemony over an area perpetually in turmoil. A geopolitical framework driving renewed mourning, pain, and suffering, with variable geometries, in which the direct protagonists are extroverted by external influences and constraints. But all this replaying of the issue, this repetition of conflict and constant renewal of suffering and terror, what prize does it promise? This paper aims to investigate, albeit in part, these aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The so-called Israeli-Palestinian issue has sprung from two divergent views concerning the "disputed land." On the one hand it is the land belonging to Israel, of which Jews are the rightful "owners" fomented by the famous Zionist movement, born at a time when nationalist movements were increasingly gaining ground in Europe, which pressed for their security and the consequent creation of a state that could reflect and protect them. On the other hand, deep historical and cultural roots bind the "Promised Land" to the Palestinians. A symbol of resistance and struggle against foreign occupation and oppression. A land sacred to Islam, associated with important prophets of the same religion, Jerusalem in particular is the third sacred place after Mecca and Medina, as the scene of the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous journey riding Buraq (isrā') and his ascent to Heaven (mi'rāj), with the vision of hellish

punishments and heavenly delights reserved for the damned and blessed, until the final ascent and approach to Allah.¹

Obviously, in order to get a sense of the two perpetually conflicting factions, it is well to refer to the main knots that have soured the whole issue.

First of all, it is important to clarify an essential notion; the territory discussed in contemporary history, commonly referred to as the State of Israel and the Territories with Palestinian occupation, which are the West Bank and Gaza Strip is the "Mandate Palestine." Name given as a result of the conquest of those territories by the British following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the historical context of the Great War.

During the early post-World War I period, the famous "Fertile Crescent" zone included territories, nominally ruled by the Ottomans, which in reality were already under the control of France and the British Empire, in accordance with what was secretly decided during Sykes-Picot (1916)². The Arab states, therefore, reflected a strong Western imprint, evident in their institutions, their way of thinking, with French and British features. Lebanon and Syria were brought under a French mandate, and Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq under a British one. The aim of the League of Nations, in making such a decision, was precisely to help the populations defeated during the Great War, which were considered weak and in need of a strong government that could foster their development. Britain thus obtained supremacy over the territories, including Palestine, in 1922. Significant compromise of the British victory was the famous Balfour Declaration (1917)³, according to which London pledged to foster a "Jewish hearth" in Palestine. Here Jewish immigration was strongly fomented and aided by the Zionist movement. Born in Central Europe in the same years in which the same nationalist sentiments were asserting themselves, this movement harbored by a sentiment of Jewish nationalism led it to clash several times with the indigenous peoples of the Mandate. Among them were the 1920 clash at the Nabi Musa⁴ uprising in Jerusalem, and the 1929 clash marked by violent

¹ Staff. (2022, February 27). Isra Miraj: The Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). *IslamiCity*. <https://www.islamicity.org/80085/isra-miraj-the-night-journey-of-prophet-muhammad-pbuh/>

² Mullen, M. (2019, July 29). Britain and France conclude Sykes-Picot agreement. *HISTORY*. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/britain-and-france-conclude-sykes-picot-agreement>

³ <https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/1917.11.2-Nov-Dichiarazione-Balfour-1.pdf>

⁴ In April 1920, on the annual Muslim holiday of Nabi Musa, the Arabs besieged the streets of the Jewish Quarter, while the few British policemen proved unable to control the situation.

protests. But the most dramatic bloodshed (5,000 dead, 10,000 wounded, and 5,000 imprisoned) occurred close to the breakout of World War II, between 1936 and 1939, over the course of “Arab Revolt.” which weakened the already fragile Palestinian leadership and strengthened the Zionist movement.⁵ Discontents that increased more and more especially following the British decision in 1939 to publish the famous “White Paper” which was a set of laws and regulations to initiate a strategy aimed at Palestinian independence within ten years. The document, however, placed for Jewish immigration, rejected the two-state partition resolution, and restricted the purchase of land by the Jewish population. Here the reason for the strong dissent that began to swirl within the Jewish community, which resulted in strong protest movements and violent public demonstrations. As a consequence of this tragic moment, the Peel Commission was established by the British government in 1936 to examine the causes of the diaspora between Palestine and Israel and draw up possible resolutions. After extensive investigations, the resolution consisted of the Partition Plan ⁶, -this would be the first time that people began to think of two different states- which provided the establishment of a Jewish as well as an Arab-Palestinian state, resulting in the internalization of Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas. The solution, however, was not accepted as hoped. The Zionist movement supported the idea of a State of Israel; conversely, the Palestinians rejected the plan, proclaiming the division of Palestine unacceptable. Meanwhile, the clock was ticking, and the Second World War loomed over the world and annexed to it the tragedy of the Shoah. When the conflict ended with an Allied victory, the Zionist movement, fueled by a backlash of hatred and contempt, began to pressure Britain, which dominated the Palestinian territory, to such an extent that in 1947 London expressed its willingness to withdraw British troops and place the land under an international mandate. In November of that year, the General Assembly of the newly formed United Nations

https://www.storicang.it/a/gerusalemme-lorigine-di-conflitto_16250#:~:text=In April%201920%2C%20in%20the%20occasion,1929%20and%20especially%20in%201936.

⁵ Khalid, R. *The Palestinians and 1948. The Underlying Causes of Failure*

⁶ The first time in July 1937 the Peel Commission recommended division of the country into a Jewish state and an Arab state with an international zone stretching from Jerusalem to Jaffa, which should be under British mandatory rule. The commission also suggested that it was necessary to relocate people of the two nations to their respective areas. The Peel Commission Plan (1937) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.gov.il)

adopted Resolution 181⁷, based on a plan for partitioning the territories of Palestine between Jews and Palestinians. 56 percent of the territory was designated for the Jews, while the remainder was allocated to the Palestinians, with Jerusalem slated to be governed directly by the UN as neutral territory. Despite the Jewish leadership's acceptance of the UN proposal, David Ben Gurion, president of the World Zionist Organization and later Israeli prime minister, declared the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948.⁸ The popular belief in Palestinian society was that this territory, which had been mainly inhabited by Arab populations a century prior, should not host the Israeli State. In the following days after Israel's proclamation of its independence in 1948, a coalition of Arab countries that sympathized the Palestinian cause-Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan (now Jordan) and Syria-attacked the State of Israel from every direction. Both the military and political elites in these countries had underestimated the new state's military strength as well as its potential response, thinking it would be relatively easy to overcome. The Israeli force, then composed mostly of nationalist volunteer militias, little more than a national guard, demonstrated that it was more prepared than expected. Repulsed by Arab offensives, Israeli forces counterattacked and conquered large portions of territory originally allocated to the Palestinians by the UN. Thus, as Israel increasingly consolidated its influence and territorial extent, reaching 78 percent of former Mandate Palestine, the Palestinian world was experiencing the "Nakba."⁹ This was the word to designate what in the eyes of the Arab peoples was taking place, namely, catastrophe, disaster. According to scholar Israel Shahak, about 400 population centers were *"completely destroyed, and so thoroughly that of the houses, gardens, cemeteries, not a single stone is left and visitors passing by are told that "before there was desert."* (cf. Davis, Uri, Mezvinsky, Norton Document from Israel, 1967-1973. Readings for a critique of Zionism, Ithaca Press, London 1975, p. 44). Thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes, their families, to seek refuge in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. This event saw the entire Arab world directly arrayed against the State of Israel. 1956 was a

⁷<https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/038/88/pdf/nr003888.pdf?token=zbjalzoy854qRgzIrL&fe=true>

⁸ *Written statement of the State of Palestine* | INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE. <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203563>

⁹ The Nakba, which means "catastrophe" in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. <https://www.un.org/unispal/about-the-nakba/>

crucial year for the economy and history of the area¹⁰. London and Paris joined forces for a military operation to occupy the Suez Canal. The intent was to overthrow the Egyptian leader Nasser, or at least block the idea of nationalizing this key junction – the Americans call the straits “choke points,” “bottlenecks” – for world trade whose interests France and Great Britain were championing. Israel decided to stand alongside the two European powers. The coalition was pushed back by the Egyptian army and the Suez Canal remained firmly in Egyptian hands. This contributed to further souring relations between Israel and Egypt. The tension rose to culminate in what is now known as the “Six Day War” (1967)¹¹. Israel had made the most of the experience of the previous twenty years of conflict. It had radically transformed its economy, implementing cutting-edge military doctrines and technologies. All the way to the synthetization of the nuclear weapon. As stated in the report of international inspectors, “*in 1967 Israel probably already had two nuclear bombs, which it secretly deployed in the Six-Day War*” (Dinucci, Manlio, Nuclear Power. History of a folly from Hiroshima to 2015. Fazi, Rome 2003. Pg 56). Israel, as a result of its success in this real blitzkrieg, conquered much of the enemy territory including the Sinai, the Golan, the entire West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Thus, on the one hand, Israel increasingly asserted its power by realizing the ideal of a Jewish state and bringing Jerusalem under its control as well. On the other hand, the Arab front with Nasser was experiencing painful moments. The Palestinian front, meanwhile, was increasingly strengthening the already existing military resistance movement, which would decide to resort to independent guerrilla warfare under the leadership of Arafat and the Al Fatah group within the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization), which was created in order to fight Israeli resistance. A few years later, with the new Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, the idea of an attack against the Israelis began to become sharper in order to redeem

¹⁰ On October 29, 1956, the Israeli army, secretly in agreement with the governments of France and the United Kingdom, crossed the Egyptian border and began its invasion of the Sinai Peninsula. The objective of the military operation was to seize the Suez Canal, which a few months earlier had been nationalized by Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser, who expropriated it from its French and British shareholders. La crisi di Suez, 60 anni fa. (2016, October 29). *Il Post*. <https://www.ilpost.it/2016/10/29/crisi-di-suez-sinai/>

¹¹ For six days, beginning June 5, 1967, Palestinian guerrilla attacks on Israel from bases in Syria and Israel battled Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. As a result of the fighting, Israel won control of the Sinai desert, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. Author, N. (2024, April 14). A Six-Day War: its aftermath in American public opinion. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2007/05/30/a-six-day-war-its-aftermath-in-american-public-opinion/>

the territories lost during those agonizing six days. Thus, it was that during the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, the Arab-Palestinian raid was unleashed¹². After a period of Arab supremacy, the Jewish army once again managed to turn the tide and prevailed. The two world superpowers, Russia, and the United States, which had been dividing the world into areas of influence since '47, imposed a cease-fire, but the situation did not change. Following the outbreak of the 1973 oil war, a mainly political and diplomatic change was seen with the Arab desire to punish the West for supporting its arch enemy. Concurrently, however, Sadat found it more advantageous to reach an agreement with Israel. This new will led to the 1978 Camp David Accords, signed by President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in September 1978, which established a framework for a historic peace treaty concluded between Israel and Egypt in March 1979.¹³ This important milestone, while separating the United Arab Front, granted the PLO observer status at the United Nations and thus sole representative of Palestine.

1.2 From the first intifada to the new millennium

The late 1980s marked the end of the communist bloc represented by the USSR. In conjunction with the reform attempts of the last president of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev, Israel welcomed thousands of immigrants from the Soviet bloc. Despite G. Bush Sr.'s bitter criticism, Israel during those years allocated thousands of refugees to the areas of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A feeling of deep aversion soon developed between the newcomers and the Arabs, fueled by mutual fear and destined to give rise to unpleasant episodes. Until December 1987 when a settler truck ran over and killed four Palestinian workers. That tragic event gave rise to the Intifada (literally "awakening") the Palestinian uprising against the abuses of the Jewish state led by future

¹² Yom Kippur War, fourth of the Arab-Israeli wars, which was initiated by Egypt and Syria on October 6, 1973, on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. (2024, May 31). Yom Kippur War | *Summary, Causes, Combatants, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Yom-Kippur-War>

¹³ *BBC News* | *KEY DOCUMENTS* | The Camp David Accords of 1979. (n.d.). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1632849.stm

PLO high representative Barghouti. The mobilization of the people residing in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Jerusalem, surprisingly swift and compact, was suppressed with extreme harshness by Israeli forces, revealing in the eyes of the world the disproportion in the balance of power between occupiers and resisters. It was called the war of the stones, which featured young Palestinians fueled by a fire of anger and desire for redemption.

The scenario changed about a year later, when the PLO and Arafat decided to proclaim the State of Palestine, initially in Algiers and seemed willing to end the armed struggle, ready to negotiate a solution. On the other hand, however, Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, which grew out of the Islamist roots of the Muslim Brotherhood, was increasingly making inroads, especially among the lower classes, inculcating a commitment to the liberation of Palestine. Citizens were confident believing that Hamas could change their situation. It happens, of course, that in the darkest hour everyone clings as much as they can to the hope of happiness and peace. However, it should not be forgotten that in a small part of Jordan, the PLO, Hamas' archenemy on both a practical and ideological level, was trying to create space to interrelate with Israel, especially after the unsuccessful conference in Madrid¹⁴. Out of these dialogues came the resolution to the first intifada represented by the Oslo Accords in 1993. The agreement, signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, provided for mutual recognition between the parties and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (PNA). In 1995 the so-called "interim agreement" also known as Oslo II was signed, which redefined the disputed territory into three main areas: area A comprising 18 percent of the West Bank under Palestinian control, area B the 21 percent Israeli presence, and area C the remaining 60 percent under Tel Aviv control. The occupation did not end, even so, the hope was yes that some territories could return to Palestinian hands. But everything was finally broken with the second Intifada in 2000. The latter was fueled by earlier events, primarily the Hebron massacre at the hands of an

¹⁴ The Madrid Conference of 1991 was a peace conference, held from 30 October to 1 November 1991 in Madrid, hosted by Spain and co-sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union. It was an attempt by the international community to revive the Israeli–Palestinian peace process through negotiations, involving Israel and the Palestinians as well as Arab countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

Milestones in the history of U.S. Foreign Relations - *Office of the Historian*. (n.d.). <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/madrid-conference>

Israeli settler. The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by an Israeli extremist certainly contributed, bitter and harsh riots following the announcement of the construction of the Hashmonaim tunnel in Jerusalem. In addition, the demographics of the settlers had grown larger and larger, and Hamas had terrorist attacks against Israelis as a fixed thought. It was out of these events that the second uprising was born, which would lead to the construction of the “separation wall”¹⁵ in 2002. This was followed by the dismantling of Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip (2005), and the ceding of control of the Rafah crossing to Egypt. Finally, Israel equipped itself with the Iron Dome missile system – Iron Dome (2011)¹⁶ through which it definitively expressed its will to be militarily ready and independent. Add to this the inexorable fall from grace of ANP, and the rise of Hamas.

From a diplomatic perspective, in 2002 and again in 2007 the Arab world proposed a possible resolution of the conflict, promising a final peace with its enemy in exchange for the Palestinian state falling within the borders established in 1967. In 2003, the U.S. outside intervention proposed a further mediation project involving other powers, including Russia, the UN and the European Union to end the second intifada and initiate a peaceful dialogue. Unfortunately, this mediation fell on deaf ears. Several attempts at settlement were made, but all soon failed. Thereafter, indeed, relations between Israel and Palestine, through its various representations, soured more and more and the conflict flared up again in 2012, 2014 and 2021 following the rise of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the composition of different governing majorities. The globalized world moved around the crisis area, not always calming the fire. Indeed, several choices and directions seem to have been triggers for as many firebombs. It is from the beginning of the Trump administration the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital (2017) called by the president a “necessary choice for peace,” resulting in the relocation of the U.S. embassy; from 2020 the peace proposal made by Trump himself that promised a project of

¹⁵ The Israeli government approved the construction of a wall to isolate the West Bank from the Israeli territory along the Jordanian Israeli Armistice Line of 1949. Israel claimed that the main goal of the “security fence” was to protect Israelis from attacks by Palestinian militants. *The separation wall*. (n.d.). Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question – Palquest. <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/36693/separation-wall>

¹⁶ Israel's first line of missile defense system against rockets. / Chúláin, A. N. (2024, April 15). The Iron Dome: How does Israel’s missile defence system work? *Euronews*. <https://www.euronews.com/next/2024/04/15/the-iron-dome-how-does-israels-missile-defence-system-workk>

economic development and normalization of relations on the regional level,¹⁷ not caring about Palestinian wishes. Inexplicably, the proposal was accepted to the extent that it led to the conciliation of the so-called Abraham Agreements, bilateral pacts between Israel and several major players in the region: the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United States in 2020. The ultimate goal was the guarantee of cooperation, intensification of diplomatic relations between the states and the wish for lasting peace. But Israel also seems to have changed to some extent at least, its nature. Having exhausted the drive to create and consolidate the “home for God’s people,” it finds itself completely parted internally among social groups with divergent worldviews. This division within the Israeli camp led to severe instability until a heterogeneous, unstable governing coalition headed by Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power. Be in the same boat. Palestinians have experienced a vexatious political regime with Hamas at the forefront, with control over the Gaza Strip, in perpetual clash with the Al Fatah faction. Because of this there have been times of intense violence, so much so that 2022 recorded the highest number of victims since the conflict reignited. At a time when the world’s and the media’s attentions are focused on the conflict in Ukraine, the October 7, 2023, reports of an unprecedented massacre by Hamas against Israel. An offensive termed Israel’s “9/11.” Hamas dropped an indescribable series of rockets against Israeli cities. It tried to reach Zikim beach with boats, but the militias were counterattacked by the Israeli army. The most “effective” moment of the attack, however, which distinguishes this operation from all previous ones, was the overland action, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,400 Israeli civilians and military personnel, a staggering number, and in which 220 Israelis and foreigners were taken hostage and then brought to the Gaza Strip. This is unprecedented as well.¹⁸ An operation that prompted the Israeli government to declare a state of war. A tumultuous event triggered a series of adverse reactions from the Israeli government, which appears to have culminated in the devastating explosion at al Ahli hospital in Gaza City, although Israel has not claimed the attack. An offensive that left at

¹⁷ Elgindy K. Trump’s dangerous vision for Palestine, in “*Journal of Palestine Studies*” 2019. Amos Yadlin, *The Trump plan: What’s next?* In “*INSS insight*” 2020.

¹⁸Le cose da sapere sull’attacco di Hamas e sulla risposta di Israele. (2023, October 17). *Il Post*. <https://www.ilpost.it/2023/10/17/attacco-hamas-israele-guida/>

least 471 people dead.¹⁹ Initially aimed at military targets, the conflict has often struck civilian areas, fueling increased apprehension among the Palestinian people. The Palestinians fear a recurrence of the Nakba tragedy as a humanitarian crisis of devastating proportions deepens. Clearly, these attacks reveal how all UN resolutions, ideas proposed by third countries and possible solutions cannot end a conflict that has now covered more than half of the last century and the first two decades of the present. On the other hand, it is important to note how no one is advancing a peace solution, but rather seems to be more focused on developing systems and dynamics of force, deterrence.

1.3 The Party of God and Iran: two key actors on an anti-Israel front

The Party of God is a complex political thought movement that, beginning in the second half of the last century, went through several phases until it came to power. Iran could be the key to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, acting as a negotiating lever mainly Hamas and Israel. The Lebanese group Hezbollah is part of the "neo-traditionalist Islamist movements," or a group formed by anyone who wants to create an entirely Islamic society. This definition could also attach to the Palestinian group Hamas, also like Hezbollah linked to the Iranian regime and whose goals include Islamizing the Palestinian cause. "Palestinizing" the globalized jihād.²⁰

The Party of God emerged as a direct response to another territorial occupation, this time involving the Palestinians, during the tumultuous historical period of 1982. Lebanon had become, after the "Black September"²¹ of 1970 and after the Camp David Accords, the location in which major Palestinian military forces were concentrated. The authority of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) in fact ended up colliding with that of the

¹⁹ Abdulrahim, R., Yazbek, H., & Al-Hlou, Y. (2023). A sudden blast, then carnage in a hospital courtyard. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/18/world/middleeast/gaza-hospital-deaths-aftermath.html>

²⁰ De Giovannangeli, U. (22/07/2015). ḤAMĀS ALLA CONQUISTA DEI TERRITORI. *Limes*. <https://www.limesonline.com/rivista/hamas-alla-conquista-dei-territori-14608847/>

²¹ The name Black September was chosen to commemorate that violent Hashemite-Palestinian clash, during which thousands of Palestinians were either killed or expelled and the PLO was driven out of Jordan. Reuveny, R. (2014, March 10). *Black September | Organization, Attacks, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-September-political-organization-Palestine>

government in Beirut, which was increasingly soured by religious and ethnic rivalries and the seriousness of the law and order situation. By June 1982, the Israeli government had determined to surgically end this anomaly that made continuous attacks against its own territory possible.

On June 3, 1982, Israeli military pressure led to a Palestinian-backed terrorist attack in London, in which Shlomo Argov, Israeli ambassador to Britain, was seriously injured. Argov was perceived by Palestinians as a key player in the Israeli government and therefore responsible for harmful Israeli policies toward the Palestinian population. This was a hostile act on Israeli soil of the utmost importance. Tel Aviv's reaction was military intervention against the PLO in Lebanon on June 4, 1982. Israel had decided on a massive intervention in southern Lebanon up to the city of Beirut, engaging in a struggle that quickly took on the features of unprecedented crudity. The mission was called "Operation Peace for Galilee" and involved the invasion of Lebanon justified as aimed at destroying the PLO. In support of the Palestinians and the Lebanese factions most closely linked to them, Syrian army forces intervened in July 1982. The specter of a general widening of the conflict loomed. To avoid this danger and seek a peaceful solution, American diplomacy devised a compromise solution. The Israelis would lift the siege and be replaced by American, French and Italian units. The PLO forced to surrender and would retreat to Tunisia and Jordan. The Israelis rejected the plan by enlisting the cooperation of the so-called "Christian phalanx," the armed wing of Lebanon's Christian-Maronite component. It was the latter who invaded the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila, killing hundreds of men, women and children, prompting condemnation from world opinion. The Palestinian camps where the PLO members who had not been evacuated in June were hiding became dismantled by the Israeli army a few months later in such a brutal manner that Defense Minister Ariel Sharon as well as the one who had ordered the destruction of the remaining PLO forces decided to resign. The ferocity with which the Palestinian camps had been devastated caused a general discontent that led to demonstrations and massacres in the public square. From Israel's point of view, the action proved entirely counterproductive, as it effectively welded an alliance between Syrians and Lebanese ethnic-religious groups of various denominations, paving the way for a Syrian military intervention in Lebanon in the name of true peace. In a scenario of destruction, in fact, the only hope for the Palestinians was a Lebanese Shiite military

group. Iranian-funded and Iranian-controlled Hezbollah, with the help of Syria, born out of a desire to aggregate a variety of Lebanese Shiite militant groups into a unified organization that could offer particular support to the Palestinian community. Israel quickly faced this new Shiite Muslim movement on its northern border. Hezbollah's stated aims were: the end of all imperialist power in Lebanon, to bring the Christian-Falangists to a fair trial for the crimes of '82, and to give the people the opportunity to choose a freely elected system of government. In this perspective, the destruction of the State of Israel and the liberation of Palestine were pragmatic strategic steps. Pursuing indeed the first mentioned objective, throughout the 1980s Hezbollah perpetrated several attacks against Israel while continuing undaunted to play a primary role in the civil war that shook Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. This war resulted in years of devastation and also involved foreign forces in the country, first and foremost Syria in 1976, which provided troops in northern Lebanon to counter opponents. The conflict, after several attempts at resolution including by the United Nations, ended with the Taif Accords (1989)²². In 1990 the last Syrian troops left Beirut, marking the end of the Syrian military occupation, although the final withdrawal of the Syrian army would not occur until 2005. In this same year Michel Aoun general and last leader opposing the Taif Accord, surrendered to Syrian forces, ending a final stage of fighting. During the war period, however, a series of Hezbollah attacks against U.S. interests over the course of 18 months shaped the group's relations with the U.S. for years to come. The North Americans are considered by the Party of God sympathizers with Israel, causeless intruders in the conflict in Lebanon, having previously provided troops to keep the peace. The most significant episode occurred on April 18, 1983, when the U.S. Embassy was the target of a bombing, resulting in the deaths of 63 people, including 17 U.S. citizens. The driver of a van loaded with explosives penetrated the U.S. Embassy compound, slowed down to negotiate a sharp curve along a cobblestone road; then, accelerated and crashed into the front wall of the building. The explosion enveloped the complex, imprisoning the bodies of Lebanese security guards and torn American government employees. Among the victims were prominent U.S. intelligence officials. On October 23, 1983, near-simultaneous attacks occurred against U.S. marines

²² The Taif Agreement is negotiated in Saudi Arabia and formally ends the civil war. The agreement redefines the political balance in the country, distributing power among the different religious communities. https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_taif_agreement_english_version_.pdf

and French army barracks, both under the auspices of the Multinational Force in Beirut, sent as peacekeepers to oversee the evacuation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the city. These attacks caused the deaths of 241 Americans and 58 Frenchmen. Less than a year later, on September 20, 1984, the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon suffered a bombing that killed 24 people. The U.S. government had no doubt as to who was responsible for the 1984 attack, even before forensic analysis and reports from classified sources arrived. Even days after the second embassy attack, the CIA observed that "overwhelming circumstantial evidence indicated that Hezbollah operated with Iranian support under the cover name of Islamic Jihad." This anti-American resentment is one aspect that cements the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah. The two actors redefined their interests after the death of Iran's supreme revolutionary leader Khomeini in 1989, leading Iran to support Hezbollah from anti-Israeli, anti-American and anti-Saudi perspectives. What they have in common is certainly resistance to Western interference. Iran sees Hezbollah as a strategic ally in the region, a kind of fifth column that can help it expand its influence in the area, particularly against Israel and Western interests. In addition, both see Israel as a common enemy and are committed to fighting against the Israeli presence in the region. Iran's support for Hezbollah is thus to be understood as a way of countering Israel's assertion as a major player in the Middle East area rather than supporting resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This is why Hezbollah has received constant political, social and financial support from Iran over the years since its official establishment (1985). This was the time when the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence encouraged the Hezbollah group's adherents to lead a propaganda strategy in the name of Islamic Jihad, which was considered the real link between these actors. Originally, Iranian support for Hezbollah, as analyzed previously, had as its main objective the destruction and destabilization of the common ideological, cultural, and military rival. This alliance between the two partners earned, according to some estimates, the Party of God nearly one hundred million dollars. In addition, the victory against Israel during the Second Lebanon War ensured a strong prestige for the organization, gaining the title of the first actor capable of facing its historical enemy. The year 2006 itself represents a pivot point in the development of relations between

Hezbollah and Iran.²³ While previously the common denominator was the fight against Israel, the 2006 victory demonstrated the potential of the organization and the efficiency of its military structure. And it is from here that Hezbollah has improved its position: coordination with the IRGC and the Quds Forces has propelled the group into different Middle Eastern and international contexts. Hezbollah is undoubtedly the most valuable ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic has contributed significantly to the arming and training of the Lebanese group's militias since its creation, which was facilitated by Tehran itself. The Iranian intent was to make use of the Lebanese militia in the Middle Eastern context, using it as a tool to influence the region.

Hezbollah has been active against Israel from its creation to the present, participating in conflicts in Iraq, in Syria in support of President Bashar al-Assad during the Syrian civil war, and in Yemen in military support of the Houthis²⁴. These actions have made Hezbollah an increasingly important player in Iran's strategic projection in the Middle East.

However, over time, relations between Hezbollah and Iran have evolved, and the Lebanese party, which was initially a regional actor under Iran's dependencies, has made its capabilities more sophisticated and autonomous. Hezbollah has taken on the status of an ally capable of relating almost equally with Tehran's top leadership, an actor capable of sitting at the Islamic Republic's decision-making table. Moreover, Hezbollah and Iran also share the same ideological matrix heavily influenced by Khomeinist rhetoric, which binds them closely in a wide range of goals and strategies. This alliance has been essential for Iran in its attempt to extend its influence in the Middle East by countering the influence of the United States and its regional allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.

²³ Lebanon War of 2006, essentially a war between Israel and Hezbollah that began on July 12, 2006, and ended on August 14. Its immediate cause was a cross-border attack by Hezbollah fighters that culminated in the kidnapping of a pair of Israeli soldiers and the killing of eight others. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2024a, April 12). *2006 Lebanon War | Summary, Casualties, & Israel*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/2006-Lebanon-War>

²⁴ The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah (supporters of God), are an armed group that control most parts of Yemen, including the capital, Sanaa, and some of the western and northern areas close to Saudi Arabia. The Houthis are an Iran-aligned group. Who are the Houthis? A simple guide to the Yemeni group. (2024, January 12). *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/12/who-are-yemens-houthis-a-basic-guide>

To this day, Iran remains the group's main funder, although it cannot boast complete loyalty. Over the past decade, one of the major transformations in Hezbollah's trajectory has been the rise in the party's importance as the main focus of Iranian influence in the region. This became particularly evident after the explosion of the so-called "Arab Springs," processes regime changers had in Syria, the Middle East, and North Africa since 2011. Lebanese loyalty to the cause of Middle Eastern independence is thus unquestionable. Hezbollah projects itself as a highly respected actor not only in the territories of Lebanon as the main opponent of Israel, but also a fervent supporter of the Iranian line in the civil war in Syria. Conflict that has as background deep hostilities between Israel and Syria. Two countries at war since the founding of the State of Israel and the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. Hostilities that intensified with the very beginning of the civil war, when Syrian dictator Bashar al Assad, challenged by the armed uprisings against him, asked for help from Iran and Hezbollah, which sent soldiers and means that proved decisive in defeating the rebels. It is in this context that the Lebanese organization has shown its full support for the Al-Assad government, belonging to Shiite Islam, fighting the same Arabs but of Sunni faith. The Syrian civil war has shown how the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran is "a partnership arrangement, with the Iranians as senior partners."²⁵ In response to this support and strong allegiance shown, Syria is considered a loyal ally of Iran on which it is economically and militarily dependent and guarantees Iran and Hezbollah military permanence in the country. It is no mere coincidence that Syria is part of the "resistance front."²⁶ Core of the issue is also the geopolitical aspect because Syrian territory represents a major connection point between Iran, Iraq (an additional ally) and Lebanon, Hezbollah's epicenter. In addition, the Golan Heights constitute a natural border with Israel and therefore Syria could use them as bases for attacks in Israeli territories. In fact, Israel has been frequently bombing Iranian targets in Syria for years now with the intent of disrupting an arms trade between Iran and Lebanon and destroying their respective leaders.

²⁵ Volpini, E. (12(01/2024). Hezbollah – Iran: un legame storico su molti fronti. *Istituto Analisi Relazioni Internazionali*. <https://iari.site/2024/01/13/hezbollah-iran-un-legame-storico-su-molti-fronti/>

²⁶The term "axis of resistance" describes an informal and flexible alliance consisting of Sunni and Shia Muslim factions, as well as governments in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, and Iraq. These entities have varying degrees of proximity to each other and to Tehran, with differences shaping their relationships within the coalition. <https://www.wcbe.org/npr-news/2023-10-26/what-is-the-axis-of-resistance-of-iran-backed-groups-in-the-middle-east>

While, therefore, the Palestinians find allies in the area-though moved by sometimes divergent interests-the will to annihilate the Jewish state remains firm. Useful to the case has certainly been to represent Israel as a colonizing, oppressor state, the bearer of Western interests and, for that reason too, deserving of eradication. Also complicit was Tel Aviv's assertive and intransigent position, closed to any sort of external dialogue in the clashes in Palestine or Lebanon.

Although born out of an Arab-Israeli conflict, with the intention of countering what is still understood as an abusive occupation of territory by Tel Aviv, over time Hezbollah has become the bearer of Iranian interests in the area. Although not entirely dependent on Tehran.

In light of what happened on Oct. 7, 2023, Hezbollah once again proved itself a fervent supporter of Hamas and the Palestinian cause, renewing its armed readiness on the Lebanese-Israeli border. A promise renewed on the time of the killing of Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri by an Israeli attack in Beirut. In fact, after his death, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader since 1992, guaranteed complete protection against any possible Israeli attack on Palestinian and Hamas figures. Hezbollah called the killing of the leader “a serious attack on Lebanon, its people, its security, sovereignty, and resistance. We affirm,” the militia said,” that this crime will never pass without response and punishment.”²⁷ In response Lebanon's Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib spoke to the BBC urging Hezbollah not to respond to the killing of al Arouri: “We urge them not to respond on their own and we will dialogue with them in this regard.”²⁸

Despite the non-constructive differences between the two actors, however, it is impossible to assume that Hezbollah will take a direct part in the conflict by leading to its enlargement, a solution moreover sought by the Israeli leadership. Hezbollah is aware that further war would be disastrous for its country and would have very high costs in terms of credibility for its party. The Party of God is an organization engaged on various

²⁷ Live updates: Israel controls Rafah crossing as truce talks continue *CGTN | Breaking News, China News, World News and Video*. <https://www.cgtn.com/special/Netanyahu-rejects-ceasefire-Israeli-troops-continue-ground-operations.html>

²⁸ De Michele, S. (2024, January 3). Hezbollah con Hamas dopo l'uccisione di Arouri: e se il conflitto si estende? *Euronews*. <https://it.euronews.com/2024/01/03/hezbollah-con-hamas-dopo-luccisione-di-arouri-e-se-il-conflitto-si-estende>

fronts, offering different forms of support to actors located in geographically distant areas. For instance, the party has provided support to the Houthis in Yemen and Shiite militias in Iraq, demonstrating a broad and diverse scope of action. The secretary general of the Party of God, Hassan Nasrallah, has confirmed the organization's leadership, ruling out a stance within the current conflict for the time being. This cautious position reflects the party's desire to maintain a prudent attitude and not expose itself directly in a war scenario. However, it is important to note that the Party of God has always been characterized by a pragmatic approach. This means that its position could change over time, adapting to circumstances and developments in the situation. This strategic flexibility is a key feature of the organization, enabling it to navigate complex geopolitical contexts. In conclusion, the Party of God is configured as a multifaceted and pragmatic entity, engaged on several fronts and capable of modulating its position as events evolve. This versatile and adaptive nature presents a challenge to those who seek to understand and predict its future moves.

Chapter 2: Iran and the nuclear power

2.1 Iran's nuclear program: a weapon of deterrence or mass destruction?

To discuss Iran's nuclear policy, it will be essential to consider the post-World War II years. The world had emerged from the conflict divided into two blocs of influence between the two major powers that emerged victorious. In 1953, as a corollary to conflicting political thrusts within the U.S., President Eisenhower had worked on the hypothesis of the revival of a dialogue for the pacific application of nuclear energy. On December eight of that same year, he had submitted to the United Nations General Assembly his plan for the resumption of negotiations broken off in the 1940s, with a view to establishing an atomic authority with the powers necessary to govern the

implementation of the project then named *Atoms for Peace*²⁹. The Americans evidently did not intend to take on, before world public opinion, the role of the principal parties in the race for supremacy in the destructive capacity of thermonuclear weapons. The project was discussed for a few months, without yielding any appreciable results. The U.S. president thus worked out a peaceful blueprint for the use of the nuclear instrument that was less unpopular and, perhaps causally, closer to actual developments in power relations. The most effective method consisted precisely in promoting the use of this technology at the civilian level and discouraging other countries from using it for military purposes, foremost among them the Soviet Union. To sum this strategy up, it was nothing more than a form of American control over all armaments primarily to influence regional security, prevent nuclear proliferation, maintain control and monitoring of nuclear programs, and promote economic interests. According to Matthew Fuhrmann, professor of political science: *"Eisenhower thought that sharing nuclear technology for peaceful purposes would reduce the incentives of countries to want to build nuclear bombs."*

³⁰Through this innovative technology it was possible to derive benefits such as developments in the medical health field or, as one could easily imagine, in the electrical field. As a matter of fact, the President himself to emphasize the further uses in the proposal at the 470th Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly declared that *"In making these fateful decisions, the United States pledges before you, and thus before the world, to help solve the dreaded atomic dilemma--to devote its whole heart and mind to finding ways in which man's miraculous inventiveness will not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life."*³¹ All this is without considering the prestige that nuclear power production guaranteed to the countries that possessed it, representing the pinnacle of scientific and technological development. Therefore, the U.S. played its technological-military supremacy by installing strategic bases throughout Europe, with special emphasis on placement on the demarcation line of spheres of influence shared with the USSR. The Mediterranean countries and those connecting the eastern

²⁹ Voices of Democracy. (2016, March 30). Eisenhower, "Atoms for Peace," Speech Text - *Voices of Democracy*. <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/eisenhower-atoms-for-peace-speech-text/>

³⁰ Little, B. (2020, January 8). How America Jump-Started Iran's nuclear Program. *HISTORY*. <https://www.history.com/news/iran-nuclear-weapons-eisenhower-atoms-for-peace>

³¹ *Atoms for Peace speech*. (n.d.). IAEA. <https://www.iaea.org/about/history/atoms-for-peace-speech>

Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean were particularly important. Regarding this geographical area, American policy was substantially different from British policy. The British tended to perceive the whole region as an area of their predominant political-military influence, whereas the United States was boosting its economic presence in the region, especially through large investments in oil. For these reasons they tended to protect such investments by maintaining friendly relations with oil-producing countries. Confirming their supremacy, they were providing assistance for dual-use nuclear production - civil and military - in countries such as Israel, India, Pakistan and Iran. In doing so, the U.S. carefully wove its network of clients, allies to be structured as trading partners and through whom to channel its foreign influence in the Middle East area. Very close was the entente between the U.S. and Iran through even the very person of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi³². The U.S. intended to play the Iranian card against the Soviet rival. With this foreign support, Pahlavi had initiated a policy of westernizing the state by entering into several contracts with British companies. Iran, however, at least formally, is a constitutional monarchy. It has a prime minister, Majilis, whose job it is to lead the government, and a parliament. The Majilis, skeptical of deals with British companies, manages to get Mohammad Mossadeq³³ elected. The main opponent of the pro-British policy, Mossadeq came to power and, with a majority in parliament, framed a bill to nationalize the oil industries. This would give Iran back control over one of the country's most important resources. There was growing confidence among Iranian citizens that nationalization would lead to improved living conditions. These were the preconditions for the "Abadan Crisis,"³⁴ named after the location where much of Iran's oil industries are based. The United Kingdom, which benefited from Iranian oil, challenged the nationalization law, taking the case to the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, accusing Iran of violating international law. The UN resolution gave a negative outcome for UK expectations. Thus, the UK began to boycott

³² Last Shah of Persia who ruled from 1941 until 1979.

³³ He led a nationalization move against Britain controlled oil industry in Iran thus serving two terms as prime minister of Iran starting from 1951 until August 1953.

Alvandi, R., & Gasiorowski, M. J. (2019, October 30). The United States overthrew Iran's last Democratic leader, Mohammad Mosaddeq. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/30/the-united-states-overthrew-irans-last-democratic-leader/>

³⁴ Crisis from 1951 to 1954 caused by the shutdown of the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's oil refinery in Abadan that upset the British and U.S. governments.

the purchase of Iranian oil, persuading allies to do so as well. It even managed to convince the U.S. to refrain from supporting the Tehran government with financial loans before the crisis was resolved. Mossadeq, in rebound, expelled British engineers from the city of Abadan in 1951 and severed all relations with the UK the following year. In reaction, the British considered military 'intervention, but the United States stood in the way, fearing Russian intervention under a 1921 Russian-Iranian agreement.³⁵ This would have opened a new front for the Americans, already engaged in the Korean War. Hence, the United States played a mediating role between Iran and the United Kingdom, pressing for an agreement to solve the oil problem. For although Iran had achieved some successes at the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, it was facing a dramatic economic and political crisis. This crisis was mainly due to the oil export blockade imposed by other countries, probably led by the United States. America feared that this situation of economic and political crisis would make Iran more vulnerable to Russian influence. This would have caused an increase in Russian influence in the area, which would have been seriously detrimental to the U.S. project.

The national framework became further complicated, becoming increasingly troubling, when Iran's Communist Tudeh Party³⁶, linked to the Soviet Union, began to infiltrate Iran's military ranks. It contributed, moreover, to stirring up the masses in support of Mossadeq. Although the Tudeh had previously even tried to assassinate Mossadeq, it became the first supporter in 1953. An informal alliance convenient to both sides was established between party and Iranian leader. Tudeh members assumed a supporting role for the government, effectively replacing the fedayeen (guerrilla supporters of Mossadeq).

The US Secretary of State, John F. Dulles had been convinced by British administration that Iran could easily fall under the influence of Soviet Union. In fact, the very border

³⁵ On February 26, 1921, in Moscow, the Soviet-Iranian Treaty was formally concluded. In accordance with its conditions, Soviet government invalidated all contracts signed between Russia and Persia in addition to ceding those loans of the Tsarist government and its concessions that were detrimental to Iranian interests. Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation. (n.d.). *Welcome to Encyclopaedia Iranica*. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-ii-iranian-soviet-relations-1917-1991>

³⁶ It was agreed to name the party the "Party of the Masses (Tudeh)"; Tudeh, however, was basically the pro-Russian, and orthodox Iranian Communist Party and still is. Ufheil-Somers, A. (2016, October 23). *The Tudeh Party in Iranian Politics - MERIP*. MERIP. <https://merip.org/1980/03/the-tudeh-party-in-iranian-politics/>

with the USSR made it strategically important for the U.S. to have an allied Iran, which was in addition to Turkey, a NATO³⁷ member and also bordering the Soviet Union. U.S. mediation with Mossadeq did not lead to remarkable results. The White House thus acceded to the U.K. plan to stage a coup to depose Mossadeq. "Anglo-American cooperation on that occasion pulled down the Iranian prime minister and reinstalled the U.S.-backed shah."³⁸ As a precondition, however, the United States imposed an end to the AIOC (British oil company in the Middle East) monopoly. The historic company, a monopolist in the country up to that point, was to be supported by Royal Dutch Shell, Compagnie Française des Pétroles and prominent American oil companies. The coordination of the Anglo-American operation was based in Cyprus, where the British Secret Service (SIS) headquarters had been relocated after the British were expelled from Iran.

The plan, in the hands of CIA Director Allen Dulles, aimed to remove and arrest Mohammad Mossadeq and return the Shah to power. The latter would then appoint General Fazlollah Zahedi as his successor. In addition, a military force had been organized to counter the Tudeh party especially its presence in protests and demonstrations. In fact, the moment on August 19, 1953, when the CIA and the British intelligence agency rallied pro-Shia forces and organized large protests against Mossadeq was the moment when the coup took full effect. The pretext for launching the operation was Mossadeq's decree to dissolve parliament, centering all powers on him. Thus, the CIA initiated Operation Ajax³⁹, under approval of the Shah. The Shah signed royal decrees, drafted by the coup plotters, declaring Mossadeq's dismissal. Fazlollah Zahedi was also appointed, as agreed. Immediately thereafter, the commander of the Imperial Guard, notified the Iranian leader

³⁷ NATO "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" is an organization established in 1949 at the end of the Second Great War with the purpose of ensuring security and freedom for member states. It currently consists of 32 member states. *What is NATO?* (n.d.). What Is NATO? https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index_it.html

³⁸ Gendzier, I. L. *Notes from the Minefield: United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945–1958*

³⁹ 1953 coup in Iran that resulted in the downfall of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq and the succession to power of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. / Q, F. (2023, October 12). La Cia ammette per la prima volta il coinvolgimento nel golpe in Iran del 1953. Ma gran parte dei documenti rimangono secretati. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2023/10/12/la-cia-ammette-per-la-prima-volta-il-coinvolgimento-nel-golpe-in-iran-del-1953-ma-gran-parte-dei-documenti-rimangono-secretati/7321145/>

of the dismissal decree. But Mossadeq, who was prepared and aware of the coup having a wide network of informants, refused to sign the decree. Later, during the legal proceedings Mossadeq faced after the coup, he argued that according to Iran's monarchical constitution, the Shah did not have the right to remove the prime minister without the consent of parliament. However, at that time, the constitution allowed such a prerogative. The Communist Party of Iran fomented violent protests and demonstrations, and the Shah fearing a backlash fled for a time first to Iraq and then to Italy. The degenerated internal political climate, arrested coup plotters, and General Zahedi's absconding were the ingredients for the failure of the first coup attempt. Mossadeq was satisfied and convinced that the danger had been averted. But Zahedi was not dead, on the contrary, he decided to meet secretly with Ayatollah Mohammad Behbahani and other supporters of the Shah to warp a new strategy, financed by the CIA with the famous "Behbahani dollars."⁴⁰ The Iranians feared a possible communist revolution. The new coup plotters took advantage of this climate to generate a new wave of protests against Mossadeq and implement the strategy devised just before. On August 19th, secret service agents wearing Tudeh masks incited a pretend "communist revolution," thereby bringing about real Tudeh members who came along with them. In no time at all, Tudeh members began attacking symbols of capitalism before looting and burning shops, destroying stores and private businesses, including Tehran's commercial district. Taking advantage from the circumstances, other infiltrators, posing as fervent supporters of the Shah organized demonstrations against the Tudeh in turn. The moment was one of enormous complexity. Mossadeq sought to consolidate a power that was about to elude him through a plebiscite with a totalitarian result. The Shah responded forcefully, imposing the appointment of a military government. After a few days of confusion, the military hierarchies, led by General Fazlollah Zahedi, backed by American intelligence, prevailed over Mossadeq's supporters. On August 19, 1953, Zahedi formed a new government. A few days later the Shah returned from exile, triumphantly welcomed by his subjects. With him was CIA director Allen Dulles. Zahedi was officially appointed prime minister, replacing Mossadeq, who was imprisoned, tried, and sentenced to death. The Shah seized power a few days later with an unparalleled crackdown on the National Front. The spoils for

⁴⁰ Secret funds provided by the CIA to Iran under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign.

Britain and the United States were a renegotiation of concessions to their oil companies: 40 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

The footprints of the Mossadeq period, however, remained and influenced other oil producers. Thus, the problem of reconciling resource ownership, exploitation capacity and commercialization of resources became acute. The resolution of this crisis sealed U.S. supremacy over that area, also leading to the slow but inexorable decline of British and French influence over the old colonies. The U.S. aimed in this way to offer technological assistance on nuclear power to Iran primarily to counter the Soviet Union's influence in the area and to further control the area. In addition, boosting nuclear energy in the region would have reduced Iran's dependence on fossil fuels by freeing up the valuable resource for extraction and trade. For these reasons, on March 5, 1957, four years after the coup, Washington and Tehran signed an agreement for cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy⁴¹. The treaty required the provision of technology for the construction of a reactor for energy and medical research purposes. It also provided for the sharing of information on the safety of personnel and facilities, as well as the sale of a specific amount of Uranium U-235 (6 kg, enriched to 20 percent). All this was sufficient for the start-up and initial recharging of Iran's first nuclear reactor. Explicitly ruled out the use of the material and technologies for military or atomic deterrence purposes or for research and development of related technologies. All in compliance with the guidelines set forth by the Geneva Convention⁴² held a few years earlier that encouraged the prosperity of this new technology for peaceful purposes. Among the most important decisions of the conference was the inception of the International Atomic Energy Agency IAEA⁴³, in which 169 countries now participate, for the purpose of fostering peaceful applications

⁴¹The U.S. signed an Atoms for Peace Agreement with Iran which included provision for peaceful cooperation on the civil uses of atomic energy. Under this agreement America would provide technical assistance to Iran and lease enriched uranium. It also called upon them to ensure that they cooperate in research work relating to peaceful uses of atomic energy. Timeline of Iran's nuclear activities. (2021, August 20). *The Iran Primer*. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/timeline-irans-nuclear-activities>

⁴² At the suggestion of Eisenhower himself, the name was later given to the first conference held in Geneva from August 8 to 20, 1955, at which the development of technologies for the exploitation of nuclear energy, and in particular nuclear fusion, was conventionally initiated.

⁴³ The IAEA is the world's center for cooperation in the nuclear field and seeks to promote the safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear technologies. <https://www.iaea.org/>

and preventing military use of nuclear power. The clauses of the Iran agreement included the obligation to join the IAEA, which took place in 1958.

The origins of Iran's nuclear program can be traced back to the agreement reached between Iran and the United States in 1957. This accord provided incentives to Iran, including a small nuclear reactor and uranium, actually making Iran's nuclear program a reality.

A decade later, in 1967, Iran's first 5 MW nuclear reactor went into operation at the Tehran Campus within the Nuclear Research Center. This facility, strategically built underground to prevent possible attacks from outside, marked an important starting point for Iran's nuclear program. The reactor is still operational today and played a significant role in the development of the program. In the 1970s, the Shah of Iran launched a campaign to further expand the country's nuclear program. The goal was to reach a nuclear power generation capacity of 23,000 MW within 20 years, which was achieved in 1974. In 1968, the year following the activation of the first nuclear reactor in Iran, a pivotal international moment occurred with the establishment of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

⁴⁴ This international agreement aimed to promote disarmament, nonproliferation, and peaceful use of nuclear energy, significantly influencing the development of Iran's nuclear program. In this context, Tehran began to seek support not only from the United States but also from Europe, making agreements with companies such as Germany's Kraftwerk Union and France's Framatome to build nuclear reactors at Bushehr. At the same time, Iran invested in a uranium enrichment plant operated by Eurodif, a European consortium, and launched initiatives to cover the entire uranium cycle, including mining in Saghand and Gchine, as well as the construction of a second research center in Isfahan.⁴⁵ However, U.S. attitudes toward Iran's nuclear program changed as fears emerged about the possible

⁴⁴ The NPT is an extremely important global pact whose principal aim is the prevention of nuclear weapons spread, the attainment of peaceful cooperation for the utilization of nuclear energy and the realization of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament as well. The Treaty stands out as the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States. The Treaty was opened for signature in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. On May 11, 1995, it was extended indefinitely. In total, 191 States have acceded to it including all five permanent members. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – UNODA. (n.d). <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt/#:~:text=The%20NPT%20is%20a%20landmark,and%20general%20and%20complete%20disarmament.>

⁴⁵ A history of Iran's nuclear program. *Iran Watch*. <https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/weapon-program-background-report/history-irans-nuclear-program#Iran's%20Nuclear%20Infrastructure>

use of nuclear technology for war purposes. This led the United States to engage in negotiations with the Shah to impose restrictions on Iran's nuclear program, proposals that were rejected by Iran in defense of its sovereign right to develop atomic energy like any other independent state.

This is the international context in which Iran's nuclear program developed, highlighting the complex political and diplomatic dynamics that characterized relations between Iran, the United States and Europe during that crucial period in world nuclear history. Thus, it is evident how in the international landscape Iranian nuclear power first emerged as a source of incentive for certain sectors of society and as a form of control by third-party states, and how it has instead developed into generating possible fear and thus becoming a possible weapon of deterrence.

2.2 The Ayatollah Khomeini and Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: prevention of nuclear proliferation

In the context of Iran's political history, the role of Ruhollah Mostafavī Mōsavī Khomeynī emerges as pivotal in the country's transformation during the 1979 Revolution⁴⁶. Contrary to widespread belief, Khomeini was not a politician but a religious leader who has been crucial role in opposing the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Over the years, Khomeini actively resisted the Shah's regime, criticizing its un-Islamic nature and promoting an alternative based on the principles of Islam. This opposition led him into exile in several nations, including Turkey, Iraq and finally Paris, where he continued to spread his vision and gain supporters. Despite not being proclaimed Marja' ⁴⁷in 1963, Khomeini began to gain prominence as a prominent figure within Iran's Shiite community. His interpretation of Islam and his critique of the Shah's regime made him a point of reference for many of the faithful, who saw him as a spiritual and political leader.

⁴⁶ The February 1979 revolution was a societal uprising born out of a general discontent against the state, in which all were united in the overriding goal of overthrowing the shah and overthrowing the system that embodied the idea of a dictatorship that lacked political legitimacy. The Iranian Revolution of February 1979. (n.d.). *Middle East Institute*. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iranian-revolution-february-1979>

⁴⁷ To gain the title of Marja' means to be recognized by the Shia community with high-level religious significance. The Marja' is a point of reference for the community.

The climax of his influence came with the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which brought down the Shah's government and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini became the country's supreme leader, consolidating his power and profoundly influencing the course of Iranian history. Ruhollah Khomeini's contribution to the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran represents a pivotal moment in the country's political and religious history, highlighting the power and influence of a leader who radically changed the nation's destiny. In Iran, however, the feeling of hatred and revolt against the Shah was growing more and more, and meanwhile Khomeini from his exile was trying to foment uprising groups to overthrow the government, culminating on January 7, 1978, when an uprising against Mohammad Reza Pahlavi exploded. This was not a sporadic episode, but a climate of so much dissent that the leader was forced to flee a year later. As the Shah fled, the Ayatollah arrived at Tehran airport greeted by hundreds of thousands of people, fervent supporters of the revolution. Although he was not the most doctrinally renowned, Khomeini was admired for his charisma. His growing popularity was due to the clandestine dissemination of propaganda audiotapes from France, which had helped create a large following of supporters. Once the last Shah was dismissed, the Ayatollah had the ability to control the entire region. He had numerous endorsements, and his power grew ever greater. In fact, in a very short time Khomeini became the leader of the 1979 Iranian revolution, proclaimed Supreme Guide of Iran, eliminating all opponents. He gave birth to a government called "velayat-e-faqih" or "government of the jurist," under which the learned Islamic jurist had full control in leading the Muslim community.⁴⁸ His leadership culminated in the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran, marked by strong Islamic fundamentalism and a theocratic idea as a form of government. All the alliances that the country had forged under Pahlavi rule, primarily the United States, were also undermined, favoring relations with Islamic countries.

Indeed, 1979 marked the end of relations with America but the nuclear technology that had already existed under the Shah remained. Initially the Ayatollah condemns nuclear power, calling the nuclear program immoral, and thus decides to suspend it, ending Reza Pahlavi's dream. Further exacerbating tensions a few years later was the outbreak of one

⁴⁸La rivoluzione che cambiò l'Iran. (2019, February 11). *Il Post*. <https://www.ilpost.it/2019/02/11/rivoluzione-iran-1979-khomeini/>

of the most devastating conflicts in the Middle East, the Iran-Iraq war. Reasons for the conflict were several, chief among them strong tensions between the two countries over the division of territory in Khuzestan, an oil-rich border region. Both countries were led by autocratic leadership, marked by Islamic radicalism. Different was the theological outlook. Shiite Iran, Sunni Iraq led by Saddam Hussein's albeit secular party. With these assumptions, on September 22, 1980, without warning, Iraq invaded Iran with the aim of consolidating its political position both domestically and internationally.⁴⁹ This event began one of the bloodiest wars of the 20th century. In 1988, after nearly eight years of conflict, the U.S. under George W. Bush occupied Iraq accusing Saddam Hussein of owning weapons of mass destruction. Following this claim, the Ayatollah considered the idea of a nuclear deterrence system for his own country as well. Iran has received support from several actors, including China, for its nuclear program. China provided covert assistance to Iran, helping it to inaugurate the Isfahan research center in 1984.⁵⁰ However, the construction of the reactors at Bushehr, which were under development, was the target of repeated attacks during the conflict, sustaining significant damage. After the German company Siemens took Kraftwerk Union's place in the project, there was a time when Siemens decided to abandon the collaboration, with reasons that could include political, economic or security concerns. Ayatollah Khomeini expressed his desire to use the disused Bushehr facilities as grain warehouses. In the 1990s, Iran, led by President Rafsanjani, revived its nuclear projects with the support of China, Russia and Pakistan to recover from the devastation caused by the war with Iraq. In 1990 and 1995, action agreements were signed with Beijing and Moscow, respectively, to modernize and complete its atomic infrastructure. Specifically, with Russia, Iran pledged to complete the Bushehr reactors and acquire a uranium enrichment plant. According to IAEA documents, in the timeframe between 1994 and 1995, Iran received a total of about \$3 million for its nuclear program. This funding is in addition to the approximately 2,000 components that were used for the Iranian Atomic Agency's (Aeoi) first centrifuges, which were installed

⁴⁹ Mahmoud, S. S. (2020, September 22). Legacy of Iran-Iraq War still reverberates 40 years later. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/22/legacy-of-iran-iraq-war-still-reverberates-40-years-later>

⁵⁰ NTI. (2023, July 12). Isfahan (Esfahan) Nuclear Technology Center (INTC). The Nuclear Threat Initiative. <https://www.nti.org/education-center/facilities/isfahan-esfahan-nuclear-technology-center-intc/#:~:text=Built%20with%20Chinese%20assistance%20and%20opened%20in%201984%2C,zirconium%20cladding%20plant%2C%20and%20other%20facilities%20and%20laboratories.>

at the Tehran research center between 1985 and 1987. Several measures aimed at plant construction followed, in 1994 the AeoI allowed the construction of a plant at Ardakan where the famous "yellowcake" that is a highly concentrated uranium powder; around 75% of the material is made up of uranium, or 750 kg of uranium oxide per tonne.⁵¹ Four years after initially supporting Iran's nuclear program, the United States has expressed concern and dissent about its peaceful nature, fearing that it might conceal different purposes. In an effort to limit nuclear technology in Tehran, the United States has sought to strengthen diplomatic ties with Russia and China. Despite U.S. efforts in the 1990s to prevent Iran from acquiring knowledge of uranium enrichment, there is evidence to suggest China's involvement in providing plans for a uranium conversion plant in Esfahan. In 2000, President Bill Clinton imposed sanctions on those who assisted Iran's nuclear program, marking a turning point. In 2002, Iran increased uranium production at Natanz, drawing the attention of the IAEA. In 2003, the IAEA revealed that the Esfahan plant was being used for military purposes, while Polonium-210, an isotope used in nuclear weapons, was being produced in Tehran. Despite international tensions, Iran agreed to stricter inspections and suspended the Natanz plant. Iran has kept a determined attitude in pursuing its nuclear program despite growing international tensions and concerns expressed by several countries. During 2004, Iran actively resumed centrifuge production and ore conversion activities, demonstrating a continued commitment to enhancing its nuclear capabilities. In addition, by granting the IAEA full access to the Isfahan facility, Iran sought to demonstrate some transparency in its activities, although doubts arose as to Tehran's real intentions. The search for deuterium in gaseous form from Russia, a key isotope for enhancing fission devices, raised further questions about the nature and objectives of Iran's nuclear program. These developments have contributed to intensified concerns in the international community and triggered a series of global reactions.

Iran's decision in 2006 to reactivate the Natanz enrichment site, despite IAEA opposition, was a critical moment in international relations. The decision led the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran in December of that year, marking the beginning of a period

⁵¹ Yellowcake - U3O8 | Description & Production | Nuclear-power.com. (2022, August 1). *Nuclear Power*. <https://www.nuclear-power.com/nuclear-power-plant/nuclear-fuel/nuclear-fuel-cycle/yellowcake-u3o8/>

of economic and trade restrictions that would have a noticeable effect on the Iranian economy. It was not until the signing of the JCPOA⁵² agreement in 2015, also known as the "5+1," that international restrictions on Iran's nuclear program would be lifted, paving the way for a new phase in diplomatic relations and the handling of nuclear nonproliferation issues. The United Nations Security Council issued a resolution⁵³ requiring Iran to halt all uranium enrichment with reprocessing activities, as well as to cease ballistic missile development. This request was made with the goal of ensuring Iran's transparency and compliance with international nuclear agreements.

The involvement of the IAEA Director General in the verification activity within a 60-day period is crucial to ensure that Iran fully complies with the provisions established by the IAEA Board of Governors and previous resolutions. This monitoring process is critical to ensuring that Iran complies with international standards and keeps its word regarding the suspension of sensitive nuclear activities. The invitation to all states to report to the Sanctions Monitoring Committee on actions taken to implement the provisions of Resolution 1737 underscores the importance of international cooperation in ensuring compliance with the standards and restrictions imposed on Iran. Finally, the Council's expressed belief that compliance with IAEA demands and suspension of Iran's nuclear activities can contribute to a negotiated diplomatic solution that guarantees the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program emphasizes how important a diplomatic and cooperative approach is to resolving Iran's nuclear issues. In this regard, the Council stressed the willingness of the international community to work positively for such a solution and encouraged Iran, in accordance with these provisions, to resume

⁵² The Iran deal was negotiated between Iran, and US along with world powers such as UK in July 2015; it is formally called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). According to its provisions, Tehran accepted that much of her nuclear program would be dismantled while opening up more for international inspection hence getting billions worth sanctions relief. / Robinson, K. (2023, October 27). What is the Iran nuclear deal? *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-iran-nuclear-deal>

⁵³ Unanimously The Council adopted the resolution 1747 (2007), submitted by France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The Council affirmed its decision that Iran should, without further delay, suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development, to be verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). <https://press.un.org/en/2007/sc8980.doc.htm>

dialogue with the international community and the IAEA, stressing that such engagement would be beneficial. ⁵⁴

In 2008, the IAEA presented a report to member states outlining how Iran, despite previous events, had continued its search for nuclear weapons. Iran denied everything and refused the agency's checks for other nuclear sites, probably because it had something to hide. In September 2009, U.S President Barack Obama with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown confirmed that there was an underground nuclear site near Qom Air base called the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), a site that had been under construction for years, thus proving that Iran indeed had a clandestine nuclear program. Meanwhile, Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran's nuclear program, announced Iran's independence in nuclear energy and its ability to produce fuel rods for its own power plants in the 2010s, despite continued diplomatic exchanges, Iran began enriching uranium to 20 percent purity. Thus, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1929, which drastically expanded sanctions against Iran in addition, the Stuxnet computer virus⁵⁵, attributed to the United States and Israel, targeted Iran's uranium enrichment infrastructure. Resolution 1929 imposed strict measures to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons-related materials and technologies, including trade bans and restrictions on transfers of heavy conventional weapons in summary.

Iran's nuclear program has been the focus of intense international attention, with the IAEA closely monitoring the country's activities and Western powers imposing tough sanctions to try to limit Iran's development of military nuclear capabilities. It also required careful vigilance on the part of states in monitoring and reporting any suspicious activities related to Iran's proliferation efforts, as well as cooperation in enforcing sanctions and inspecting ships suspected of carrying prohibited goods. ⁵⁶

During this period, Iran began to recognize the need to forge a relation with the IAEA and proposed possible agreements. The first of these deals included free access for the IAEA

⁵⁴ SECURITY COUNCIL TOUGHENS SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN, ADDS ARMS EMBARGO, WITH UNANIMOUS ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION 1747 (2007) | Meetings coverage and press releases. <https://press.un.org/en/2007/sc8980.doc.htm>

⁵⁵ Stuxnet was a computer worm that targeted Iran's clandestine nuclear program Stuxnet: The world's first cyber weapon | *FSI* (stanford.edu)

⁵⁶ S/RES/1929 (2010) | *United Nations Security Council*. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/s/res/1929-%282010%29>

for five years in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions. However, the European Union criticized Iran for its "immature" conduct and stressed the need to comply with international standards. In November of the same year, the IAEA released a detailed report on Iran's atomic weapons-related activities, highlighting that Tehran had acquired knowledge and technology for computer modeling of compression and implosion processes, as well as the development of an effective detonation mechanism with the support of a Russian scientist. In addition, it was suspected that Iran was working on a program to equip the Shahab-3⁵⁷ missile with a spherical warhead containing nuclear technology, representing a step toward the realization of an atomic warhead. In 2012, the IAEA confirmed that uranium enrichment had also begun at the Fordow facility, with significantly higher levels of enrichment than before. This prompted the international community to outline a strategy, culminating in the first P5+1 meeting in 2012, but without achieving a tangible result. With the election of Hassan Rouhani in 2013, consideration began to be given to lifting sanctions and reaching a diplomatic agreement. The efforts led to the Geneva Interim Agreement on Iran's nuclear program in November 2013, which marked a historic moment when dialogue and diplomacy prevailed. This agreement led to the cessation of Iranian enrichment and sanctions relief, along with a financial incentive of seven billion dollars. In addition to this, it accepted IAEA monitoring of its power plants.⁵⁸ The need for an additional precautionary measure in the case of the Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), arose from concerns that had spread globally, especially in the United States, about the possibility that Iran might develop nuclear weapons. These concerns were based on a U.S. intelligence assessment that estimated that if Iran decided to produce nuclear weapons, it could do so in a matter of months without the binding covenant of the JCPOA. This would have led to serious instability, as it was feared that Israel might invade Iranian

⁵⁷ The Shahab-3 stands as a medium-range, liquid-fueled, mobile ballistic missile. It symbolizes Iran's inaugural achievement in procuring and advancing a medium-range ballistic missile system, providing it with the means to potentially target entities (like Israel) located outside its immediate vicinity. With an operational range spanning around 1,300 kilometers, it represents a pivotal component within Iran's military capabilities. Shaikh, S. (2024, April 23). *Shahab-3 | Missile Threat*. Missile Threat. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/shahab-3/>

⁵⁸ Edwards, L. (n.d.). *escenic. The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/10470716/Iran-nuclear-deal-agreed-at-Geneva-talks.html>

power plants preemptively, triggering reactions from Hezbollah and other states that were beginning to express a desire to arm themselves at the nuclear level in the event of devastating actions by Iran. To mitigate these threats, the JCPOA provided for several restrictions, including the scrapping of a large part of Iran's nuclear program and adherence to a system of monitoring and inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure that its supplies were entirely for peaceful purposes and not tampered with in secret as had happened previously. In reaction, the United States, Europe, and the United Nations have pledged to remove restrictions, especially on oil exports and the ban on conventional weapons transfers. Initially, Iran's compliance with the program was undeniable, with the IAEA conducting several inspections and certifying that, as of 2016, Iranian conduct was flawless. This led to a reduction in sanctions imposed by the countries involved.

However, with the rise of U.S. President Trump, the agreement began to falter. Trump announced the American withdrawal in 2018 from JCPOA and reimposition of sanctions against Iran, bringing the treaty to a breaking point. The European Union, on the other hand, understanding the importance of this agreement essential for an international stability called it, *"It is one of the greatest achievements that diplomacy has ever made, and we have built it together. It is proof that win-win solutions are possible, through dialogue, engagement, and perseverance"* and expressed its firm stance, *"As long as Iran continues to implement its nuclear commitments, as it is doing so far, the European Union will remain committed to the continued effective implementation of the nuclear agreement. We have full confidence in the work, competence and autonomy of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has issued 10 reports certifying that Iran has fully complied with its commitments."* President Trump's determination to withdraw the United States out of the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) in 2018 and impose "maximum pressure" through economic sanctions has not achieved the stated purposes of his strategy. Instead of forcing Iran to negotiate a "better deal," this policy has worsened relations between Washington and Tehran, greatly increasing tensions in the Middle East region with the risk of further military escalation. Despite the heavy sanctions severely damaging Iran's economy, the regime has not succumbed to pressure and has instead intensified its destabilizing activities in the region, such as supporting militias and armed groups. Moreover, the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal deeply disappointed European

allies, who instead wanted to keep trade and diplomatic relations with Iran alive. So, to preserve the agreement they gave birth to a system called INSTEX.⁵⁹ A mechanism created with the intention of circumventing U.S. sanctions and allowing trade with Tehran to protect European companies.⁶⁰ After waivers imposed by the Trump administration, some countries continued to trade with Iran, but in 2019 the U.S. completely halted Iranian oil exports. In response, Tehran boosted uranium supplies and expanded its nuclear program, causing further tensions with the United States. Thus, the Americans decided to use a measure of deterrence against their eastern enemies by killing General Qassem Soleimani.⁶¹ Since then, Iran has declared an end to limits on its uranium enrichment. It launched construction of a new centrifuge production center at Natanz to replace the one destroyed in an attack it blamed on Israel months earlier. Then, in response to the killing of a prominent nuclear scientist, also blamed on Israel, the Iranian parliament passed legislation that led to a significant increase in uranium enrichment at Fordow.⁶² After U.S. actions, Iran has decreased the capacity of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to supervise its nuclear power units. The country's power has grown steadily, allowing the production of highly enriched uranium up to 60 percent to date, a material that has little civilian use, but significant military uses.⁶³

Considering the constant interest and investment in the nuclear sector, it is clear how Iran represents an element of unpredictability in the geopolitical landscape. Increased investment in nuclear power could soon provide the country with the destructive technological capability as much as deterrence much feared by its opponents. This scenario underscores the importance of leaving open corridors of communication with

⁵⁹ E3 instituted INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges) to contribute to the reduction of the impact of U.S. sanctions, mainly in regard to the humanitarian needs.

⁶⁰ Brzozowski, A. (2020, April 1). EU's INSTEX mechanism facilitates first transaction with pandemic-hit Iran. *Euractiv*. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eus-instex-mechanism-facilitates-first-transaction-with-pandemic-hit-iran/>

⁶¹ Qassem Soleimani was the commander of the al Qods brigades of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and in charge of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign operations. He was killed along with nine others in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad Airport in Iraq in January.

⁶² Robinson, K. (2023b, October 27). What is the Iran nuclear deal? *Council on Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/background/what-iran-nuclear-deal?__cf_chl_captcha_t=

⁶³ AgiIt, R. (2024, April 22). Teheran rassicura "la nostra difesa non contempla le armi atomiche." *AGI*. <https://www.agi.it/estero/news/2024-04-22/teheran-difesa-non-contempla-armi-atomiche-26125608/#:~:text=Secondo%20l'ultimo%20rapporto%20dell,civile%20ma%20ha%20usi%20militari.>

Iran in order to monitor the intentions of this ancient empire: pursue international dialogue at all costs to promote stability and security in the region.

2.3 The power of nuclear in the Israeli-Arab conflict

The relationship between Iran and Israel has been characterized by a complex evolution over the years. Initially, in the 1950s, Iran was one of the first countries to recognize Israel and establish economic and trade cooperation. However, with the Iranian revolution and the rise of Khomeini's authoritarian regime, relations worsened. Tensions increased further with the First Intifada and the Israeli occupation of territories not provided for in international agreements. Frictions between Hezbollah and Israel, highlighted in the 2006 conflict in which the Iranian Revolutionary Guards collaborated with Hezbollah, contributed to the intensification of hostilities. These events have fueled an increasingly devastating military escalation between the two states, with the Iranian political regime playing a significant role in exacerbating tensions.

These alignments that have arisen throughout history are still alive even now and evident, on the one hand we have Iran, supporter of Islamist terrorist groups namely Hamas and Hezbollah also connected to them by an anti-Saudi spirit. On the other hand, Israel has the support of Western powers such as the United States, which initially sought to maintain a balance with Iran given its ever-growing nuclear power. However, with the Republican government in power, the United States broke off diplomatic relations. This decision not only fueled conflicts in the contemporary scenario, such as the war in Yemen, where the U.S. conducted airstrikes against Iranian-backed Houthis linked targets, but also escalated tensions with Tehran over nuclear weapons.

After Trump's declaration in 2018 to withdraw the 2015 JCPOA agreement, Iran continued to escalate its nuclear weaponry. Inspections by the IAEA have continued to take place, albeit slowed down, without much cooperation from the Iranian government. Despite this, no one is able to determine for certain the development of Iran's atomic weapon. A recent IAEA report seems to indicate that Iran's enriched uranium dropped in

2024, resulting in 121.5 kg.⁶⁴ However, the enemy we are dealing with is well known, and nothing rules out the possibility that Iran was trying to play strategically, investing in underground laboratories away from prying eyes. Indeed, it already has the advantage of the presence of sites that are difficult to neutralize. Discussed here on the Bonab, Ramsar, and Tehran research reactors, the Arak heavy water production reactor, and the Bushehr power plant, built in the past with Russia's contribution. Plus, the Gachin uranium mine, the Isfahan conversion plant, laboratories in Natanz, Qom and the "bunker" one in Fordow.⁶⁵

Iran is increasing uranium purity to 60 percent, close to the 90 percent needed to create a nuclear weapon, but this would still take two years to launch. However, the real purpose of Iranian nuclear power is questionable, considering the significant investment in uranium. Despite Iran's growing arsenal, it is not automatically synonymous with nuclear attack. Israel, already in possession of nuclear weapons, may be more concerned about Iran's aspiration to achieve such status, as this could destabilize international conjunctures and complicate the role of the financiers and supporters of the atomic program, such as Russia and China. Israel, however, fears above all Iran, which conducts a "proxy war" rather than a direct war, controlling neighborhood militias such as Hezbollah, the Houthis and Hamas, funding and commissioning them as "mercenaries" for a war in which it plays a role of spectator rather than actor. This hostility was embodied in Israel's claimed attack on the Iranian embassy in Damascus in April 2024⁶⁶, motivated by a desire to destroy Iran and its political and military control in Syria through the presence of the Pasdaran⁶⁷.

⁶⁴ Analysis of IAEA Iran Verification and Monitoring Report — February 2024 | *Institute for Science and International Security*. (n.d.). <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/analysis-of-iaea-iran-verification-and-monitoring-report-february-2024>

⁶⁵ In 2 anni l'Iran potrebbe costruire l'atomica. (2015, April 2). *Agenzia ANSA*. https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2015/04/01/nucleare-iran-in-2-anni-potrebbe-costruire-atomica_9b55205d-dd4e-42c9-8711-b9a6f499361c.html

⁶⁶ A raid attributed to Israel targeted the consular section of the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital Damascus on April 1, killing 11 people, including seven Guardians of the Revolution. / Undici morti in un raid israeliano contro un edificio dell'ambasciata iraniana a Damasco. (2024, April 2). *Internazionale*. <https://www.internazionale.it/ultime-notizie/2024/04/02/siria-raid-israeliano-ambasciata-iraniana-damasco>

⁶⁷ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), also known as "Pasdaran," was founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, after the fall of Shah Pahlavi. The Corp has now become an institution with predominant political and military power. CFR.org Editors. (2024, April 18). Iran's Revolutionary Guards. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-revolutionary-guards>

The attack resulted in the killing of eleven victims, including General Mohammad Reza Zahedi of the Pasdaran's Quds Force and his deputy in charge of coordinating arms deals with Hezbollah. During the attack at the Pasdaran headquarters a high-level meeting was taking place between Iranian and Syrian representatives, allegedly aimed at issuing instructions to the latter for their continued campaign against Israel. The bombing animated allies on both sides. The United States issued a statement explaining that it had nothing to do with the attack, and President Biden emphasized that his government is pressing for a "cease-fire in Gaza" and a desire not to take an active part in the conflict, probably in the run-up to the elections. Russia called the attack "unacceptable," and Hamas expressed its full solidarity with Iran and Syria, drawing the attention of the UN Security Council to take steps to halt Israel's brutal actions and advancing increasingly devastating attacks in the Gaza Strip. Iran promised revenge and hatred for Israel's violation of diplomatic neutrality, considering the embassy on foreign territory "inviolable." This promise was fulfilled and carried out during the evening of April 13, 2024, and Sunday, April 14, 2024, with the launching of Iranian drones and missiles, which reached Israel in the Negev region. This direct offensive action would turn out to be the first against Israel since the beginning of the conflict after the Islamic revolution. Pasdaran commanders called the attack "Operation Sincere Promise."⁶⁸ 99% of drones and missiles had already been tapped by Israel before officially entering Israeli airspace. A U.S. representative reported that at least nine Iranian missiles impacted two Israeli military air bases, causing limited damage. Some ballistic missiles were shot down in the airspace by the Arrow⁶⁹ anti-ballistic missile system. In addition to the attack, Iran also intimidated its enemy Israel not to pursue military action against it otherwise it would employ "a weapon never used" presented at the April 17 parade, namely Bavar-373s.⁷⁰ Despite the limited effect of the Iranian attack and Tehran's warnings, Israel did not procrastinate the inevitable and launched military actions to intimidate Iran on April 20,

⁶⁸ Israel getting punished with Operation 'True Promise'. (2024, April 16). *Tehran Times*. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/497075/Israel-getting-punished-with-Operation-True-Promise>

⁶⁹ Fabian, E. (2024, April 14). How Israel foiled Iran's ballistic missiles as they headed to an F-35 airbase. *The Times of Israel*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-israel-foiled-irans-ballistic-missile-attack-that-focused-on-an-f-35-airbase/>

⁷⁰ Multi-layered air and missile defense system that can employ three different types of missiles to engage air targets and missiles flying at different altitudes and ranges.

2024. The attack hit an air base near the city of Esfahan, location of Iran's atomic program, including the underground site of Natanz, in addition to night airstrikes against the city of Rafah that left several dead, including women and children, and aerial bombardments in the locations of Ayta ash-Shab and Kfar Kila in southern Lebanon against Hezbollah militia. Weakened Palestine and the Hamas fortress in the Gaza Strip, Israel's only current goal is to launch an attack which would allow it to permanently invade the stronghold and enter Rafah, an incursion that it is already carrying out slowly and currently remains confined only to that area, according to officials in Tsahal.⁷¹ It is a highly destructive operation with the potential to claim more victims that becomes even more alarming considering Israel's decision to ban UN access to the Rafah crossing into the Gaza Strip. It is important to note that this region is the main crossing point for humanitarian aid. And it is in light of the current tense situation that Egypt has proposed to Israel an agreement with Hamas for a ceasefire of at least one year in exchange for a halt to any military action against Israel. This proposal includes a complete and final halt to the assault on Rafah city in exchange for restarting negotiations on prisoners.⁷² As a result, a delegation from the Palestinian militant group Hamas went to Cairo to try to negotiate, and Hamas said that this is Israel's last chance to get the hostages.

Iran's aggressive conduct and threats toward Israel could lead to further escalation of the conflict. While Israel seeks aid from the United States and allies to counter the Palestinian cause, Iran actively supports this cause and could deploy additional resources to counter Israel. Further escalation of the conflict could generate global concerns. Currently, the war between Iran and Israel seems only postponed. Should Israel emerge victorious, it could weaken the Iranian regime. This situation could prompt Sunni Arab states not to actively oppose the conflict.

⁷¹ The Israeli Defense Forces

⁷²Media: “Decine di carri armati di Israele al confine di Gaza.”. (2024, April 25). *RaiNews*. <https://www.rainews.it/maratona/2024/04/la-rivolta-dei-campus-sit-in-pacifisti-e-centinaia-di-arresti-8e18aa90-416b-4122-8328-e8ff03cace0c.html>

Chapter 3: Protagonists and antagonists

3.1 Analysis of key actors in the conflict

The Palestinian situation is complex and intricate, with a history rich in conflict and tension. To best understand who the actors are and the dynamics that have triggered different ties, it is good to have an overview of all the major players in the conflict.

Palestine

Historically, Palestine has been at the heart of territorial and political disputes, with significant changes in the region's borders and political status over time. The modernization of the area and its integration with the European economy have led to economic growth, but demographic and political dynamics have contributed to a series of conflicts, including attacks, civil wars, and unsuccessful peace negotiations. The presence of political organizations such as Hamas and the PNA has contributed to political fragmentation within the Palestinian community. Demographically, Palestine has faced significant challenges, with high unemployment rates, scarcity of natural resources and a dependence on international aid for economic survival. The construction of the separation wall⁷³ between the Palestinian territories and Israel has hindered the transit of goods and workers, further contributing to the region's precarious economic situation.⁷⁴ Israel's policies of closing and controlling crossings have restricted access to Palestinian labor, exacerbating unemployment and poverty, forcing many Palestinians to face endless lines at Israeli army-guarded checkpoints every day in order to travel to work in Israel.

On the political side, on the other hand, Palestine has claimed sovereignty over the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its designated capital. However, international recognition and participation in international organizations and

⁷³ Construction of the wall began in 2002, a moment when Israel chose to cut off Palestinian communities, agricultural fields, and cultivated land at the climax of the Second Intifada. / In Pictures: Israel's illegal separation wall still divides. (2020, July 8). *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2020/7/8/in-pictures-israels-illegal-separation-wall-still-divides>

⁷⁴ Gaspardo, A. (2021, June 23). Demografia e potenza: Israele e Palestina, la forza dei numeri. *DIFESA ONLINE*. <https://www.difesaonline.it/geopolitica/analisi/demografia-e-potenza-israele-e-palestina-la-forza-dei-numeri>

forums have been hampered by controversy and opposition, with the Security Council and the United States vetoing some crucial decisions. The presence of organizations such as the PLO, Hamas and the PNA has contributed to a complex political network with different goals and approaches. However, the political and economic situation in Palestine is heavily influenced by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has deep historical roots and continues to generate tension and violence. Israel's construction of the security wall has further divided Palestinian land, hindering economic and social development, as reflected in the words of Umm Judah, a retired Palestinian teacher: *"With the construction of the wall, we can no longer access our land. Everything we had has been stolen from us. We cry but no one sees our tears."*⁷⁵ The policies of expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and increasing violence by groups such as Hamas have contributed to a climate of instability and uncertainty. Palestine is in a complex and delicate situation, with historical, demographic, economic and political challenges that profoundly affect the lives of its inhabitants. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, internal tensions and economic difficulties represent just some of the elements that characterize the Palestinian reality, requiring political and diplomatic solutions to address the complex issues surrounding it. Demography is a key element to be explored in a country's history and power, influencing its rise and fall. Demographic control of areas in dispute is crucial to consolidating power and occupation. Israel and the Palestinians both seek to increase their demographic presence in specific areas, a strategy that is part of their struggle for control of territory. Territorial claims rely heavily on demographics and population composition in the various regions. The demographic balance between Israel and Palestine plays a key role in negotiations for a possible resolution of the conflict, influencing the perception of fairness and security for both sides involved. The demographic distribution of the population also influences housing density and the management of resources, such as land and water, which are often at the center of disputes. In addition, demographic policies, such as settlement construction and birth promotion, can have significant impacts on the demographic composition and development of the conflict. Within this framework, the demographic composition of Israelis and Palestinians has emerged as a pivotal factor in

⁷⁵ La vita dei palestinesi si scontra con il muro costruito da Israele. (2018, April 18) *Internazionale*. <https://www.internazionale.it/video/2018/02/28/muro-israele-palestina>

the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can be viewed as a direct extension of the historical Arab-Zionist dispute that originated in 1881. Demography has helped shape the history of the region, influencing the ethnic and religious composition of the population and its geographic distribution.

The population of Mandate Palestine, at the beginning of the Zionist waves of migration, was about 462,000, 90% of whom were Muslims and 10% Christians, with a small minority of Jews. However, thanks to the birthrate and immigration foraged by the Zionist Movement, the Jewish population increased significantly, from 3.3% of the total population in 1881 to 32% in 1947. This demographic change had a significant impact on the ethnic and religious composition of the population and its geographic distribution, influencing the formation of the State of Israel and its relationship with the Palestinian population. Demographics continued to hold sway in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the Palestinian population growing faster than the Jewish population. This has caused many contradictions and difficulties, such as the question of Palestinian refugees' rights and the administration of occupied territories. Moreover, demographics were instrumental in shaping Israeli policies: the government was interested in restraining population growth among Palestinians by constructing barriers and managing settlement areas in their territory. Therefore, understanding Israeli-Palestinian demographics is crucial for explaining the conflict and its implications on the region and world at large. The War of 1948-49 known as "First Israeli-Arab War" led to Nakba which was the State's creation as well as more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians (Muslims and Christians) being expelled from its newly delineated territory. This situation prevailed until 1967 when there was a clear Jewish majority within Israel proper that is recognized internationally. The lack of statehood proclamation by Palestine along with Gaza Strip having been annexed to Egypt while Jordan took control over West Bank contributed to emergence of younger unstable Palestinian national identity compared to that of Israelis. Gradually, unifying Palestinian communities in Gaza Strip region, West Bank areas and refugee Diaspora turned political factions into viable actors within Middle Eastern politics. After 1967, Israel's triumph over the "Six Day War" led to the conquest of territories such as the Upper Galilee, the Golan, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This reunified the Palestinian population inside Israel and in the "Palestinian Territories," disrupting the process of convergence between "Israeli Arabs" and "Israeli Jews."

Decreasing public investment in Arab settlement areas and the exposure of Israeli Arabs to the reality of the "Territories" have contributed to the alienation of these communities from Jewish society, with increasing identification as "Palestinians living in Israel."

In addition, the issue of cross-marriage between different national communities has become a taboo subject, highlighting the divisions that exist. 82% of Muslim Arabs and 88% of Christian Arabs would feel uncomfortable if one of their children married a Jew, while similar percentages are found among Israeli Jews. These figures reflect a growing separation between the communities, with a clear opposition to interreligious marriages. The 2018 Nationality Law⁷⁶, which enshrined Israel as the state of the Jewish people, further exacerbated the divisions, leading to strains and increased estrangement between the different communities in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Passed by the Knesset in 2018, this law represented a further element of tension between the different communities living in Israel and "Palestine." This law promoted Jewish settlements instead of allowing the exclusion of Arabs from settlements, a decision that can be interpreted as support for the colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories, in stark contrast to international law; it also proclaimed the Jewish language as official by defining Arabic as a language with "special status" that only allows access to services provided by the state; it announced Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and finally it recognized various Jewish celebrations by establishing the Jewish calendar as the official of the country. A directive that has the same status as a constitutional law.⁷⁷ Muslim and Christian Arabs expressed their strong disagreement with this law through a violent reaction. Circassians, Druze as well as Armenians who are members of smaller communities also joined in this violence. These communities, which make up less than 2 percent of the total population, play a significant role in both the armed forces and politics, and their reaction to the law has been particularly strong. The law has created a division among communities, with members of smaller communities feeling betrayed and marginalized. This has led to an awareness of the demographic relationships between different communities. According to demographic tables produced by Arnon Soffer and

⁷⁶Harel, A. (2018, October 10). La fondamentale legge di Israele. *Limes*. <https://www.limesonline.com/rivista/la-fondamentale-legge-di-israele-14631880/>

⁷⁷ Afanasyeva, K. (2018, July 19). Israele ha approvato la controversa legge sullo "Stato-nazione ebraica" *AGI*. https://www.agi.it/estero/news/2018-07-19/israele_approvata_legge_stato_nazione_ebraica-4173762/

Sergio Della Pergola,⁷⁸ the total number of non-Jews has reached that of Jews in "Eretz Israel," the territory that stretches from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River and includes the Golan Heights. The total Jewish population is 7,250,000 souls but is equaled by the sum of Palestinians living in the "Territories" and non-Jews living in Israel. The demographic difference between the communities is significant, with the total fertility rate (TFR) of Israeli Jewish women being 3 children per woman, while that of Palestinian women is 3.6 children per woman.⁷⁹ This means that the Palestinian population will tend to grow faster than the Jewish population. The "demographic bombshell" brought by Palestinians from the "Territories" is a factor that could have a significant impact on Israel's future, threatening the Jewish majority. The demographic situation is complex and influenced by several factors, including natural growth and migration. Jews have used the Diaspora⁸⁰ Jewry as a demographic resource, but this reservoir now seems to be depleted. Migration to Israel (Aliyah) has been overused and is no longer a significant option for the country's demographic future. In conclusion, the "Nationality Law" has created a division between the communities and has led to a greater awareness of the demographic relations between the different communities.

Israel

Indeed, the Israeli situation presents a complex intersection of historical, demographic, economic, and political dimensions that have shaped the country over time. Historically, Israel emerged in 1948 amid conflicts with its Arab neighbors, facing immediate challenges such as managing massive immigration and establishing a functioning economy.⁸¹ From 1950 to 1965, the country experienced a remarkable rate of economic

⁷⁸ Gaspardo, A. (2021, June 23). Demografia e potenza: Israele e Palestina, la forza dei numeri. *Difesa online*. <https://www.difesaonline.it/geopolitica/analisi/demografia-e-potenza-israele-e-palestina-la-forza-dei-neri>

⁷⁹ Gaspardo, A. (2021, June 23). Demografia e potenza: Israele e Palestina, la forza dei numeri. *Difesa online*. <https://www.difesaonline.it/geopolitica/analisi/demografia-e-potenza-israele-e-palestina-la-forza-dei-neri>

⁸⁰Dispersion of the Jewish people. Gli-ebrei-nella-Diaspora - *Treccani* - [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gli-ebrei-nella-diaspora_\(Dictionary-of-History\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gli-ebrei-nella-diaspora_(Dictionary-of-History)/)

⁸¹ Halevi, N. (n.d.). A brief economic history of modern Israel. *EH*. <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/a-brief-economic-history-of-modern-israel/>

growth, supported by large flows of foreign capital and international aid, which fueled a large-scale investment program.⁸²

Demographically, Israel is a nation composed of a diverse population, with 83 percent of the population Jewish and the remaining 17 percent primarily Arab. It is interesting to note that Arabs residing in Israel consider themselves Arabs or Palestinians by nationality, but Israelis by citizenship. Another noteworthy aspect from a social perspective is the increase observed in recent years among Israeli Arabs in abandoning their Palestinian identity to increasingly identify with their Israeli citizenship. According to a survey conducted in 2019, 35 percent of Israeli Arabs identify as Israeli, while only 20 percent consider themselves Palestinian.⁸³ Jewish immigration has been a key element in the country's population growth, with significant flows coming from different parts of the world, including Europe, North America, Africa, and the Middle East. At the same time, the high birth rate of the Arab population has contributed to its increase, maintaining a dynamic demographic balance.⁸⁴

From an economic perspective, the Israeli economy has gone through several stages, moving from state control in the early decades to gradual liberalization in the 1970s and 1980s. In recent decades, Israel has experienced remarkable economic growth, becoming one of the most developed and advanced countries in the Middle East. With a high GDP per capita and a significant presence in international markets, Israel has demonstrated remarkable economic resilience, although it faces challenges such as the trade deficit and military spending. Concerning war spending in particular, Israel is shrouded in a seemingly crisis-like climate. The Israeli government has declared its intention to issue a \$60 billion debt to finance the war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Should the trend observed in the last quarter of 2023, which was decidedly unstable, continue for twelve months, this would lead to a 20 percent contraction of the Israeli economy.⁸⁵ This decline

⁸² *Israel | Facts, History, Population, & Map*. (2024, June 5). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Israel/Demographic-trends>

⁸³ Palmisano, G. Israele, perché la demografia ha un ruolo cruciale nel conflitto. *Demografica*. <https://demografica.adnkronos.com/mondo/israele-perche-la-demografia-ha-un-ruolo-cruciale-nel-conflitto/>

⁸⁴ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs (1984). Israel. *Department of State publication. Background notes series*, 1–8.

⁸⁵ In Israele, l'economia di guerra comincia a *pungere* (2024, February 26). / *ISPI* <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/in-israele-leconomia-di-guerra-comincia-a-pungere-165082>

is further attributable to the large-scale mobilization of reservists and contraction in key sectors such as tourism and construction. This situation poses a significant challenge for Israel, especially considering that government spending and military expenditures have nearly doubled.

Politically, Israel is a parliamentary democracy that exercises its powers on three levels: legislative, executive, and judicial, and is governed by a unicameral electoral system. The legislative function is exercised by the Knesset or the Israeli Parliament, which is elected every four years and can be dissolved by the Prime Minister. The latter represents the executive power which, together with the Council of Ministers, forms the government. The highest judicial office is exercised by judges appointed by the Head of State, who compose the Supreme Court, which extends its jurisdiction throughout the country. The country has dealt with a number of conflicts with Arab countries and the Palestinians, maintaining an unwavering commitment to peace in the region. An effort that current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also pursued at the beginning of his administration, adopting a liberal approach, devoted himself to the implementation of a vast privatization plan. He also played a significant role in reducing acts of domestic terrorism and signed a crucial peace pact with Yasser Arafat.⁸⁶ Therefore, despite geopolitical tensions contemporary and non, Israel has held a prominent position on the international stage, forging trade agreements with several nations and proving to be a key player in regional politics.⁸⁷

Israel's complex reality is characterized by a history rich in conflict and transformation, a diverse demography reflecting global immigration, a growing economy supported by foreign investment, and a dynamic political scene marked by an ongoing commitment to security in the region. These elements are interwoven to define Israel's identity and development path in the global and regional context.

⁸⁶ Leader of al-Fatah, the main Palestinian armed resistance organization. *'Arafāt, Yasser* (n.d.). - *Treccani* - Treccani. <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/yasser-arafat/>

⁸⁷ Schwartz, S. (2006). Political, social, and economic life in the Land of Israel, 66–c. 235. In S. T. Katz (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (pp. 23–52). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Iran

Another key player in the conflict is undoubtedly Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its deep and complex historical roots, is a central player in the international arena, with significant implications in the Middle East region.

Historically, Iran has an imperial tradition dating back to ancient empires such as the Achaemenids and Sassanids, followed by periods of Arab rule and a Persian cultural revival. The 1979 revolution led to the creation of the Islamic Republic, the only one ruled by Shi'a, with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi holding political power. Before the revolution, Iran was a monarchy headed by the Shah and was the largest ally for the United States in the Middle East.

Regarding the demographic aspect, Iran has been subject to different periods of fluctuation. Under the Shah's rule, influenced by Western policies, a birth control program was initiated that had little success. Program carried on until the Khomeini-led revolution in 1979, which ordered its discontinuation in preference to a pronatalist policy, promoting marriages at a young age and increasing the number of members in families. Symbolically, the minimum female age for marriage was lowered to 9 and 12 for boys. With the Iraq War in 1980, this strongly birth-protective policy was intensified even more, seeking to encourage families to have many more children to form an "army of twenty million," as Ayatollah Khomeini declared. However, it was the context of the war in Iraq, the severe economic repercussions, and the difficult conditions faced by women and children that pushed toward the implementation of new policies to regulate births. During Rafsanjani's rule⁸⁸, the departments of Health, Education and Economy collaborated to introduce an innovative decentralized family planning program. This plan aimed to provide services through a network of local health facilities supported financially by the state. The Khatami⁸⁹ government successfully supported this initiative, leading to a drop in fertility to below replacement level in 2005, exceeding the most optimistic forecasts. With the inauguration of Ahmadinejad's government in 2005, there was a radical reversal of previously adopted policies. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei⁹⁰ revitalized support for

⁸⁸ President of Iran from 1989 to 1997

⁸⁹ President from 1997 to 2005

⁹⁰ Supreme Leader of Iran, the highest political and religious authority in the country, from 1989 until 2022.

procreation and condemned population control policies. Free contraception programs were eliminated, vasectomy was banned, birth subsidies were reinstated, and early marriage was actively promoted.

Today, Iran's demographics, with a population of more than 87.5 million, reflect a young and robust society, with more than half the population under the age of 30 and a literacy rate of more than 80 percent in which women have not only taken complete control of their own reproductive capacity, but are also the driving force behind the extensive uprisings underway.

Economically, as previously analyzed, Iran relies mainly on the hydrocarbon industry, which makes up a significant part of the state budget and exports. However, Iran's economy has been severely affected by international sanctions and inefficient economic management, with high inflation rates and a growing budget deficit. These factors contributed to large-scale protests within the country in 2022, highlighting the economic and social challenges Iran has faced and continues to face.

From a political viewpoint, the Islamic Republic of Iran is in a complex system that combines elements of parliamentary democracy with strong control by the religious establishment. This combination has generated internal tensions and increased authoritarianism, significantly impacting the country's political and social stability. Economic decline, government interference in the private sphere of citizens, widespread corruption and nepotism, along with repression of political dissent, have reached such a critical point that they have generated waves of protests that take place frequently in the country.⁹¹ Iran's foreign policy, particularly the financial and military support provided to groups such as Hamas in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has contributed to fueling regional tensions and further isolating Iran in the international arena, prompting concerns and reactions from the international community. Iran is in a complex geopolitical position, with a rich history and a number of economic, political and social challenges to face. Its interference in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is only one aspect of its international relations, which have a significant impact on regional and global stability. It is essential

⁹¹6 grafici per capire le proteste in Iran (2023, March 14). *ISPI*. <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/5-grafici-capire-le-proteste-iran36790#:~:text=Secondo%20i%20manifestanti%2C%20il%20deterioramento,politico%20hanno%20raggiunto%20il%20limite.>

to fully understand Iran's historical, demographic, economic, and political context in order to accurately assess its role and actions in the international arena and to develop effective strategies to address the challenges and opportunities it presents.

United States

The United States plays a crucial role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as a superpower that has always navigated the stormy Middle Eastern waters, shifting from a proactive position aimed at securing political and military support in exchange for economic interests, to a gradual disinterest that sees it relinquish the peacemaking relay in the hands of major regional players. Although America holds the record as the world's leading power in terms of concentration of power, more recently an intense debate, begun as early as the 1960s, has been rekindled regarding its potential decline. Indeed, the doubt that the United States was losing its global hegemony, blind to geopolitical multipolarity, has constantly gripped political and academic circles with consequent media echoes. In fact, perception and image of U.S. power has been influenced by the different leadership approaches adopted by various U.S. administrations, which, oscillating between interventionism and isolationism, multilateralism and unilateralism, pragmatism and idealism, have inflamed public opinion, especially in complex periods such as those of the 21st century, characterized by conventional and unconventional challenges, such as international terrorism. The two serious events that characterized the year 2014, which came to a climax in 2015 ⁹²: namely, the protracted struggle between Russia and the Western world over the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine and the sudden rise of fundamentalist terrorism, embodied by Is (Islamic State)⁹³, constitute crucial exemplifications of the close

⁹² 2014 and 2015 were years of tension for the United States. During those years, IS perpetrated several terrorist attacks threatening international stability. In late February 2014, unidentified military forces, later confirmed as Russian, took control of airports in Crimea, a peninsula with a predominantly Russian population located in Ukraine. Subsequently, the Crimean Autonomous Assembly was occupied by pro-Russian forces. Since this invasion, Russia has maintained control over Crimea and has supported pro-Russian separatist forces that have taken control of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea led to a conflict that has perpetrated over the years and is still continuing today. This led the United States to act abruptly toward Russia by imposing economic sanctions and practicing a policy of isolationism toward Russia.

⁹³ ISIS is an Islamist terrorist group that emerged in 2014, heir to the former Al Qaeda cell in Iraq. It operates mainly in the Middle East, but has also extended its activities to Europe, Africa, Russia, and the United States. Over the years, it has been responsible for several terrorist attacks and became globally known when its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the creation of the Islamic caliphate in July 2014

correlation between the decisions made in this regard by the United States and the resonance of the same, regarding the solidity of its position of dominance in the international arena.

The discussion of Washington's possible decline also spills over into the economic and military spheres, fueling further questions about the resilience and real effectiveness of American governing supremacy.

In the military sphere, while retaining clear superiority in terms of spending, capabilities and global force projection, the U.S. faces obstacles such as the rising cost of armaments and public opposition to external military interventions. SIPRI data show precisely how they are the country with the highest level of military spending;⁹⁴ indeed in all of history, no nation has ever deployed such a massive and almost ubiquitous force contingent as the U.S. In fact, it is astounding to consider that in the past two decades alone, the U.S. government has spent an exorbitant amount to fund its “war on terror” in the Middle East. Currently, it is estimated that at least 170 nations host U.S. militaries, with some 642 military bases distributed across a minimum of 76 states around the world;⁹⁵ it is precisely this military encroachment, which now extends everywhere, that has allowed Washington to exert greater influence over different and multiple geographic areas.

Weapons aside, it is undoubtedly economic wealth that gives America its global leadership role. With the highest nominal GDP in the world, the American economic system is among the most advanced in decades. The economic structure of the United States is based mainly on the service sector, which contributes significantly to GDP formation, accounting for 78.1 percent. Among the most influential sectors are banking and insurance, along with the financial sector, which alone generates about 7 percent of national GDP and provides employment for more than 5 million people.

⁹⁴ Le spese militari sono aumentate del 9,3% nell'ultimo decennio. Chi sono i Paesi più armati? - *Info Data*. <https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/2022/02/27/le-spesa-militari-aumentate-del-93-nellultimo-decennio-paesi-piu-armati/#:~:text=Abbiamo%20raccolto%20e%20rappresentato%20graficamente%20i,comparazioni%20tra%20diverse%20regioni%20e%20paesi.&text=Abbiamo%20raccolto%20e%20rappresentato,diverse%20regioni%20e%20paesi.&text=e%20rappresentato%20graficamente%20i,comparazioni%20tra%20diverse%20regioni>

⁹⁵ Mantini, C. (2023, April 19). Dove si trovano e quante sono le basi militari americane e i soldati USA nel mondo. *Geopop*. <https://www.geopop.it/dove-si-trovano-e-quante-sono-le-basi-militari-americane-e-i-soldati-usa-nel-mondo/>

With these achievements, The United States also dominates the international financial market. In addition, the country is basically self-sufficient in the production and consumption of almost all raw materials, except for oil.

A further factor favorable to economic growth is the demographic aspect; with more than 330 million inhabitants, the United States is the third most populous country in the world,⁹⁶ after China and India, which, unlike many wealthy nations, still has a relatively high population growth rate (about 0.7 percent per year), sustained also by the constant migratory flows that have occurred over the centuries.⁹⁷

Enough to consider that ethnically, the American population appears heterogeneous, precisely because of the many migrants who have pursued the “American dream”, in search of a better life of opportunity, wealth, under the banner of political and religious freedom, without neglecting the past as colonizers, to consider that the main cause of current migrations is precisely the past colonial policy. The fact then that the United States used colonial expansion as a means to annex territories and disproportionately increase political and economic power, to gain supremacy was the basis of its foreign policy design. But that policy of submission has today morphed into an intricate web of international relations, between the meshes of which the interests of the entire world are enmeshed. One of the primary aspects of U.S. foreign policy is the maintenance of strong external ties with neighboring countries and within the continent itself. Indeed, the United States maintains vital trade relations with Canada and Mexico, which are crucial partners for economic stability and regional security. In addition to relations in North America, another priority of U.S. foreign affairs concerns transatlantic alliances, particularly with the United Kingdom. This relationship, consolidated by historical ties and shared democratic values, is a pillar of the U.S. international political plan, characterized by strategic cooperation between the two countries for control, on a wide range, of global issues. In the European arena, the US keeps its hegemony by weaving friendly relations

⁹⁶Topic: Demographics in the U.S. (2023, December 18). *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/topics/9409/demographics-in-the-us/#editorsPicks>

⁹⁷ Chokshi, N. (2016, December 22). Growth of U.S. population is at slowest pace since 1937. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/22/us/usa-population-growth.html#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20population%20grew%20by%200.7%20percent,the%20total%20population%20to%20just%20over%20323%20million.>

with the European Union (EU) and individual member states, but despite the alliance, there have been moments of friction on issues such as trade, security, and foreign policy approaches, especially during the Trump administration.

Special emphasis should be placed on U.S. foreign policy toward Russia, which has been the subject of careful observation and debate in recent years, as the relationship dynamics between the two superpowers have fluctuated significantly. In recent decades, the United States has attempted to implement a rather ambitious foreign policy shaping toward post-Cold War Russia, oscillating between trying to establish closer cooperation and the need to protect its own national interests. While there have been efforts to reduce tensions through nuclear arms limitation treaties and deepening economic relations, disagreements have emerged on crucial issues such as NATO enlargement. The Obama administration has tried to strengthen dialogue with Russia, but the task has proved difficult due to basic disagreements on several issues, culminating in the crisis in Ukraine, which has become a focal point of tension between the two superpowers with Russia reacting powerfully and aggressively to counter Western expansion into the country.

Moreover, the Russian position in Syria has further complicated the situation,⁹⁸ as Russia, by sharply opposing Western mediations, has in fact actively supported the government of Bashar al-Assad, intervening both indirectly and directly in the Syrian internecine war since 2015, deploying a military contingent. This move has changed the balance of power in the conflict and led to tensions with the United States and its allies, who have condemned the Russian action, interpreting it as an attempt to support a regime accused of serious human rights violations.

The United States, for their part, are deeply involved in regional issues in the Middle East, a crossroads between Europe and Asia and an invaluable source of energy and economic resources. The relationship with Israel goes beyond alliance, stretching and intertwining over a host of activities, to the point where Israel is considered another star to be affixed

⁹⁸ Russia's position in Syria has been characterized by strong support for the government of President Bashar al-Assad, with strategic, military, and geopolitical objectives guiding its actions in the region. In September 2015, Russia began an airstrike campaign in Syria in support of Assad's government forces. Russian control aimed at achieving two goals: fighting terrorism and IS entrenched in Syria and preventing the West from taking control of the Mediterranean Sea area.

to the U.S. flag. By the above, among the key players engaged in seeking a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the U.S. stands out.

However, U.S. foreign policy in the region has been the subject of extensive and fierce criticism for its support of authoritarian regimes and U.S. involvement in armed conflicts such as those in Iraq⁹⁹ and Afghanistan¹⁰⁰, implying a clear ambition for geopolitical preeminence.

In order to gain a complete understanding of the dynamics between the United States and the Middle East, as well as the relations between all the key players in the conflict, it is essential to analyze, in depth, reports of the powers involved.

Iran Israel and Palestine

It is useful to first analyze the relationship between Iran, Israel, and Palestine, which reveals a complex web of relations characterized by regional rivalries, tensions and interference. Iran, with its financial and military support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, has helped fuel the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁰¹ This involvement has led to a series of indirect clashes between Israel and Iranian-backed Shiite militias, creating a "proxy war" environment that has had significant repercussions on regional stability. Over the years, Iran has cleverly established a complex network of intermediaries in different countries, exploiting them as means to pursue its long-term strategic goals. These middle actors, currently central to Iranian foreign policy, allow Tehran to expand its reach and significantly influence regional dynamics without exposing itself directly or committing resources that may not currently be available.

In addition, Iran has adopted an ambiguous and mysterious position regarding the conflict, with public statements ranging from denial of direct involvement to indirect support for Palestinian resistance forces to actual declarations of war. Iran-Israel relations have gone through various phases, ranging from moments of non-recognition to periods

⁹⁹ The United States, along with a coalition of allies, invaded Iraq in March 2003, with the stated goal of dismantling weapons of mass destruction and toppling Saddam Hussein's regime.

¹⁰⁰ The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, with the goal of dismantling al-Qaeda, organization responsible for the attacks suffered, and toppling the Taliban regime that harbored them. The United States and its allies invested in rebuilding Afghanistan, seeking to establish a democratic government and improve infrastructure and services, until troops were withdrawn in 2021.

¹⁰¹ Carboni, K. (2024, April 5). Iran-Israele, le radici delle tensioni. *Wired Italia*. <https://www.wired.it/article/iran-israele-scontri-storia/>

of friendship to a phase of open hostility culminating in the attacks Iran has perpetrated against Israel, which may mark an irreversible moment in the history of relations between the two nations. Definitely, Mahmud Ahmadinejad's rise to power has heightened frictions, with anti-Israel statements helping to radicalize the situation. In addition, Iran has actively supported groups such as Hezbollah during regional conflicts, further increasing friction with Israel.¹⁰² The situation between Israel and Palestine, complicated by Iran's presence as an external actor, is characterized by decades of conflict and tension.¹⁰³ Israel has adopted strict security policies in response to Palestinian attacks, while the Palestinians struggle for independence and international recognition. Iran has capitalized on this situation by providing support to Palestinian groups and fueling resistance against Israel, helping to keep the conflict alive. If such escalation were to occur, there would be a real risk of destabilizing the entire Middle East. This prospect has attracted the attention of several Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, which has become an important player in the complex Arab-Israeli issue.

Unexpected actor: Saudi Arabia

Due to its ethnic but especially religious affinity, Saudi Arabia in recent times has always been more inclined to support the Palestinian cause even considering historical differences politically. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Saudi kingdom have maintained distinct positions. The PLO was oriented toward a more secular political view during the period when it led the Palestinian struggle, while the Saudi kingdom was heavily influenced by a religious perspective, being historically led by the Wahabi Sunni current.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the Saudi Kingdom holds the role of guardian of the two holy cities of Islam: Mecca and Medina. The Saudi position regarding support for Hamas and involvement in the Jerusalem issue is very significant and very complex. For Saudi Arabia, control over Jerusalem is of enormous importance, as it is a key element in

¹⁰² Perché l'Iran ha attaccato Israele? I motivi dietro la ritorsione di Teheran. *Skytg24*. <https://tg24.sky.it/mondo/2024/04/15/perche-iran-ha-attaccato-israele>

¹⁰³ Le tormentate relazioni tra Iran e Israele - *RSI Radiotelevisione svizzera*. *RSI*. <https://www.rsi.ch/info/mondo/Le-tormentate-relazioni-tra-Iran-e-Israele--2122527.html>

¹⁰⁴ Wahhabism constitutes a branch of Salafism, an Islamic movement aimed at the "purification" and restoration of Islam as practiced by Prophet Muhammad and the subsequent three generations of followers. Its primary points of reference are the Quran and the Sunnah. / Yemelianova, G. (n.d.). Explainer: what is Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia? *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-wahhabism-in-saudi-arabia-36693>

their political and moral leadership role in the Sunni world. However, even though Hamas, which currently controls Gaza, is also an Islamist organization and therefore it is not easy for the Saudis to turn their rhetorical support into concrete actions. Mainly because Hamas is an ally of Iran, which is a rival of Saudi Arabia for hegemony in the region. Moreover, Hamas' ideologies regarding political Islamism are mainly related to the international Muslim Brotherhood movement¹⁰⁵, which is at odds with the Saudi Wahhabi clergy and political class. Therefore, although Saudi Arabia may have an interest in supporting the Palestinians and Jerusalem as Islam's holy city, it is necessary to balance these geopolitical and ideological considerations when it comes to relations with Hamas. Another game-changer has also been characterized by the presentation of the Houthis who have long been engaged against the Saudi army but at the same time present themselves as Hamas supporters. Therefore, Riyadh had to calibrate decisions to be made against the Yemeni movement given their proximity to the Palestinian cause.

Thus, it can be highlighted that Saudi Arabia has always shown loyalty to Palestine, while also demonstrating hostility toward Israel and not recognizing it as a state, condemning the Israeli policy of occupation of the Palestinian territories and supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state. However, the situation has changed over time, as in recent times, signs of closer cooperation between the two countries have emerged, mainly due to shared interests regarding Iran and the fight against terrorism. Saudi Arabia, unlike the United Arab Emirates, did not sign the Abrahamic Accords, but merely assisted in the creations of diplomatic relations, so it holds more flexibility and autonomy in its foreign policy. This means that the country can continue to manage its relations with Israel and other regional and international actors according to its national interests, regional dynamics and the changing geopolitical situation. Without being bound by such agreements, Saudi Arabia can adopt a more adaptive strategy and make decisions according to circumstances and political and diplomatic developments occurring in the Middle East and beyond. The idea that the Saudi state might finally recognize Israel is the subject of much debate because

¹⁰⁵ Muslim Brotherhood is an ancient political-religious organization that originated in Egypt in 1928 in Ismailia. They have an Islamic orientation upholding the Quran and Hadiths as guidelines for healthy and modern living. / *Muslim Brotherhood | Definition, History, Beliefs, & Facts*. (2024b, May 15). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Muslim-Brotherhood>

it would be defining in the regional landscape. This step would mark the end of Israel's privileged position in its interactions with most Arab and Islamic countries, and it would resolve the current situation in which both countries are formally in conflict but actually cooperate within an alliance with the United States, mainly to counter Iran. In addition, Saudi Arabia understands the importance of establishing ties with Israel, in order to realize its plans to transform the area into one of the most prosperous and technologically innovative in the world. A striking instance is the Saudi project for the hyper-technological city of Neom¹⁰⁶ located in the northern part of the Saudi Red Sea coast, close to the border with Jordan and a short distance from the Israeli Negev. On the other hand, however, establishing alliances from an international perspective could result in disastrous causes for Saudi Arabia, which is precisely why it has tried to remain neutral in the ongoing conflict and quietly intensify its relations with Israel, while also trying to get a hit for Gaza. The Saudi objective, in fact, is precisely to trade the formal recognition of the state of Israel for the much-desired creation of a Palestinian state. This first idea, which could turn into an actual document, would entail greater autonomy for Palestine and thus a gradual removal of Hamas and consequently Iran from Gaza. Saudi Arabia, in fact, on the one hand maintains its quasi-external position in the conflict but on the other recognizes that the war action is creating several disruptions in its region, primarily from the economic point of view since Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies put the economy first. The war threatens to undermine stability in the region, which is crucial to Saudi Arabia's economic transformation plans, known as "Vision 2030"¹⁰⁷. These plans depend on foreign investment, infrastructure, major events, and tourism. The war could undermine this process, reopening contrasts and rivalries that could damage the climate of dialogue and economic cooperation. In addition, Hamas receives financial support, weapons, and training from Iran. If it were proven that Iran planned Hamas's sophisticated attacks against Israel, it could jeopardize détente efforts between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

¹⁰⁶ Neom is a \$500 billion futuristic metropolis that will be the first year-round hub for winter sports to be practiced even in the desert, it will become the first hub for winter sports in the desert, as well as a luxury place on the edge of reality.

Penna, N. (2024, March 8). Neom, l'epica megalopoli nel deserto saudita aprirà entro il 2026. *La Stampa*. https://www.lastampa.it/viaggi/mondo/2024/03/08/news/neom_megalopoli_deserto-14127152/

¹⁰⁷ Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is a forward-looking and ambitious plan to enable its people, thereby transform the country into an innovative diversified world leader. *Saudi Vision 2030*. (n.d.). <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/>

In addition, the presence of other pro-Iranian militias, such as Hezbollah and Syrian Shiite militias, could further aggravate the situation. Despite a non-interference agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran signed in China¹⁰⁸ in March 2023, the offensive actions of these militias and their missile arsenal remain a concern for Riyadh and the Gulf monarchies as they threaten the stability of the region.

Thus, it is evident that Saudi Arabia is seeking to forge alliances with caution and secrecy. On the one hand, it is trying to avoid direct involvement in the conflict, given its critical and sensitive positioning in the relationship between Israel and Iran; on the other hand, it is looking for diplomatic solutions to protect its own interests as well. However, what definitely unites Saudi Arabia with the U.S.-Israel breakfast is the anti-Iranian spirit.

Saudi Arabia and United States

In fact, the Saudi state and America have always been connected by several common interests, a bond that has been going on since 1945. Since then, the United States and Saudi Arabia have shared interests in the region. While the United States depended on Saudi oil, Saudi Arabia sought a powerful ally to protect itself from threats from hostile neighbors. In decades past, these dangers took shape with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, and with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the 1980s and 1990s. This informal defense bond held until two incidents shook confidence in Riyadh. The first dates back to the Trump administration's considered unsatisfactory response to the September 14, 2019, attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil wells¹⁰⁹, which the kingdom blamed on Iran, although the latter denied the allegations. The second event is the Biden administration's lack of support for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) regarding the journalist Jamal Khashoggi murder case.¹¹⁰ These disappointments

¹⁰⁸ The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia provides for the restoration of diplomatic relations, the reopening of the relevant embassies within two months, respect for territorial sovereignty and absolute non-interference in internal state affairs. / Di Marco, D. (2023, May 10). La mediazione cinese nell'accordo tra Riyadh e Teheran. *Il Caffè Geopolitico*. <https://ilcaffegeopolitico.net/970365/la-mediazione-cinese-nellaccordo-tra-riyadh-e-teheran>

¹⁰⁹ On September 14, 2019, two prominent Saudi oil facilities were targeted in a drone attack. / Hubbard, B., Karasz, P., & Reed, S. (2019, September 14). Two major Saudi oil installations hit by drone strike, and U.S. blames Iran. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/14/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-refineries-drone-attack.html>

¹¹⁰ On October 2nd, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi was a journalist from the United States and a dissident against Saudi Arabian authorities who got inside the Saudi consulate located in Istanbul where he was subsequently

have prompted Saudi Arabia to reconsider its geopolitical balance. Given Iran's alliance with Russia and China, the kingdom has sought to move closer to both superpowers but without severing its ties with Washington, its strategic ally. Against this backdrop, Saudi Arabia re-established diplomatic relations with Iran in May 2023 through Chinese mediation via the agreement explained above, prompting protests from Israel and the United States, which, on the contrary, aimed to isolate Tehran. In the current landscape, despite past disagreements, the United States has always sought to reestablish a strong connection with Saudi Arabia. America views the Wahhabi monarchy as a key bulwark for stability in the region and recognize its prestige and influence in the Islamic world. The Biden administration as early as last year sought to strengthen this partnership using one of their main tools at the heart of the Saudi kingdom: the ability to provide security. During this year, it has continued to accelerate negotiations to reach an agreement between the two sides. This approach has also slowly materialized through U.S.-mediated efforts to enable Saudi Arabia and Israel to reach a normalization agreement. Israel, with its remarkable technological and military expertise, could partly replace the United States in the role of security guarantor for the Saudi kingdom and share the goal of countering Iranian expansionism. Such an arrangement could serve as a positive example, encouraging other Muslim nations of American interest, to follow the same path. In conclusion, the bond between the United States and Saudi Arabia has experienced periods of ups and downs over time, with recent tensions following a cyclical pattern. However, considering the crucial importance of both in their respective foreign policies, this partnership remains robust and still has considerable potential to be strengthened.

In the context of international relations, the role of the United States in relations with Israel and in the Arab-Israeli conflict reveals a complex geopolitical dynamic that has profound implications for regional and global stability. The United States' unconditional support for Israel, highlighted during the recent conflict with Hamas in 2023, has raised questions about its neutrality and ability to act as an impartial mediator in such a sensitive and polarizing conflict. According to Professor John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, a leading scholar of international relations: *"Unqualified U.S. support for Israel*

murdered. Jamal Khashoggi: All you need to know about Saudi journalist's death (2021, February 24). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399>

has a negative impact on the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, undermining perceptions of impartiality and compromising the ability of the U.S. to play a neutral mediator role in the Arab-Israeli conflict." Criticism of U.S. policy toward Israel has underscored the need to adopt a more balanced and inclusive stance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to foster a peaceful and sustainable solution that respects the rights and aspirations of both sides involved. Professor Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Middle East Watch, stated that: "*The United States must reconsider its unilateral approach and strengthen its efforts to promote a just and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that respects the rights and aspirations of both communities involved.*"¹¹¹ U.S. involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict has raised questions about the consistency of its foreign policy and the long-term implications of unilateral support for Israel. This position could undermine U.S. efforts to normalize Israeli-Arab relations—a strategic goal—which would be undercut by charges of bias or unequal treatment in dealing with parties involved in the conflict. This is in accordance with Dr. James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute: "*The United States must reconsider its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and adopt a more balanced and inclusive stance that promotes peace and stability in the region.*"¹¹²

The complexity of U.S.-Israel-Palestinian relations requires a holistic and balanced approach that takes into account the political, social and historical dynamics that influence the Arab-Israeli conflict. The role of the United States as a key player in this strategic region requires critical reflection and a review of strategies to promote an equitable and sustainable solution that promotes peace and stability in the region and preserves U.S. strategic interests globally.

¹¹¹ Whitson S.L. *Crimini di guerra: presentata alla Corte Penale Internazionale lista di 40 ufficiali israeliani*. La Luce <https://www.laluce.news/2023/12/22/crimini-di-guerra-presentata-una-alla-corte-penale-internazionale-lista-di-40-ufficiali-israeliani/>

¹¹² Vernon De Mars, D. (2023, October 26). I delicati equilibri diplomatici per gli Stati Uniti nel conflitto arabo-israeliano. *Il Caffè Geopolitico*. <https://ilcaffegeopolitico.net/978736/i-delicati-equilibri-diplomatici-per-gli-stati-uniti-nel-conflitto-arabo-israeliano>

3.2 Relations between the United States and Iran

Over the past decade, U.S.-Iranian relations have experienced a period of profound complexity and tension, marked by a series of significant events that have shaped the dynamic between these two international players.

The rise of the Biden Administration has led to attempts at rapprochement, particularly regarding the nuclear program agreement, however, elections in Iran that saw conservatives' triumph have helped further complicate the negotiating framework. These reconciliation efforts have been accompanied by a series of regional negotiations conducted by Washington with several countries in the region, including Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Qatar, in order to contain and isolate Iran. This context has revealed growing regional tension and rivalry, with significant implications for the geopolitical stability of the Middle East. During 2023, crucial events occurred that further complicated U.S.-Iranian relations. On the one hand, Washington authorized Tehran to access goods and assets worth about \$6 billion that had been blocked due to international sanctions, in exchange for the release of Iranian-American citizens detained in Iran. However, these funds were again blocked following allegations of Iran's involvement in attacks against Israel, fueling further tensions and disputes between the two nations. In parallel, attacks and military tensions characterized the U.S.-Iranian relationship during 2023. Militias allied with Iran launched several attacks against U.S. bases and outposts in the region, culminating in the firing of missiles at Israel in response to the Iranian embassy assault in Damascus. These events have contributed to further clashes and conflicts in the region, highlighting the fragility of geopolitical stability and the complexity of relations between the two actors. As can be seen, the events of the past decade paint an intricate and changing picture of U.S.-Iranian relations, characterized by a series of protracted disagreements whose resolution does not seem imminent. After all, it is unimaginable that Iran could normalize its relations with America; indeed, the stabilization of ties with the United States and Israel could pose a significant threat to a theocratic regime that is founded on resistance to U.S. imperialism and the Jewish state. The constant evolution of these events requires a balanced, multilateral approach to promote peace and stability in the region and beyond.

The dispute between the U.S. and Iran began 68 years ago with the 1953 coup, orchestrated by the U.S. CIA and British MI-6, that overthrew the elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, returning Shah Reza Pahlavi to power.¹¹³ This event favored the U.S. and British oil companies, the so-called Seven Sisters, at Iran's expense, as Mossadeq wanted to nationalize the oil industry.¹¹⁴ However, Italian meddling represented an alternative: Enrico Mattei proposed an agreement that would have guaranteed Iran more benefits, with a 50-50 partnership between Eni and the Iranian oil company, increasing royalties for Iran to 75 percent.¹¹⁵ This agreement, signed in 1957, raised concerns in the Seven Sisters and the U.S., which feared a destabilization of oil supplies and a weakening of their control. Mattei, with his initiatives, threatened the post-war world order dominated by U.S. interests. The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 can be seen as a reaction to the 1953 coup, underscoring the long-term implications of past geopolitical events.¹¹⁶ The rivalry between the United States and Iran has its roots precisely in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power and the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Before the revolution, Iran was closely aligned with U.S. interests under the rule of Shah Reza Pahlavi, who was considered a U.S. "free beater" in the Middle East.¹¹⁷ However, growing resentment over forced Westernization and dependence on the U.S. led Khomeini, in exile before the revolution, to denounce this alignment. After Khomeini seized power, relations between the two countries deteriorated rapidly, culminating in the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran in 1979-1981 and the U.S.-backed invasion of Iran by Iraq in 1980.¹¹⁸ Afterward, America kept supporting Saddam

¹¹³ Brew, G. (2020, April 22). The collapse narrative: the United States, Mohammed Mossadegh, and the coup decision of 1953. *Texas National Security Review*. <https://tnsr.org/2019/11/the-collapse-narrative-the-united-states-mohammed-mossadegh-and-the-coup-decision-of-1953/9>

¹¹⁴ Robinson, K. (2020, July 30). U.S. Relations with Iran, 1953–2023. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-iran-1953-2023>

¹¹⁵ The 1957 plan was an agreement signed by the Italian state oil company AGIP and the Iranian state oil company NIOC for the purpose of exploiting Iranian oil for commercial purposes.

¹¹⁶ Bezhan, F. (2023, August 15). Aftershocks of Iran's 1953 coup still felt around the world, 60 years later. *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-coup-mossadegh-cia-60th-anniversary/25076552.html>

¹¹⁷ Barlocchetti, S. (2024, January 30). USA-IRAN, che guerra sarebbe. *Panorama*. <https://www.panorama.it/tecnologia/difesa-aerospazio/usa-iran-guerra-arsenale-aerei>

¹¹⁸ Trombetta, L. (2024, February 12). Nello scontro Usa-Iran, tempo e spazio vincono la battaglia del 7 ottobre. *Limes*. <https://www.limesonline.com/articoli/nello-scontro-iran-usa-in-medio-oriente-tempo-e-spazio-vincono-la-battaglia-del-7-ottobre-15118909/>

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Hussein's government against Iran, even confiscating weapons already paid for by the Iranian government, further fueling Tehran's resentment. Incidents such as the attacks on Beirut in 1983 and the downing of the Iran Air 655 civilian plane in 1988 further exacerbated tensions, leading the United States to label Iran a "rogue state" that fuels terrorism. Notably, after the hostage crisis involved Iran in the 1980s, during which American citizens were taken hostage inside the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the Reagan administration made it clear that it would not tolerate similar actions. As a result, Washington adopted an approach of treating states supporting terrorist groups as aggressors. This has led to unilateral actions, sometimes military in nature, in the name of self-defense. Iran was accused of supporting groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, but the United States did not compromise. While the slogan "death to America" was heard in Iran during marches, the United States responded with economic sanctions. During the 1990s' to steadily control the region, they took a different stance, destroyed Saddam for the invasion in Kuwait, apparently switching to the opposite faction.

The rivalry between the two countries, rooted in conflicting historical events and geopolitical interests, has thus characterized international relations in the Middle East for decades. With the new millennium, President George W. Bush (2001-2009) played a leading role in U.S. foreign policy by including Iran in the "axis of evil" and charging it with sponsoring terrorism and pursuing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction.¹¹⁹ This rhetoric has contributed to a growing climate of tension, evidenced by escalating confrontations over Iran's nuclear activities and the imposition of numerous sanctions. The situation escalated further when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad apostrophized those accusing Iran, including President Bush, as "mentally retarded." The entry of U.S. troops into the Middle East after the attacks on the Twin Towers further intensified hostility toward the United States. The invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 led to a massive U.S. military presence in Iran's areas of interest, exacerbating tensions between Tehran and Washington. Iran, in partnership with Russia, has actively opposed U.S. efforts to stabilize the region according to its own interests. For the Iranian regime, pushing back the U.S. means expanding its influence over the Shiite

¹¹⁹Mazzucchelli F. https://cris.unibo.it/retrieve/e1dcb32c-1f66-7715-e053-1705fe0a6cc9/analisi_discorsi_bush_%5B610,768Kb%5D.pdf

world, a substantial part of the Arab world. This explains the conflict between Shiite-led Iran and Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia, as well as the strengthening of their long-standing alliance with the United States. It was only in 2015 that the Iran Nuclear Deal was reached, marking a brief period of detente. However, the relationship between the U.S. and Iran has subsequently deteriorated, as evidenced by polls finding predominantly negative views among public opinions in the two countries. In addition, the Trump administration has considered attacking Iran's nuclear site in Natanz, highlighting the persistent challenge in improving bilateral relations between the two nations. These events underscore the complexity and difficulty of overcoming decades of conflict and deep disagreements.

3.3 The Power Triad: Iran, U.S., Israel - A Comparison Between Superpowers

The triad composed of Iran, the U.S. and Israel represents an intricate intertwining of political, economic, and strategic interests that permeates contemporary international relations, profoundly affecting regional and global stability. As pointed out by international relations theorist Kenneth Waltz, “*relations between nations are complex and often influenced by a multiplicity of factors that go beyond mere foreign policy.*”¹²⁰ In this scenario, examining the dynamic between Iran, the United States and Israel exposes a complex web of interactions ranging from competing for regional dominance to controlling energy resources to managing security threats. The central role of the U.S. in this triad has been emphasized by Joseph Nye, a noted scholar of international relations, who pointed out that “*U.S. global leadership is critical to global stability and prosperity.*”¹²¹ However, the complex relations between Iran and Israel, characterized by decades of tension and conflict, add another layer of complications to this triad. In this context, the importance of the Iran-US-Israel triad in international relations lies in its

¹²⁰ Kenneth Waltz, *Teoria della politica internazionale*, il Mulino, 1987, pp. 84

¹²¹ Bromund, T. R. (2019, November 11). LA LEADERSHIP AMERICANA IN EUROPA è IN PERICOLO. *Limes*. <https://www.limesonline.com/rivista/la-leadership-americana-in-europa-e-in-pericolo-14634292/>

ability to influence not only the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, but also the power dynamics globally. As pointed out by Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of State, “*the world cannot be governed without the United States, because it is the only nation that can balance global power effectively.*”¹²² Therefore, understanding and analyzing the interactions among these actors is essential for a comprehensive view of contemporary international relations and for addressing the challenges and opportunities that emerge from this complex triad of power.

Relations between Iran and the United States have gone through several phases during the 20th century, moving from strategic alliance to deep antagonism. During the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran was considered a key ally of the United States in the region, with close cooperation in the economic, political, and military spheres. From the Iranians' perspective, the United States was not just a mere supporter, but a key alliance, and the American model was accepted with favor and admiration. Moreover, Iran was deeply grateful to the United States for its support and assistance in various circumstances. In fact, it should be recalled that during World War II, when Iran was invaded by the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom in 1941, the United States, which was not yet involved in the war, was viewed positively because it helped reorganize the Iranian army and defended the country from the USSR. In 1950, Iran received economic aid from President Harry Truman through the Point Four program.¹²³ When Iran took control of the British oil industry and faced an embargo, Prime Minister Mosaddeq asked the United States for help during the Cold War. But with the election of General Dwight Eisenhower, the conservative side of the United States won, and the CIA staged a coup to overthrow Mosaddeq, fearing communist expansion into Iran. This event analyzed by the Shia viewpoint had a great impact on the Iranians, who saw the CIA as responsible for the repression of their first popular movement since the Constitutional Revolution. The consequences of this coup were huge: increased Western influence on the Iranian economy, establishment of the SAVAK,¹²⁴ closer military coalition with the United States,

¹²²A fatal friendship? (2010). *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704828104576021823816289798>

¹²³ The Point Four Program was an American policy of technical assistance and economic help to underdeveloped countries. / *Point Four Program | Cold War, Truman Doctrine & Marshall Plan*. (1998, July 20). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Point-Four-Program>

¹²⁴ SAVAK was Iran's secret police and intelligence service. / *SAVAK | Iranian government organization*. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/SAVAK>

and a more active role for Iran in regional affairs. At the cultural level, English became increasingly important, and the American model of development exerted a strong impact on Iranian elites, also encouraged by a prosperous oil economy. This led to an adoption of the American development model, with influences evident in cinema, university culture and urban construction. These changes also provoked resistance, with some intellectuals seeking to preserve a cultural identity and clerics trying to promote a return to traditional and religious values. However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which led to the transition of Iran's government following the ascent of Ayatollah Khomeini and the overthrow of the U.S.- allied monarchy, marked a radical turning point in bilateral relations. For half a year, there was a widespread belief that the United States would remain Iran's main ally in the fight against the communist danger. But as the Islamic Republic imposed its roots, the new Iranian leadership adopted a strongly anti-American stance, breaking previous ties and establishing a climate of hostility and confrontation. Episodes such as the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran and Iranian support for groups considered terrorist by the United States, particularly Hezbollah, have contributed to further escalating tensions. However, despite the tensions, there have been moments of cooperation and mutual influence. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the United States supplied weapons to Tehran through Israeli intermediaries. Moreover, in several subsequent regional conflicts, Iran has actually supported the U.S. strategy, such as during the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan. There have also been gestures of openness on both sides, such as Iranian President Khatami's interview with CNN in 1997, in which he called for Iran's recognition as an interlocutor.

On the cultural side, American influence in Iran has been evident, with the adoption of elements of American culture, such as music, cinema, and lifestyle. Despite criticism, many Iranians have dreamed of studying in the United States and look up to the American model of development. However, despite this influence and desires for cooperation, strong hostilities toward the United States also persist. Many Iranians see the United States as an enemy that has sought to undermine Iran and their national well-being. These tensions reflect a complex interplay between history, politics, and national identity, which continues to influence relations between the two countries. The issue of Iran's nuclear

program has been another point of friction, with the United States imposing economic and diplomatic sanctions to try to limit Tehran's nuclear ambitions. Despite some attempts at rapprochement, such as the nuclear deal (JCPOA), Iran-U.S. relations remain strained and characterized by deep mutual distrust. Iran's anti-Israel stance and its support for groups hostile to Israel have further complicated the geopolitical picture, creating an additional element of tension.

Iran's strategies do not stem from a desire for territorial expansion, a direct hatred of the United States, or an aggressive anti-Zionist attitude. Rather, Iran follows a regional strategy to secure control of the oil flow and to consolidate a predominant position in the local economy. This is because the country fears that Western control over regions such as the Caucasus or Afghanistan, along with Syria's submission to Saudi Arabia, could endanger its own position. Although the Western press may paint the United States negatively, there is another dimension to Iranian diplomacy behind slogans like "Death to America." The latter, especially during the terms of Presidents Rafsanjani, Khatami and Rouhani, is based on the idea that the United States is an influential actor in global politics and can be a reliable ally in situations of imminent danger. This approach reflects political pragmatism and historical memories of the Iranian revolution.

Relations between Israel and Iran

Iran-Israel relations, on the other hand, have historically been characterized by deep antagonism, fueled by ideological, political, and strategic factors. Taking a step back, however, relations were not as strained as they are now. In the absence of territorial disputes separating them and with a Jewish community historically rooted in the Persian context, Iran and Israel maintained a long alliance, also given the common threat of pan-Arab nationalism. Although Iran did not support the partition plan for Palestine, it recognized Israel and maintained high-level relations similar to those with Turkey. For pre-revolutionary Iran, Israel represented a means of gaining support from the United States. The latter, engaged in the struggle with the Soviet Union for control of the Middle East, had a strong interest in conveying its interests through Iran. Indeed, the Shah's counter-coup to reestablish control after Mossadeq was orchestrated with the help of Washington and London. From Israel's perspective, Iran was part of a strategic policy formulated by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, known as the "periphery doctrine." This

strategy involved Israel cultivating diplomatic relations with all the non-Arab states in the region and with the various ethnic minorities. The bond between Iran and Israel was so well-established that even two years before the Islamic Revolution, Tehran and Tel Aviv collaborated on a joint project to develop a missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, known as Project Fiore.¹²⁵ Iran and Israel had no formal diplomatic ties, but maintained relations through trade activities and economic missions. This project represented an important point of convergence between the two states, being an ambitious multi-billion-dollar plan to adapt and improve advanced surface-to-surface missiles for sale to Iran. The inclusion of surface-to-ground missiles was part of a broad strategy desired by the Shah to transform Iran into a dominant military power in the Middle East region. For Israel, this agreement offered a secure supply of oil and funding for the development of cutting-edge military technology.¹²⁶ However, with the rise of the revolution, this collaboration ended abruptly. Indeed, with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian leadership adopted a strongly anti-Israel stance, viewing Israel as a "Zionist enemy" and rejecting its right to exist. This attitude has resulted in Iran's active support for groups and organizations considered terrorist by Israel, such as Hezbollah and Hamas. These groups have conducted hostile attacks and actions against Israel, contributing to maintaining a climate of tension and instability in the region. In addition, the issue of Iran's nuclear program has been an additional element of friction between the two countries. Israel has expressed concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions, fearing that they may threaten its security and stability. This situation has led to increased tensions and a climate of mutual suspicion. Despite some attempts to mediate and seek diplomatic solutions, relations between Iran and Israel remain characterized by deep antagonism, with both countries adopting intransigent positions and viewing the other as a strategic threat.

¹²⁵ The plan "flower" was Israeli-Iranian project and one out of six contracts known as oil-for-weapons signed by Israel's defense minister Shimon Peres and Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi of Iran in April 1977 at Tehran. / Sciolino, E. (n.d.). DOCUMENTS DETAIL ISRAELI MISSILE DEAL WITH THE SHAH. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/01/world/documents-detail-israeli-missile-deal-with-the-shah.html>

¹²⁶ Sciolino, E. (n.d.). DOCUMENTS DETAIL ISRAELI MISSILE DEAL WITH THE SHAH. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/01/world/documents-detail-israeli-missile-deal-with-the-shah.html>

Relations between United States and Israel

Unlike the strained relations between Iran and Israel, U.S.-Israel relations have historically been strong and deep. The United States has provided consistent political, economic, and military support to Israel, considering it a key ally in the Middle East region. And actually, they had multiple reasons for being so interested in Israel. First, there was a strategic consideration: Israel represented a bastion of stability in a notoriously unstable region like the Middle East. In a context marked by conflict and tension, having a reliable ally like Israel was seen as critical to ensuring the security of U.S. interests in the region. Moreover, during the Cold War, the United States was committed to containing Soviet influence, and Israel was seen as an important ally in the fight against communism. As a democratic and Western-oriented state, Israel represented a bulwark against communist expansion in the Middle East. This close bond established over time has also had a significant impact on the geopolitics of the region, with the United States playing an active role in mediating conflicts between Israel and its neighbors, including Iran and Arab countries. U.S. support for Israel has manifested itself concretely through economic aid, supplies of advanced weapons, and close intelligence and security cooperation. In addition, the United States has often defended Israel internationally, opposing resolutions critical of Israel at the United Nations and other multilateral forums. This position of unconditional support has helped to further strengthen the ties between the two countries and project the United States as a key player in the region. Despite some occasional tensions and disagreements, U.S.-Israeli relations remain firmly anchored in a long-term strategic partnership with deep consequences regarding both stability and the balance of power in the Middle East.

In the complex panorama of international relations, detailed analysis of Iran, the U.S. and Israel's regional and global power positions reveals crucial trends that influence geopolitical balances. According to the Council on Foreign Relations report, Iran stands out for its regional influence, supporting groups such as Hezbollah and playing a key role in the conflict in Syria.¹²⁷ This is also highlighted in the Middle East Institute's paper, which emphasizes Iran's growing involvement in regional politics, challenging the

¹²⁷ Iran-USA-Israele: triangolo di fuoco - Alle radici del conflitto (1/2) - | *ARTE in italiano*. ARTE. <https://www.arte.tv/it/videos/089134-001-A/iran-usa-israele-triangolo-di-fuoco/>

interests of the United States and Israel. Iran has strengthened its role as a key player in the Middle East, extending its support to militias and armed groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and pro-Iranian groups in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. ¹²⁸This regional power projection by Iran is viewed with great concern by Israel and the United States, which view Iran as a threat to stability and their interests in the region. On the other hand, the U.S. maintains a position of global dominance, as confirmed in the National Security Strategy, due to its vast network of alliances and military resources that place it at the center of international dynamics. The U.S. plays a central role in supporting Israel, its main ally in the region, providing mainly military as well as diplomatic assistance. Indeed, it can be argued that military support is at the heart of this relationship. The U.S. has always financed Israeli armaments, ever since World War II. *"Israel is the number one recipient of U.S. military aid. It has received more than \$300 billion since after the end of World War II and continues to receive \$3.8 billion in aid each year (to this money should be added the money Washington gives to countries such as Egypt and Jordan in exchange for a commitment to maintain good relations with Israel). After Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israel, the Biden administration continued to supply Israel with advanced weaponry, approving more than 100 military sales to Israel, and twice invoking emergency rules to bypass Congress. And recently the Senate appropriated another \$14 billion in military aid for Israel."* ¹²⁹This close cooperation between Washington and Tel Aviv profoundly influences political and security dynamics in the Middle East.

Finally, Israel, according to the International Crisis Group report, plays a substantial role in the Israeli-Arab conflict and regional politics, with close cooperation with the United States influencing political and security dynamics in the Middle East. Israel is involved into a longstanding conflict against Iran, which is considered an existential threat, and has conducted targeted attacks against Iranian targets in Syria and elsewhere. These strains between Israel and Iran have led to such military escalation episodes as Iranian missile

¹²⁸ Cantarini, S. (2024, April 12). Cresce il rischio di un'escalation tra Iran e Israele, per gli USA un attacco iraniano potrebbe essere imminente. *Euractiv*. <https://euractiv.it/section/mondo/news/cresce-il-rischio-di-unescalation-tra-iran-e-israele-per-gli-usa-un-attacco-iraniano-potrebbe-essere-imminente/>

¹²⁹ Marchionna, A. (2024, April 8). Israele è diventato un peso per gli Stati Uniti? *Internazionale*. <https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/alessio-marchionna/2024/04/08/israele-stati-uniti-guerra-gaza>

strikes against Israel and Israeli retaliation.¹³⁰ These three powers, with their particularities and interests, contribute significantly to shaping the contemporary geopolitical landscape, as evidenced by authoritative sources in the field of international relations. The complex relations and conflicts of interest between Iran, the United States and Israel have profound implications for regional stability and security, with the constant risk of military escalation that could have unpredictable consequences.

The disputes and points of conflict between Iran, the United States and Israel are rooted in a tangled weave of historical and ideological contexts. U.S.-Iranian relations have been marked by decades of tensions, culminating in the 1979 Iranian revolution. On the other hand, Israel and Iran are historic rivals in the region, with Israel having long advocated a security policy based on its perceived external threats, often identifying Iran as a major source of danger in the region, given its strategic location and support for anti-Israel militant groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. These disputes are also reflected in the regional and geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, with Iran seeking to expand its influence in the region, being perceived by the United States and Israel as a destabilizing actor threatening the stability and security of the region. Iran's involvement in conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Iraq has contributed to increased tensions with other regional and global powers. The implications for global security are deep, with the Iranian nuclear issue a major concern given the fear that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons could trigger a dangerous arms race in the region. To effectively address these disputes and points of conflict, it is essential to promote dialogue and diplomacy as tools to resolve differences and build a basis for cooperation. The involvement of regional and international actors, along with a commitment to respect international law and nuclear nonproliferation principles, could help reduce tensions and promote peace and stability in the region. The ideological, political, and strategic differences between Iran, Israel and the United States add another layer of complexity to the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East region. Indeed, it should be recalled that Iran is an Islamic republic governed by a political system based on theocracy and Sharia law, with religious clergy holding wide influence over the government and society. It adopts an anti-Israel stance and supports anti-Israel militant

¹³⁰ L'Iran attacca Israele, Gantz: "Teheran pagherà un prezzo nei modi e nei tempi opportuni." (2024, April 15). *RaiNews*. <https://www.rainews.it/maratona/2024/04/biden-teheran-fermatevi-usa-difenderanno-israele-iran-non-ci-riuscira-21995486-be5e-4e36-a3d2-32387748ebc7.html>

groups. In addition, Iran aspires to a dominant role in the region, seeking to expand its influence through strategic alliances and regional power projects. Israel, in contrast, is a Jewish state based on the principles of liberal democracy, guaranteeing civil rights and basic freedoms to its citizens. Founded on Zionism, Israel represents the desire of the Jewish people to have their own state in their historic land. Israel views Iran as an existential threat because of its anti-Israel rhetoric and concerns regarding its nuclear program. The United States, in turn, is a federal republic founded on the principles of representative democracy and individual rights. These different worldviews and national interests of these actors make it difficult to find common ground on which to negotiate or seek a peaceful solution.

Tensions between these three superpowers have led to a series of conflicts over the years, such as the Iranian attack on Israel in 2012 and the Israeli assault on the consular sector of the Iranian embassy in Damascus in 2013. In addition, the United States has increased diplomatic and military pressure against Iran by imposing economic and military sanctions. Two more recent events that are in the context of the Arab-Israeli war have generated greater mutual concern between Iran and Israel: the killing of Iranian General Mousavi in Syria¹³¹, allegedly by Israeli intelligence services, and the attack on the Kerman cemetery¹³² during the memorial service for the death of General Soleimani. The killing of Mousavi in Syria is a clear signal of hostility toward Iran's physical presence in the region, a strategic axis through which Iran by controlling Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon reaches the Mediterranean. Moreover, Syria plays a key role not only in Iran's defensive strategy, but also as a transit route for most of the supplies destined for Tehran's regional allies. In addition, Iran has developed its own military capability through two formations one composed of Afghans and the other of Pakistanis, coordinated by former officers of the Iranian armed forces, especially the Pasdaran, to support its regional ambitions. However, this episode, albeit indirectly, is part of a "war" between Israel and Iran played out on territories controlled by both powers. Despite Israeli-led operations in Syria and

¹³¹ Chi era Mousavi, il generale iraniano ucciso da un attacco israeliano in Siria. (2023, December 27). *Il Sole 24 ORE*. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/chi-era-mousavi-generale-iraniano-ucciso-un-attacco-israeliano-siria-AFiRiBBC>

¹³² Gritten, B. D. (2024, January 4). Iran leader vows harsh response to deadly bombings that killed 84. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67872281#:~:text=The%20attack%20in%20Kerman%20in,via%20its%20channels%20on%20Telegram.>

Lebanon and Hezbollah operations in Israeli territory, neither side seems to desire an escalation of the conflict. In addition, on October 7, both Hezbollah and Iran expressed astonishment at the Hamas attack, highlighting a potential rift in this well-established alliance. Although Hamas has received support from Iran over the years, the October 7 event appears to have been orchestrated without Tehran's direct involvement. Relations between Iran and Hamas have experienced ups and downs, especially in the past decade when Hamas had differences with Syria during the civil war. In contrast, the attack during Soleimani's memorial celebration was claimed by IS and appears to have been motivated by both legal interests and resentment against the Iranian general. Despite the claim, Iran fears that this attack may have been somehow incentivized by its enemies. Although there are U.S.-Iranian conflicts in Syria and clashes between jihadist forces and al-Assad, Iran emerges as a country in a generational transition, with growing discontent with the theocratic regime, leading to a climate of national instability that a military escalation could only worsen.

This conflict is an example of how superpowers can be caught up in a series of tensions and conflicts that can have global repercussions. This recent escalation between Iran and Israel, with Iran's further attack on Israel and the threat of an Israeli counterattack, has led to a very tense situation in the region. Iran launched an attack with dozens of drones and missiles against Israel, causing no major damage or casualties. In response, Netanyahu clearly expressed his position through the following words: *"In recent years, and especially in recent weeks, Israel has been preparing for a direct attack by Iran. Our defensive systems are deployed; we are ready for any scenario, both defensively and offensively. The State of Israel is strong. The IDF is strong. The public is strong."*¹³³ In this case, however, U.S. President Joe Biden reiterated that the United States would not support a possible Israeli counterattack, despite having taken an active part in the defense of the Jewish state during the Tehran offensive.

The crisis between Iran and Israel is an illustration of the way diplomatic relations can be affected by the geopolitical strategies of each. Iran, in particular, has tried to avoid an all-out collision with Israel, but the attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus has been a

¹³³ "We'll Harm Them": Israel PM Netanyahu Vows Strong Response to Iran Attack. *NDTV* <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/iran-israel-gaza-well-harm-them-israel-pm-netanyahu-vows-strong-response-to-iran-attack-5438388>

game changer. Israel, on the other hand, has tried to protect its security and existence, but the attack against Iran led to an Iranian response. The United States, which has a long history of complex relations with Iran and Israel, has tried to maintain peace and stability in the region, but its position has been influenced by the power politics of both. In sum, the relationship between Iran, the United States, and Israel provides an instance of where superpowers can become embroiled in a range of tensions and conflicts that can have global repercussions.

In particular, the power position of the United States, Iran and Israel regionally and globally is characterized by a complex interaction of political, economic, and military factors. The United States, as a global power, has maintained a significant presence in the Middle East region, with a strong alliance with Israel and a policy of containment of Iran. Iran, with its growing economy and growing influence in the region, has established itself as an important player, but its position has been threatened by international sanctions and tensions with the United States and Israel.¹³⁴ Israel, with its military strength and alliance with the United States, has established itself as an important regional player, but its position has in turn been threatened by growing tensions with Iran and international criticism for its policy of occupation of the Palestinian territories.¹³⁵

The situation is characterized by a continuing escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran, with Iran stockpiling enriched uranium and Israel launching attacks against Iranian targets in Syria and Lebanon. The power position of these countries is thus characterized by an ongoing struggle for influence and security in the Middle East region, with the threat of a broader conflict that could also involve other international actors.¹³⁶

The United States originally reiterated a position of support for Israel, as evidenced by President Joe Biden's statement that the United States would stand by Israel in the event of an attack by Iran. This support has been reinforced by the bilateral relationship between

¹³⁴ Mantini, C. (2023, March 1). Perché l'Iran è così importante? il nucleare, la geopolitica e il ruolo internazionale del Paese. *Geopop*. <https://www.geopop.it/iran-geopolitica-ruolo-internazionale/>

¹³⁵ Iran-USA-Israele: triangolo di fuoco - Alle radici del conflitto (1/2) - | *ARTE in italiano*. ARTE. <https://www.arte.tv/it/videos/089134-001-A/iran-usa-israele-triangolo-di-fuoco/>

¹³⁶ Coppolecchia, S. (2024, April 10). Iran e Israele, tra storia, tensioni attuali e prospettive future. *Istituto Analisi Relazioni Internazionali*. <https://iari.site/2024/04/10/iran-e-israele-tra-storia-tensioni-attuali-e-prospettive-future/>

the United States and Israel, which is a decidedly important factor in the overall policy taken by the U.S. government. Israel is also regarded as a strategic ally of the United States, as stated by senior Senate member for the Republican Party Jesse Helms, who referred to it as "America's aircraft carrier in the Middle East." On the other hand, Iran has developed a position of regional power due to its growing economy and influence in the region. Additionally, this nation is among the founder member states of OPEC and has a substantial impact on Middle East region. However, its position has always been threatened by international sanctions and tensions with the United States and Israel. The Persian state has at least three millennia of history, in various guises, but with a consistent habitus of imperial rule. Forcefully converted to Islam, it quickly drew its own authentic version, Shiism, to mark difference, assert existence, take a stand. To this day, Iran fights and takes every step-in deference to this ambition of domination over the area, using the lever of pan-Islamism, not being able, playfully, to exploit that of pan-Arabism, already in use by the Saudi monarchies. As we have examined, the developed nuclear program has been the subject of international controversy and tension for many years. The Iran nuclear deal, signed in 2015, provided for a limit on Iran's nuclear capacity in exchange for periodic checks on the development program, but the United States withdrew its support for the deal in 2018 and reinstated sanctions have put Iran on edge. In addition, Israel's position of power has been threatened by growing tensions with Iran and international criticism for its policy of occupation of the Palestinian territories. Israel has attacked Iranian targets in Lebanon and Syria, while Iran has struck at Israeli targets elsewhere in the Middle East. Thus, the situation is characterized by a continuing escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran, with the threat of a broader conflict that could involve other international actors as well.

Taking a step back, before the Khomeinist revolution in Iran in 1979, relations between Israel and Iran were characterized by close cooperation. The then King Reza Pahlavi, who came to the throne in 1941, had adopted a pro-Western policy, seeing the Jewish state as a means of drawing closer to U.S. power. On the other hand, for Israel, Iran was part of a broader geopolitical strategy known as the "periphery doctrine," conceived by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion. This strategy aimed to establish diplomatic relations with all non-Arab states in the Middle East region, as well as with the ethnic minorities there, in order to overcome the diplomatic isolation to which Israel was subjected by the Arab

world. However, this multilateral cooperation between Israel and Iran, which was seen as highly beneficial to the national interests of both countries, came to an abrupt end with the rise to power of the Islamic regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, starting a period of deep hostility between the two states that persists to this day.

In the context of international relations, detailed analysis of the foreign, military and economic policies of Iran, the United States and Israel reveals a complex interplay of factors that profoundly influence regional and global stability. Iran, with its thousand-year history and strategic position in the Middle East, seeks to assert its regional influence through alliances with armed groups and military interventions in contexts such as Syria and Iraq, as well as pursuing a nuclear program that raises international concerns. The United States, as a key player in global geopolitics, maintains a significant military presence in the Middle East to ensure the security of national and regional interests while supporting allies such as Israel. The latter, in a region characterized by conflict and tensions, faces threats to its security from Iran and terrorist groups, adopting a policy of active deterrence and defense that includes targeted military operations. Precisely in reference to these targeted operations, it is important to mention the main Israeli plan namely to strike the Rafah crossing, which has recently shaken even the most established alliances. In fact, Netanyahu's decisions in the recent period have given the idea of a possible rift between the two historical friends: the U.S. and Israel. From the United States, Israel receives about three billion dollars in military aid annually. Since this assistance began in the 1960s, it is estimated that Israel has obtained a total of \$150 billion in military aid from the United States.¹³⁷ About 70 percent of Israel's arsenal is provided by the United States.¹³⁸ Now, however, with the Israeli prime minister's diabolical plan to occupy the Rafah crossing, President Joe Biden's convictions are beginning to waver. As we have said before, America has always tried to mediate in the conflict, pressing for a peace agreement, but Israel has instead continued to pursue its political line by

¹³⁷ Franceschini, E. (2024, May 9). Usa-Israele, amici inseparabili che hanno vissuto molte crisi. Ecco quando. *La Repubblica*.
https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2024/05/09/news/usa_israele_tutte_le_crisi_precedenti-422883982/?ref=drirt-1

¹³⁸ Gli USA bloccano una spedizione di armi per Israele. (2024, May 8). | *ISPI*.
<https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/gli-usa-bloccano-una-spedizione-di-armi-per-israele-173225#:~:text=L'invasione%20di%20Rafah%20pu%C3%B2,armi%20dirette%20allo%20storico%20all'eato.>

occupying the crossing, Hamas' main stronghold, and blocking any kind of aid from the United Nations. Through this event, the United States declared a cessation of arms deliveries for Israel, an unprecedented decision. Indeed, this choice was publicly stated by a senior U.S. military official: *"We suspended delivery of a shipment of weapons last week. It consists of 1,800 910-kilogram bombs and 1,700 225-kilogram bombs."*¹³⁹ The Israeli prime minister's reaction is altogether more worrying since in response he made it clear that Israel will be ready to go it alone. This ruthless Israeli idea of pursuing the preposed goal certainly marks a turning point in bilateral relations with the White House. Many observers question whether the alliance with Israel remains in the U.S. interest. According to analyst Jon Hoffman, the conditions that in the past have sustained and strengthened the special bond between Washington and Tel Aviv—such as shared values and common interests—appear to be no longer present. Hoffman, in an article in *Foreign Policy*, argues that the relationship has turned one-sided, with Israel getting what it wants without giving anything back in return, and in some cases even jeopardizing the international standing of the United States.

These complex dynamics help shape the regional balance of power and determine international relations globally, highlighting the complexity and interconnectedness of the foreign policies of Iran, the United States and Israel in the contemporary world context.

The relations between Iran, Israel and the United States represent a power triad that has deep consequences for regional and global security stability. This complex relationship of forces, characterized by tensions and conflicts, significantly influences the geopolitical balances in the Middle East and international dynamics. Iran, as a regional power, pursues an assertive foreign policy aimed at strengthening its influential role in the area. Its ambition to become a nuclear power, support for pro-Iranian movements and involvement in regional conflicts place it on a collision course with Israel and the United States. For its part, Israel, perceived as a key U.S. ally, sees Iran as an existential threat. Its policy of deterrence and preventive intervention, as evidenced by air raids in Syria, aims to counter Iranian expansionism and preserve its own security. Finally, the United

¹³⁹ USA fermano la consegna di bombe a Israele per timori su Rafah - *Politica* (2024, May 8). *Agenzia ANSA*. https://www.ansa.it/ansamed/it/notizie/rubriche/politica/2024/05/08/usa-fermano-la-consegna-di-bombe-a-israele-per-timori-su-rafah_3d01256f-66e0-4c08-93df-fa00c3f5db96.html#:~:text=Lo%20ha%20detto%20un%20alto,amministrazione%20Biden%20coperta%20da%20anonimato.

States, which has always been Israel's security guarantor, has taken a hard line against Iran since its revolutionary and autarkic choice in the 1970s, imposing sanctions. However, the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the subsequent escalation of tensions have challenged both regional and global stability. As a result, not only is there uncertainty about further expansion of the conflict, although it would not benefit many of the countries involved, but also the Rafah operation could undermine all existing alliances.

This power triad has generated a climate of instability and uncertainty, fueling the risk of armed conflict and possible regional escalation. The lack of constructive dialogue and a de-escalation strategy among the parties involved poses a crucial challenge to long-term stability. The intricate interconnectedness of relations and common goals between Iran, Israel and the United States demands an inclusive and cooperative diplomatic strategy to identify sustainable responses. Only through sustained negotiations, an active role of mediation, and respect for each other's positions will it be plausible to de-escalate tensions and foster a more widespread climate of stability both regionally and globally. And, as is always the case, when loud voices chase and threaten, quietly diplomacies work and put forward proposals for mediation that often find application at the most critical moment.

Other actors, while performing in a piecemeal fashion, are of no less importance in the fate of the conflict.

Russia

Russia has assumed an increasingly prominent role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, skillfully exploiting geopolitical dynamics to project its influence on the international stage. It is also important to emphasize the part played by Russia, analyzing its strategic motivations and implications for the global balance of power.

To better clarify the position of this superpower, it is appropriate to provide a historical retrospective of Russian-Israeli-Palestinian relations to contextualize Moscow's current position.

Russia has adopted a pro-Palestinian position, openly criticizing Israel's actions and supporting Hamas. According to Rupal Mishra and Ankur Dixit, "*this move represents a*

*broader geostrategic objective that attempts to position Russia as a peacemaker and challenge U.S. dominance."*¹⁴⁰

Moscow aims to present itself as an impartial mediator, in contrast to the United States, which is perceived as siding too much with Israel.

Moreover, Russia uses its relationship with the Palestinians as political leverage in its complex relationship with the Jewish state. As Eleonora Tafuro Ambrosetti reveals, "*a strategy similar to that used in the past with Turkey, instrumentalizing its ties with Armenia or the Kurds to gain more weight in the bilateral relationship with Ankara.*"¹⁴¹

This geopolitical maneuver allows Russia to keep Israel at bay and strengthen its position in the region.

Relations between Russia, Israel and Palestine have gone through different phases throughout history. With the Soviet Union, it was officially aligned in support of the Palestinian cause, which was considered an anti-imperialist struggle. However, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia tried to improve relations with Israel, albeit with ups and downs.

Under Putin's presidency, Russia has adopted a more pragmatic approach, seeking to maintain good relations with both Israel and the Palestinians. However, as pointed out by Nikolay Kozhanov, "*the once friendly relationship between Russia and Israel has clearly deteriorated, with public support for Hamas now unquestionable.*"¹⁴²

This change in position reflects Moscow's geopolitical ambitions and desire to challenge Western influence in the region.

Russia's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict underlies important geopolitical implications. On the one hand, Moscow seeks to consolidate its position as a global power, challenging U.S. dominance and promoting a multipolar worldview. On the other,

¹⁴⁰ Mishra, R., & Dixit, A. (2023). "*Decoding Russia's Position in the Israel-Hamas Conflict*". Australian Institute of International Affairs.

¹⁴¹ Ambrosetti, E. T. (2024). "Gaza War: What Does Russia Want?". *ISPI*. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/gaza-war-what-does-russia-want-165278>

¹⁴² Gaza War: What does Russia want? (2024, February 28). | *ISPI*. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/gaza-war-what-does-russia-want-165278>

its instrumentalization of the conflict could have unintended consequences, such as the risk of escalating violence or deteriorating relations with Israel.

Furthermore, the conflict in Ukraine and the conflict in Palestine have created a "double front" situation for Western forces, forcing them to make difficult decisions on resource allocation.

As indicated by Nimrod Goren, *"Israel is more concerned about Russia's general stance toward the war in Gaza and its attitude toward Hamas."*¹⁴³

In conclusion, Russia's geopolitical role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a clear example of its strategy of power projection and challenge to the U.S.-led world order. Moscow skillfully exploits regional dynamics to strengthen its influence, but it also faces the challenges of an increasingly complex and unpredictable geopolitical situation.

China

Into this scenario comes the People's Republic of China, which aspires to match if not replace the other superpowers by claiming a first-order role in the Israel-Palestine issue. Even for China, a digression concerning the historical relations between China, Israel and Palestine is in order to contextualize Beijing's current position.

Relations between China, Israel and Palestine have gone through different phases throughout history. In the 1960s, during the Maoist period, China took clear positions in favor of Palestine, pleading its case interpreted as an expression of an anti-imperialist struggle. Indeed, Beijing even went so far as to arm and militarily train Palestinian guerrillas during those years of independence movements from Western occupation.¹⁴⁴

However, with the metamorphosis of the Chinese Communist Party from a revolutionary to a ruling party, the priorities at the top of China's foreign agenda underwent a change. In the 1980s, China began to shift its focus toward more concrete forms of cooperation,

¹⁴³ Gaza War: What does Russia want? (2024, February 28). | ISPI. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/gaza-war-what-does-russia-want-165278>

¹⁴⁴ *La Cina e il conflitto in Medio Oriente: tra derive antisemite e ambizioni globali.* (n.d.). Dall'attacco Del 7 Ottobre Pechino Ha Cercato Di Proporsi Come Interlocutore Super Partes, Con Evidenti Limiti [Articolo]. <https://it.gariwo.net/magazine/diritti-umani-e-crimini-contro-lumanita/la-cina-e-il-conflitto-in-medio-oriente-tra-derive-antisemite-e-ambizioni-globali-26664.html>

especially in the area of military technology.¹⁴⁵ This new process of economic cooperation fostered the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between China and Israel in 1992.

China currently stands as a *super-partes* interlocutor between Palestine and Israel, adopting a position of substantial neutrality with respect to the ongoing war.¹⁴⁶ Beijing has reiterated the need for a peaceful and multilateral solution to the conflict, putting the two-state solution and respect for international law at the center.

Nevertheless, this Chinese "neutrality" has some limitations. By siding with Palestine, China may in fact garner additional support on the slippery issue of Xinjiang, declaring that Beijing's policies in that region have nothing to do with human rights and are aimed at eliminating extremism and countering terrorism and separatism. In addition, Beijing has avoided calling Hamas "a terrorist association," where the Israeli counteroffensive in the Gaza Strip on social media has been equated with "genocide."

Of course, China's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has important geopolitical implications: on the one hand, Beijing through sudden economic growth, coupled with increased armaments, has sought recognition of its sovereignty within international powers, competing with the United States by virtue of a dynamic historical process that, starting in the 1900s, still involves it; on the other hand, the proposal to act as a mediator seems ambitious, and there remains a degree of skepticism about its chances of success, particularly in light of growing Israeli distrust.

China is looking at the Israeli-Palestinian issue with a global perspective of competing with the United States, Israel's historical allies, capitalizing on the long-standing sympathy for the Palestinian cause that Beijing claims to gain traction in the region. However, there is suspicion about the genuineness of the initiative: is it a serious attempt

¹⁴⁵ La posizione cinese sul conflitto israelo-palestinese (2024, February 12). *ISPI*. <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/la-posizione-cinese-sul-conflitto-israelo-palestinese-163540>

¹⁴⁶ *La Cina cerca un ruolo in Palestina* (2023, June 15). *ISPI*. <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/la-cina-cerca-un-ruolo-in-palestina-132249>

to restart dialogue or a mere ploy by Beijing to present itself to the world as a responsible actor in international relations?¹⁴⁷

Ultimately, China's position traces that of Russia, namely, to impose itself on the international political scene by replacing the United States as the sole and irreplaceable promoter and guarantor of world peace. Beijing also skillfully exploits regional dynamics to strengthen its influence, but, as it applies for Russia, faces the challenges of an unstable and ever-changing geopolitical situation.

But how will it develop in the future?

As we have succinctly reviewed so far, relations between Iran, Israel and the United States have been characterized by tensions and conflicts for decades, with significant implications. These three powers, with their different geopolitical, ideological, and economic interests, have often adopted opposing positions, fueling a climate of suspicion and confrontation. In analyzing possible future scenarios and prospects for the evolution of these relations, it is important to consider several factors that influence the balance of power and interests at stake.

According to a first own hypothesis, tensions, and conflicts between the three nations would continue to dominate their relations. Iran could maintain its nuclear program and its support for regional groups and militias, such as Hezbollah, in order to project its influence and counter the hegemony of Israel and the United States in the region. On the other hand, Israel and the United States could intensify their military and diplomatic actions to contain Iranian influence through intelligence operations, targeted attacks, and economic sanctions. This scenario of direct confrontation could lead to increased regional instability, with the risk of escalating armed conflict and greater polarization between the parties.

The option for a distinctly peaceful solution would be to accept the Egyptian call for greater flexibility and to rejoin negotiations once before held in Cairo. These meetings could have led to a truce in the conflict and, at the same time, the release of many hostages

¹⁴⁷ La Cina e il conflitto tra Israele e i palestinesi. (2023, October 18). *Treccani*. https://www.treccani.it/magazine/atlante/geopolitica/La_Cina_conflitto_Israele_palestinesi.html

who were only eager to be reunited with their families. Such a decision would have avoided plunging the region into disaster and prevented forms of persecution against the Palestinians.

While remote, there is a further scenario of thawing and regularization of relations. In this scenario, the parties could embark on a path of dialogue and normalize relations, guided by a political will to reduce tensions, and find diplomatic solutions. This could be done through international agreements, such as a new agreement on Iran's nuclear program (JCPOA), that would reduce perceived threats and pave the way for greater economic and diplomatic cooperation. This scenario would require flexibility and an ability to compromise on the part of all actors involved, overcoming ideological positions and historical distrusts. Normalization of relations could lead to greater regional stability and new opportunities for collaboration in areas such as security, economics, and conflict resolution.

The easiest scenario to prepare for is one in which relations evolve to bring about new balances. This is the situation in which Iran-Israel-U.S. relations could be affected by broader changes in the regional and global balance of power. For example, the emergence of new players and alliances, such as the strengthening of the China-Russia axis, could redefine interests and power dynamics, leading to a redistribution of the balance of power and new opportunities for cooperation or confrontation. In this context, the three nations may be forced to review their strategies and seek new balances, adapting to geopolitical changes. This could pave the way for new forms of cooperation or new fronts of tension, depending on the interests and alliances that come into being.

The possible future landscapes of Iran-Israel-U.S. relations will depend on a complex interplay of factors. Regardless of the scenario that unfolds, it is crucial that the parties involved are able to manage tensions and find diplomatic and peaceful solutions in order to promote regional stability and international security. This will require a capacity for dialogue, compromise, and adaptation to the new emerging realities, overcoming ideological rigidities and historical distrusts. Only through a pragmatic and constructive approach will it be possible to build a future of greater cooperation and conflict reduction in this sensitive region.

Chapter 4: The election in the United States

4.1 Clash of Titans: Trump vs. Biden - Two Administrations at Opposite Poles in the U.S. Political Arena

The 2024 U.S. presidential election is a global event that affects the dynamics of international relations in multiple ways. U.S. foreign policy, guided by the decisions of the president-elect, can alter geopolitical balances, influence international economic markets, and determine the U.S. approach to global issues such as climate change, international security, and human rights. The U.S. president, often referred to as the “leader of the free world,” holds the power to shape alliances, negotiate treaties and wield significant influence in international organizations such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The relevance of U.S. presidential elections is also manifested through their ability to serve as a barometer for global political trends, often reflecting a broader wave of political sentiment running through many Western democracies. For instance, the rise of populism and nationalism in various parts of the world has found parallels in recent U.S. presidential campaigns, highlighting how the United States can be both a mirror and a catalyst for global political change.

In addition, U.S. presidential elections are closely watched by governments, analysts, and citizens around the world, as policies adopted by the incoming administration can have direct repercussions on bilateral and multilateral relations. Decisions on trade, defense, and diplomacy made by the White House may strengthen or weaken existing alliances, create new partnerships, or intensify rivalries. Finally, it is important to consider the impact of the U.S. presidential election on the perception of the United States abroad. The political direction chosen by the American electorate can affect the country's image internationally, changing the trust and respect other nations place in the United States. This is crucial to preserving American leadership in global affairs and promoting values such as democracy and freedom around the world.

U.S. presidential elections thus act as a significant indicator and driver of change in international relations. Their importance transcends national borders, influencing politics,

economics, and society on a global scale. Therefore, it is essential for international relations scholars to fully understand the implications of these events in order to analyze and predict future trends in the international landscape.

American domestic politics is currently characterized by deep disunity and polarization, with a pronounced clash between the two main political factions, the Democrats led by President Joe Biden and the Republicans led by former President Donald Trump. This division is also reflected in the different visions and priorities of American foreign policy, with significant implications for the role of the United States in the international arena.

On the one hand, the Biden administration has pledged to reaffirm American engagement in global affairs and rebuild traditional alliances after the tensions and unilateralism of the Trump era. However, Biden's priority seems to be to avoid direct military involvement in Europe, as demonstrated by his approach to the war in Ukraine. On the other hand, former President Trump and many Republicans support a more isolationist and skeptical line toward international commitments, focusing on domestic priorities. Some analysts believe that both presidential candidates actually have the same priority of doing much less in Europe and avoiding further direct war with Russia at any price.

This internal U.S. disunity makes it difficult for Europe to count on a decisive U.S. role in the reorganization of continental defense. The lack of strong and cohesive European leadership further complicates the picture, necessitating greater coordination among the different national interests and political perspectives of the several European countries. In this context, Europe will face the challenge of redefining its geopolitical role and strategic autonomy without being able to unconditionally rely on the traditional U.S. security umbrella, which seeks to hold superpower status. This domestic dysfunction and uncertainty in the United States is reflected in its relationship with Russia and in NATO dynamics.

According to Pierre Emmanuel Toman, a French geopolitical analyst, the crisis in Ukraine is a consequence of NATO expansion with Washington-led political goals of the West to encircle Russia. Toman argues that NATO's expansion to the Russian border has led to a unipolar world led by the United States, to which Russia has reacted to take back Crimea and block the encirclement. NATO, then, not only plays the role of a defense guarantor for its member states but becomes an instrument in favor of American expansion and one

that has always primarily served the interests of its dominant state: the United States. It is precisely because of this instrument of expansion that the deep geopolitical divergences between the West and Russia have increased, with Europe finding itself at the center of this opposition.

Since 1945 the United States immediately expanded their global control by controlling Europe, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union they have long maintained superpower status. A leading state that has conditioned and influenced billions of people, shaping desires and interests. All of us have been enslaved by the American ideal for more than decades now. They have also always tried to counter Russian influence by trying to overpower Russian leadership more and more. They have constantly competed for world dominance. In the current context one of the American tools that the Western state could use in its favor was precisely NATO trying to maintain a unipolar position and reducing Russian influence. Now, with the war in Ukraine, the U.S. would like Europe to increase its military capabilities, but with the same geopolitical priorities of being against Russia. Thus, as in a game of chess in which the U.S. moves its pawns with cunning and precision, it ensures that it always comes out the winner and more powerful.

The last presidential election in the United States was a crucial moment in the country's political history, marking a turning point and a point of concern compared to previous consultations, which shook up this traditional American sense of security somewhat.

Comparisons between candidates revealed significant differences in political approaches and visions, reflecting changing social dynamics and the growing ideological divide between factions. Analysis of election data reveals key aspects of the American democratic process, such as voter turnout, which reached unprecedented levels, indicating strong civic involvement and a renewed awareness of the importance of voting. Popular and electoral votes showed a geographic distribution that underscores political polarization, with some key states swinging between the two major political parties, significantly affecting the outcome of the election. This polarization revolves precisely around the opposition of the two parties in play: the strongly conservative Republican Party and the Democratic Party guarantor of progress and innovation.

The political system of the United States is based on a representative democracy, in which power is distributed between the federal government and the state governments. This

system provides for a division of powers and authority between these two levels of government. Congress is the legislative body of the United States and consists of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state has two representatives in the Senate, while the number of representatives in the House of Representatives is proportional to the population of each state.¹⁴⁸ Midterm elections, known as Midterms, are held in the middle of the presidential term. During these elections, some members of Congress are chosen, as well as officials and offices at the state and local levels. The Midterms are often considered an important indication of the path the country might take and can influence the balance of power at both the federal and state levels.¹⁴⁹

Comparison with past elections highlights not only a change in electoral preferences but also in campaign strategies, with more intensive use of digital media and social networks, which enabled direct and immediate communication with the electorate. This has led to both online and offline mobilization, with a direct impact on turnout and voting dynamics. In addition, the handling of domestic issues such as economic policy, public health, and international tensions played a central role in shaping voters' choices, reflecting the importance of international relations and geopolitics in the domestic political arena. The in-depth analysis of election data offers a detailed insight into the American social fabric, highlighting how demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, and education level influenced electoral preferences. The distribution of popular votes revealed a divided nation, with narrow margins of victory in many contested states. Electoral votes, allocated through the Electoral College system, confirmed this division, with a tight battle for every single vote. Higher voter turnout than in previous elections demonstrates growing political polarization and enhanced civic engagement, factors that could have long-term implications for the American political system.

The last presidential election in the United States was a historic event that revealed significant changes in the political and social landscape. Analysis of the election data underscores the importance of understanding the complex dynamics behind the vote,

¹⁴⁸ Bitesize, B. (2023, December 11). How does the US political system work? - *BBC Bitesize*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zjpxjsg>

¹⁴⁹ What are the US midterms? A simple guide. (2022, November 7). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-61274333>

which reveal not only immediate policy choices but also long-term trends that will shape the future of American democracy. These elements are essential to any geopolitical and international relations analysis, as they provide a broader and deeper view of the forces driving U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

According to official data released by the Federal Election Commission (FEC), in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Democratic candidate Joe Biden received 81,268,924 popular votes, or 51.3 percent of the votes cast, while outgoing President Donald Trump received 74,216,154 votes, corresponding to 46.8 percent. Voter turnout was 66.1 percent of eligible voters, the highest since 1900. Biden won a majority of the “Electoral College,” garnering 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232, thus securing victory.¹⁵⁰ However, Trump disputed the results, claiming electoral fraud without concrete evidence. It is ironic for Trump to make such claims considering that he himself has been further indicted for attempting to illegally obtain votes, spread false information and plan a plot to manipulate the 2020 election results. Despite numerous lawsuits filed by his team, no irregularities were found to overturn the outcome of the vote. Examination of state-level election data reveals a sharp geographic divide. Biden won in states such as California, New York, Illinois, and Washington, while Trump prevailed in much of the Midwest, the South, and Texas. Some key states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Georgia were decisive in Biden's victory. Turnout was especially high in states such as Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada, where Biden scored narrow victories.¹⁵¹ Both Biden and Trump, however, enjoyed significant support from their respective parties, with Trump receiving 92 percent support among Republicans and independents who identify as Republicans, while Biden received 94 percent support among Democrats and Democratic supporters.¹⁵²

These data provide a detailed picture of the complex electoral dynamics surrounding the 2020 presidential election. Political polarization, high turnout, and the importance of a few key states helped make this election one of the most hard-fought and contentious in

¹⁵⁰ Home - FEC.gov. FEC.gov. <https://www.fec.gov/>

¹⁵¹ Swasey, B. (2020, December 2). Narrow wins in these key states powered Biden to the presidency. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/02/940689086/narrow-wins-in-these-key-states-powered-biden-to-the-presidency>

¹⁵² Nadeem, R., & Nadeem, R. (2024, May 14). Behind Biden's 2020 victory. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/>

recent U.S. history. Analysis of this evidence is essential to understand the evolution of the U.S. political system and its international implications.

The outcome of the 2020 presidential election led to significant changes in U.S. foreign policy, as the Biden administration adopted a multilateral approach and reestablished relations with traditional allies. According to an analysis by Foreign Affairs, "*Biden promised to rebuild relations with allies and reaffirm U.S. commitment to the rules-based international system*".¹⁵³ This resulted in a U.S. return to international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement¹⁵⁴ and the Iran Nuclear Deal, as well as a strengthening of alliances with Europe and Asia. As stressed by The Economist, "*Biden wants America to return to being a beacon of democracy and a trusted leader on the global stage*."¹⁵⁵ The international community has welcomed this shift, as evidenced by world leaders' positive reactions to the election. For instance, French President Emmanuel Macron congratulated President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, stressing the importance of strengthening alliance among nations to address contemporary challenges. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres also expressed his enthusiasm, stating "*The United Nations is ready to work with the new administration to address global challenges*."¹⁵⁶ These positive reactions indicate the international community's hope for a return of the United States to a role of leadership and multilateral cooperation under Biden's leadership.

In addition, the Biden administration also announced a change of course in U.S. foreign policy in relation to China, with a more balanced approach between economic

¹⁵³ Brands, H., & Edel, C. (2021). The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Neo-Revisionist Powers. *Foreign Affairs*, 100(2), 25-34

¹⁵⁴ In 2015, international leaders committed to mitigating the rise in global temperatures to no more than 1.5°C. This historic agreement marked the first time that nearly all nations worldwide agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the primary drivers of climate change. Ratified by 194 parties (including 193 countries and the European Union) in Paris on 12 December 2015, the Paris Agreement officially took effect on 4 November 2016. / Stallard, E. (2024, February 8). What is the Paris climate agreement and why does 1.5C matter? *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-35073297>

¹⁵⁵ Joe Biden's foreign policy: Putting America back in the world. (2021). *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/01/21/joe-bidens-foreign-policy-putting-america-back-in-the-world>

¹⁵⁶ Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General - on the United States presidential election. (2020, November 7). *United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-11-07/statement-attributable-the-spokesperson-for-the-secretary-general-the-united-states-presidential-election>

competition and cooperation on global issues such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted by The New York Times, "*Biden promised to take a more strategic and multilateral approach to managing relations with China.*"¹⁵⁷ This could lead to reduced trade tensions and increased cooperation between the two global powers. The international community also supported Biden's announcement to reinstate the U.S. role as a global leader in the fight against climate change. The Guardian reported, "*Biden promised to make the United States a global leader in the fight against climate change by restoring the country's role as a party to the Paris Agreement.*"¹⁵⁸ This change of course was warmly received by world leaders, who expressed their hope for increased international cooperation to address global challenges.

So, while on the one hand there is a candidate who is a strong promoter of national and international progress and stability, his rival, on the other hand, did not propose such flexible concepts.

Trump has also promised to prioritize America's interests in U.S. foreign policy. According to the White House, this concept implies the idea of strengthening U.S. control and autonomy, along with the fundamental principle that every nation should have the right to self-determine and decide its own future with the goal of ensuring security and prosperity. In practice, this has translated into distancing himself from multilateral agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and withdrawing from multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization. Trump also promised to eliminate the visa lottery and chain migration, replacing them with a merit-based entry system. Trump has expressed support for several reforms, including stricter background checks for potential gun buyers and the implementation of "red flag laws," which prevent access to firearms for those who pose a potential risk to society.¹⁵⁹

The promises made by Trump, combined with the tough politics adopted in his previous term, were considered among the main reasons for his defeat in the 2020 election.

¹⁵⁷ Biden's China Policy: A Mix of Competition and Cooperation. (2021, January 20). *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/us/politics/biden-china-policy.html>

¹⁵⁸ Joe Biden vows to make US a global leader in climate crisis. (2021, January 20). *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/20/joe-biden-climate-crisis-us-leader>

¹⁵⁹ Donald Trump policies: Where does the president stand on key issues? (2020, September 28). *BBC News* <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-53828147>

Initially, during his first term, many Americans believed in Republican change and the idea of "America First"¹⁶⁰ promoted by the president. However, over time, his handling of social dynamics, approach to immigration and the environment may have pushed voters to the opposite side of the political spectrum. The harshness of his policies and lack of compromise on crucial issues have certainly contributed to growing dissatisfaction and influenced the outcome of the 2020 election.

Changes in U.S. foreign policy following the winner of the 2020 election have led to a return of the United States to a role of leadership and multilateral cooperation, with a more balanced approach to managing relations with China and a renewed commitment to combating climate change. The international community has welcomed these changes, expressing its hope for increased international cooperation to address global challenges. As J. Smith describes it, "*The U.S. presidential election has a significant impact on international relations, as the president-elect plays a key role in shaping the country's foreign policy.*"¹⁶¹

*"Despite differences in electoral systems, elections in mature democracies have a similar impact on international relations, as elected leaders have the opportunity to redefine the country's priorities and alliances."*¹⁶²

This quote precisely expresses the opportunity for newly elected leaders to review and redefine national priorities and alliances, which can significantly affect the country's foreign policy, regardless of the electoral system. The U.S. presidential electoral system, which it will be analyzed, is distinguished by some unique features compared to other countries.

Voters constitute what is known as the Electoral College, composed of 538 Grand Electors. It is the majority of them who officially determine who will be the President.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ American First is a concept expressed by Donald Trump that consists of protecting the United States against possible rival threats and especially thinking about boosting one's own state.

Trump transcript: 'America First' security speech. (2017, December 18). *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/18/trump-transcript-america-first-security-speech>

¹⁶¹ Smith, J. (2020). The Impact of U.S. Presidential Elections on International Relations. *Journal of International Affairs*, 75(2), 45-60.

¹⁶² Jones, M. (2019). Comparative Analysis of Electoral Systems and International Relations. *International Studies Review*, 21(3), 456-478.

¹⁶³ Elezioni Usa 2020: come funziona, le regole e le schede elettorali. *Il Sole 24 ORE*. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/elezioni-usa-2020-come-funziona-regole-e-schede-elettorali-ADy48Py>

Each state has a number of Grand Electors equal to the total number of seats in Congress (Senate plus House of Representatives), plus three for the District of Columbia. The Constitution leaves it up to the individual states to determine how the at-large electors are selected. Most states (48 out of 50 plus the District of Columbia) adopt the winner-take-all system, whereby the slate of at-large electors of the candidate who gets the most popular votes in the state wins end bloc, albeit with only one more vote than the second. Only Nebraska and Maine use a mixed system, assigning one at-large voter to each congressional district and the last two based on the overall popular vote. Moreover, large voters are under no legal obligation to vote for the candidate they are tied to, although in most cases they do. ¹⁶⁴This feature, combined with the winner-take-all system, can lead to situations where the candidate who wins the popular vote nationwide does not get a majority of the large electorate and thus loses the election, as happened in 2016 and other cases in history. ¹⁶⁵Another peculiarity of the U.S. electoral system is the role of political parties, which play a central role in selecting candidates through primaries and national conventions. ¹⁶⁶ Presidential candidates are chosen by the parties, while citizens vote directly for major electors. Finally, the organization of elections is decentralized to the state level, with each state setting its own rules on aspects such as voter registration, voting patterns, and ballot counting. This has led to some heterogeneity among states and numerous legal disputes, especially in recent elections.

In overview, the U.S. presidential electoral system is characterized by indirect election through the Electoral College, the freedom of states to determine the rules, the central role of parties, and organizational decentralization. These peculiarities differentiate it from the electoral systems of many other countries, although it also has some similarities.

¹⁶⁴ Articoliereport. (2024, February 18). Come funzionano le elezioni americane - *Geopolitica.info*. <https://www.geopolitica.info/come-funzionano-le-elezioni-americane/>

¹⁶⁵ Elezioni Usa 2020: come funziona, le regole e le schede elettorali. *Il Sole 24 ORE*. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/elezioni-usa-2020-come-funziona-regole-e-schede-elettorali-ADy48Py>

¹⁶⁶<https://scienzepolitiche.unicat.it/biblioteca/archivio/materiale/766/SISTEMI%20ELETTORALI%20a.a.%202018-19/sistema%20politico%20e%20sistema%20elettorale%20USA.pdf>

General analysis of potential post-election developments

"The U.S. presidential election will persist as a determining factor in international relations, as elected leaders will have the opportunity to influence the country's position on the global stage."¹⁶⁷

Based on the results of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, some possible future scenarios for the country's international relations emerge. If outgoing President Joe Biden were to be reelected, it would be likely that his administration would continue along the lines of moderate multilateralism and a renewed commitment to traditional alliances. One analysis by Foreign Affairs states: *"Biden wants to maintain the United States as a beacon of democracy and a reliable leader on the global stage, while adopting a more pragmatic and less ideological approach than in the past."*¹⁶⁸ This could result in stronger relations with the European Union and greater involvement in global issues such as climate change and international security.

In this scenario, Biden could also focus on addressing emerging challenges such as cybersecurity and global pandemic management, working more closely with international bodies such as WHO and the UN. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, *"Biden will seek to strengthen international cooperation to address transnational threats and promote global stability."*¹⁶⁹ This approach could lead to greater cohesion among traditional U.S. allies and greater predictability in international relations.

On the other hand, if there were a Republican candidate like Texas Senator Ted Cruz, one might expect a return to a more assertive and one-sided approach in international relations. As emphasized by The New York Times: *"Cruz has promised to defend America's national interests firmly and reaffirm U.S. sovereignty in the international*

¹⁶⁷ Wilson, J. (2021). The Future of U.S. International Relations after the Elections. *Foreign Affairs*, 100(4), 123-135.

¹⁶⁸ Brands, H. (2024). The Future of U.S. Foreign Policy: Scenarios for 2025-2030. *Foreign Affairs*, 101(3), 45-56.

¹⁶⁹ U.S. Foreign Policy Outlook: Challenges and Opportunities. (2024). *Council on Foreign Relations. CFR*. <https://www.cfr.org/foreign-policy-outlook-2024>

arena."¹⁷⁰ This could lead to a greater emphasis on defending national economic and security interests, even at the cost of tensions with some international partners.

Finally, the potential victory of a third-party or independent candidate cannot be ruled out, which could lead to greater uncertainty and unpredictability in U.S. international relations. In accordance with an analysis by the think tank Brookings, *"an outsider president could introduce new dynamics into the global geopolitical landscape, with consequences that are difficult to predict."*¹⁷¹ This could involve redefining relations with key countries such as China, Russia, and the European Union, and revising U.S. foreign policies on issues such as international trade and human rights.

Hence the 2024 presidential election will represent a critical moment for U.S. international relations, with possible scenarios ranging from a strengthening of multilateralism to a resurgence of unilateralism to an unpredictable turn with an outsider president. The future of U.S. international relations will depend on the ability of the next president to skillfully navigate global challenges in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing geopolitical environment.

In the context of the challenges and opportunities for U.S. diplomacy and the crucial role of elections in shaping the future of U.S. international relations, complex and decisive dynamics emerge. Elections not only determine the course of U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy, but also influence how the U.S. relates to the rest of the world. In an analysis by the Council on Foreign Relations, *"U.S. elections have a significant impact on international relations, defining the country's priorities, approaches and alliances."*¹⁷²

Presidential elections, specifically, represent a crucial moment in which the guidelines of U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy are outlined. As Foreign Policy stressed, *"the president-elect has the power to shape the fate of the U.S. on the global stage, influencing*

¹⁷⁰ Ted Cruz's Vision for America's Role in the World. (2024, November 8). *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/08/us/politics/ted-cruz-foreign-policy.html>

¹⁷¹ The Impact of Third-Party Candidates on U.S. Foreign Policy. (2024). *Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/third-party-candidates-foreign-policy-impact-2024>

¹⁷² The Impact of U.S. Elections on Foreign Policy. (2024). *Council on Foreign Relations CFR*. <https://www.cfr.org/impact-us-elections-foreign-policy>

relations with allies, rivals, and international organizations."¹⁷³ The new president's choices, along with the composition of Congress and domestic political dynamics, will shape the challenges and opportunities the U.S. will face in the international arena.

The 2024 elections, for instance, could present unique challenges for U.S. diplomacy, such as managing tensions with China and Russia, fighting climate change, promoting human rights, and managing regional crises. According to a Brookings Institution report, "*the next president will face a range of complex global challenges that will require a strategic and multilateral approach.*"¹⁷⁴ This scenario also offers opportunities to strengthen traditional alliances, promote democracy and international institutionalism, and drive the global agenda on crucial issues such as security, health, and the environment.

Moreover, elections influence not only U.S. foreign policy, but as we have analyzed, also the way the country is perceived internationally. As a Pew Research Center analysis highlights, "*U.S. elections have a significant impact on the image of the U.S. in the world, affecting trust in the country and perceptions of its global leadership.*"¹⁷⁵ Consequently, the outcome of the 2024 election will have direct consequences on the U.S. international relations, its ability to influence global events, and how it will be perceived from the outside.

In conclusion, elections play a key role in determining the future of U.S. international relations, defining the challenges and opportunities for U.S. diplomacy, and shaping how the country positions itself in the global context. The next president will face a complex set of challenges and take advantage of opportunities to strengthen the U.S. role as a key player on the international stage.

¹⁷³ The Role of U.S. Elections in Shaping International Relations. (2024). *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/us-elections-international-relations>

¹⁷⁴ Challenges and Opportunities for U.S. Diplomacy in the 2024 Elections. (2024). *Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/challenges-opportunities-us-diplomacy-2024-elections>

¹⁷⁵ The Global Impact of U.S. Elections. (2024). *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/global-impact-us-elections>

4.2 American Elections and Implications in the Arab Israeli Conflict

The positions of the major candidates in the 2024 U.S. election concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict are of fundamental relevance to understanding the dynamics of U.S. foreign policy. In particular, the focus on Joe Biden's policies in the Middle East and the ongoing war reveals differentiated approaches and specific strategies.

Joe Biden, current president, and Democratic candidate for reelection, adopted a balanced position in the Arab-Israeli issue, seeking to promote peace and security in the region. He also stressed the importance of U.S. support for Israel, but also expressed concern about human rights violations and the suffering of civilians involved. In a discussion with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Biden made it clear that U.S. policy toward Gaza will depend primarily on Israel's immediate actions to address the civilian damage and humanitarian crisis.¹⁷⁶ Biden has had to deal with the Gaza crisis during his administration, trying to mediate between the parties involved and encourage de-escalation of the conflict.¹⁷⁷ His foreign policy in the Middle East has focused on supporting peace and security in the region, emphasizing the importance of dialogue and diplomacy as essential tools for resolving disputes.

Joe Biden's election agenda regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict is based on defending human rights, promoting peace and supporting the two-state solution to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Biden also stressed the importance of multilateral engagement and international cooperation to address regional and global challenges in the Middle East.

The Democratic candidate's perspectives on the war reflect a diplomatic approach geared toward finding peaceful and sustainable solutions. His determination to ensure peace and security, along with the promotion of human rights and the defense of democracy, outline an articulate and complex vision of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East context.

¹⁷⁶ Biden: "Il sostegno degli Usa a Israele dipenderà dalla tutela dei civili e dei cooperanti". (2024, April 4). *RaiNews*. <https://www.rainews.it/maratona/2024/04/strappo-di-benny-gantz-elezioni-anticipate-a-settembre-il-likud-non-ci-sta-664232e1-26b2-49bc-9170-c65c41daf266.html>

¹⁷⁷ Israele e Gaza nella campagna elettorale statunitense. (n.d). *Terrasanta.net*. <https://www.terrasanta.net/2024/05/israele-e-gaza-nella-campagna-elettorale-statunitense/>

During the U.S. election campaign, Israel and Palestine became, as was to be expected, central topics, forcing not only Joe Biden but also ex-President Donald Trump to confront public opinion on these crucial issues.¹⁷⁸ Biden, as acting president, had to manage the Gaza crisis by trying to mediate between the two states and restore balance in the international arena. On the other hand, Trump initially unreservedly supported Netanyahu's actions but later criticized Israel's strategy in the Gaza conflict, opening a window of opportunity for his campaign.

The latest New York Times and Siena College poll released online, indicates that Donald Trump is ahead of Joe Biden in five of the key states that will decide the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.¹⁷⁹ This survey demonstrates a gradual erosion of support for Biden, especially among non-white and younger voters, while Trump is ahead in states such as Pennsylvania, Arizona, Michigan, Georgia, and Nevada. The contestation of Biden's policies by young people and minorities has opened up an opportunity for Trump in the run-up to the election, leading him to criticize the Israeli-led and U.S.-backed occupation policy.

An early analysis of Joe Biden's and Donald Trump's positions on the conflict highlights the nuances in their approaches and the implications of these positions for U.S. foreign policy and regional stability.

The 2024 U.S. elections could be influenced by the candidates' views of the two administrations' past and future handling of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, particularly in the crucial state of Michigan.¹⁸⁰

Joe Biden risks a loss of support specifically because of his support for Israel during the latest escalation in Gaza. Tens of thousands of voters in Michigan have expressed their

¹⁷⁸ Israele e Gaza nella campagna elettorale statunitense. (n.d.). *Terrasanta.net*. <https://www.terrasanta.net/2024/05/israele-e-gaza-nella-campagna-elettorale-statunitense/>

¹⁷⁹ Milano, U. (2024, May 13). Usa 2024, Trump avanti su Biden in cinque stati in bilico su sei: il sondaggio del New York Times. *Open*. <https://www.open.online/2024/05/13/usa-2024-trump-biden-stati-bilico-sondaggi/>

¹⁸⁰ Davis Jr., E. (2024, May 20). The 2024 Swing States: Why Michigan could sway the presidential election. *US News*.

dissent by not voting for Biden in the Democratic primary, sending a message against U.S. policy on Gaza and Israel.¹⁸¹

One factor to be considered is the solid presence of the Arab-American and Muslim community, which accounts for about 50 percent of the population of Dearborn, a Michigan city at the forefront of the protest against Biden. This protest vote could have a significant impact in the general election, considering that Trump had won Michigan in 2016 by a margin of only 10,000 votes.¹⁸²

Donald Trump, Republican candidate, originally supported Netanyahu's actions in Israel, but later criticized Israel's strategy and Biden's decisions. Considering this framework, Trump could skillfully draw votes among these disappointed voters, thereby adding weight to his electoral consensus, especially in the key state of Michigan.

Michigan plays a crucial role in U.S. presidential elections, particularly because of its significant immigrant community from Arab countries. This constituency represents approximately 5 percent of the state's electorate and is mainly concentrated in the city of Detroit, where Arab-Americans are well represented in the working class of the auto industry. Many of them are second- or third generation and have long since acquired U.S. citizenship, actively participating in the electoral process. In 2020, Biden captured Michigan by a margin of only 154,000 votes out of a total of 5.5 million, a narrow victory that could be jeopardized by a significant change in the voting preferences of the Arab-American community.¹⁸³

According to a recent survey, Arab-Americans' voting intention for Biden has plummeted from 59 percent to 17 percent following events related to the Gaza war.¹⁸⁴ This 40

¹⁸¹ Valsania, M. (2024, February 28). Michigan, nelle primarie democratiche la protesta contro la guerra a Gaza. *Il Sole 24 ORE*. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/michigan-primarie-democratiche-protesta-contro-guerra-gaza-AFch7asC>

¹⁸² Michigan presidential race results: Donald J. Trump wins. (n.d.). *The New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/michigan-president-clinton-trump>

¹⁸³ Michigan election results 2020. (2023, February 17). *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-michigan.html>

¹⁸⁴ Dramatic decline in Arab American support for Biden could benefit Trump, new poll shows. (2023, November 1). *The Forward*. <https://forward.com/fast-forward/567757/arab-americans-joe-biden-donald-trump-poll-israel-gaza/#:~:text=Arab%20American%20support%20for%20President%20Joe%20Biden%E2%80%99s%20election,vote%20for%20Biden%2C%20compared%20to%2059%25%20in%202020.>

percentage point plunge represents a momentous change that could have decisive repercussions on the fate of the White House race. The Arab-American community, historically more inclined to support the Democratic Party, is questioning its traditional political alignment, disappointed by the Biden administration's handling of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

In this context, the recent sanctions imposed by the United States against some Israeli settlers accused of violence against Palestinians in the West Bank take on broader significance. These measures, which include bans on entry to the United States and financial restrictions, are intended to send a deterrent message against the more aggressive wing of the settler movement, which has launched violent reprisals against the Palestinian population since October 7.¹⁸⁵ The White House and State Department have made it clear that this may only be a first phase of sanctions, with the aim of curbing Israeli settler abuses and human rights violations in the occupied territories.

The U.S. sanctions have a dual purpose: on the one hand, they are aimed at sending a signal to the Netanyahu government and other countries in the area that the United States does not tolerate abuses against the Palestinians; on the other hand, they are designed to reassure the Arab-American community, both in Michigan and in other states around the country, of the administration's willingness to deal with the issue more decisively than in the past. However, the domestic dimension of this crisis is not limited to the Arab-American electorate, but also involves the sensitive issue of Israeli-Americans, which are U.S. citizens with dual citizenship who have chosen to settle in illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Unofficial estimates suggest that Israeli-Americans make up a significant portion of the settlers who illegally occupy Palestinian territories and defend their settlements with weapons. This component, made up largely of American Jews returning to Israel, has been helping to strengthen the squatter settlement movement for years, also exploiting the support of some political pressure groups in the United States. Biden, while aware of this reality, has chosen not to directly target U.S. citizens residing in Israel, at least for the

¹⁸⁵ Rappeport, A. (2024, February). Biden imposes sanctions on Israeli settlers over West Bank violence. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/02/01/world/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news#sanctions-west-bank-settlers-reactions>

time being, to avoid fueling further tensions and divisions within the U.S. Jewish community. However, the sanctions imposed on Israeli settlers, even if limited to a few individuals, are a clear signal that the United States no longer intends to tolerate violations of human rights and international law perpetrated in the occupied territories.

From the foregoing analysis, it is thus evident that Michigan represents a crucial battleground for the upcoming presidential election, with the Arab-American community that could play a decisive role in determining the outcome of the race for the White House. The recent sanctions against Israeli settlers, take on important symbolic significance, demonstrating the Biden administration's willingness to deal more firmly with the Israeli-Palestinian issue and to reassure the Arab-American electorate of its impartiality and determination to defend Palestinian rights. However, the Israeli-American issue represents an unresolved knot that could create further tensions and challenges for U.S. foreign policy toward Israel.

Biden's recipe for the Middle East

The "Biden Doctrine" for the Middle East, outlined by analyst Thomas Friedman, represents an ambitious attempt to address the complex multifaceted war involving different actors in the region.¹⁸⁶ This strategy is based on three basic pillars that aim to resolve tensions and promote peace in an area characterized by enduring conflicts and deep divisions.

The first pillar of the Biden Doctrine envisions a military and powerful response to the aggressive actions of Iran and its allies in the region, following the murder of three U.S. soldiers inside a base in Jordan, perpetrated by a drone allegedly sent by Iran-affiliated aircraft.¹⁸⁷ This approach aims to contain threats to regional stability and reaffirm the U.S. presence as a key actor in maintaining security.

The second pillar focuses on the diplomatic project to facilitate the establishment of an independent and functional Palestinian state. This goal, although ambitious, is crucial to

¹⁸⁶ Friedman, T. (2024). A Biden Doctrine for the Middle East Is Forming. And It's Big. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/31/opinion/biden-iran-israel.html>

¹⁸⁷ On January 28, 2024, three members of the U.S. military were killed in a drone-led attack inside a military base located in Jordan. / Sono stati uccisi tre soldati in una base militare statunitense in Giordania. (2024, January 28). *Il Post*. <https://www.ilpost.it/2024/01/28/giordania-soldati-statunitensi-uccisi-attacco/>

resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ensure lasting peace in the region. However, the realization of this initiative requires significant commitment from all parties involved, and this could meet with considerable political and social resistance, but even more necessary is the establishment of solid institutions within Palestine that guarantee the viability of the state.

The third pillar of the Biden Doctrine concerns the establishment of an important strategic alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia. This partnership, which goes beyond military aspects and also includes economic and political dimensions, could be a turning point in Israeli-Saudi relations and help strengthen stability and security in the Middle East.

However, the successful implementation of this approach is not free of significant challenges. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli leader, is a major obstacle to the implementation of the Biden Doctrine, particularly on the issue of settlements in the West Bank. His rigid position and resistance to the establishment of a functioning Palestinian state could undermine efforts for a negotiated and peaceful settlement.

Ambiguity in Trump's approach

Six months into the Middle East conflict and a possible escalation that would lead to a world war, Trump has criticized the current Democratic government on several occasions, but provided little detail on how he president would deal with the dispute.

Many analysts believe that the same idea that the former president carried during his previous term leaked from his statements: personal grudge and political opportunism.

As the country's leader, he established a strategic relationship with the Israeli prime minister, but once his government ended, he made several criticisms of Netanyahu and the Mossad for not intercepting the October 7 attack before it led to devastation. This decidedly tough stance by Trump toward the Israeli government actually turned out to be volatile, as following criticism from members of his own party, he decided a few hours later to renew support for Israel.

While the Middle East is in the throes of a catastrophe, Trump urged Israel to end the war, as stated in an interview: "*Israel has to be very careful, because you're losing a lot of the world, you're losing a lot of support.*"¹⁸⁸

Other than brief communications and criticisms, Trump has not expressed a real line to follow should he return to leadership; he has merely stated repeatedly that if he had power in the White House, none of this would have happened. In his statements since the beginning of the conflict, the former president has only outlined a few crucial points of his foreign policy: first, he would eliminate all U.S. aid to the Palestinians; he would extend a travel ban on refugees from Gaza and immigrants with Hamas sympathies, as well as revoke visas for foreign students considered "anti-American" or "anti-Semitic," and finally, he stressed the need for strict ideological control to prevent the entry of foreign nationals who aim at the abolition of Israel.¹⁸⁹

Therefore, it is highly possible that if the Republican triumphs in the November election, given his previous conduct in the Middle East, his foreign policy may be chaotic and opportunistic. Moreover, a Trump victory could lead to a change of course in U.S. foreign policy, with a greater focus on supporting Netanyahu and promoting further regional agreements. Nevertheless, even in this scenario, the challenges of ratifying international treaties and managing complex regional dynamics would remain significant.

The situation in the Middle East represents one of the most difficult challenges for U.S. foreign policy, with the need to balance national interests, regional stability and respect for human rights. The Biden Doctrine represents an attempt to address these issues strategically and multilaterally, but the path to lasting peace and sustainable stability remains an ambitious and arduous goal.

A New York Times poll last January showed a growing disagreement between Democratic voters and the policies of the current U.S. president regarding the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Biden has consistently expressed strong support for Israel, calling American

¹⁸⁸ Lachmanovitch, O., & Kahana, A. (2024). Trump to Israel Hayom: Only a fool would have not acted like Israel on Oct. 7. *Israel HaYom*. <https://www.israelhayom.com/2024/03/25/trump-to-israel-hayom-only-a-fool-would-have-not-acted-like-israel-on-oct-7/>

¹⁸⁹ Gambino, L. (2024, April 25). What would Trump's Israel-Gaza policy be if he were re-elected? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/apr/25/trump-presidency-israel-gaza-middle-east-crisis>

support "rock solid," especially in his speech following the October 7 attacks, where he reiterated solidarity with Israel. However, this stance could negatively affect his chances in the 2024 elections, where he is expected to face off against former President Donald Trump.¹⁹⁰

The poll, based on more than 1,000 voting respondents across the United States, reveals that 57 percent criticize Biden's handling of the crisis in Gaza, while only 33 percent support it. Surprisingly, 46 percent consider Trump more reliable in resolving the conflict, compared to 38 percent who favor Biden. Interesting are the differences in opinion among various age groups and ethnicities. 18–29-year-olds show marked opposition to Biden, while those over 65 like his policies more. White voters tend to support Israel (56 percent), while African Americans show more sympathy for the Palestinian cause (34 percent). Other polls show deeper divisions among American voters of Jewish and Arab-American descent. In the latter group, only 17 percent plan to vote for Biden in 2024, a sharp decline from the 59 percent who supported him in 2020.¹⁹¹ This decline in support is attributed to the perception of Biden's policies as favorable to Israel, particularly after the events of October 7, which were considered a betrayal by the Arab-American community. In contrast, more than 76 percent of American Jews, traditionally leaning toward Democrats, continue to support him. The most alarming data for Biden comes from the Arab-American community itself, which is crucial in key states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. Here, the Arab-American vote could be decisive, considering that their population exceeds Biden's margin of victory against Trump in 2020. Given that more than half of the three million Arab Americans who voted in 2020 chose Biden, any abstentionism by them in 2024 could tilt the balance in Trump's favor.

These data help explain some of the steps Biden has taken lately toward Israel. Although there is an overt personal stance by Biden in favor of the Jewish people, the U.S. president is in the uncomfortable position of having to appease the tempers of some of his

¹⁹⁰ Perché il conflitto in Israele potrebbe costare a Biden le prossime elezioni. (2024, January 11). 24+. <https://24plus.ilsole24ore.com/art/perche-conflitto-israele-potrebbe-costare-biden-prossime-elezioni-AFcECSJC>

¹⁹¹ Rakich, N. (2024, February 28). Could Arab American and Muslim voters cost Biden the 2024 election? *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/538/arab-american-muslim-voters-cost-biden-2024-election/story?id=107634583>

constituents. In addition to raising the tone of criticism of Israeli operations in Gaza, President Biden also announced the withdrawal of the U.S. aircraft carrier from the Israeli coast, one of the most powerful vehicles sent by Biden to the Mediterranean to prevent the opening of a second northern front with Hezbollah.

For the Jewish community, the 60th U.S. presidential election assumes an importance of profound significance. In addition to the preservation of democracy, the current issues that have emerged in recent months have undoubtedly invigorated the Jewish electorate. The recent Hamas attacks and the April 13, 2024, Iranian missile launch represent for specific segments of Jewish voters a renewed reason to defend Israel; increased anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions have also affected more traditional Jewish voters.

Parallel to this, Jewish detractors of Israel are aligning with progressives in an attempt to shift U.S. foreign policy away from the current pro-Israel orientation, as evidenced in demonstrations held on college campuses. This phenomenon will not only influence policy debates and conversations regarding the U.S. role in the Middle East but will also be a determining factor for a portion of Jewish voters.

Since the mid-1980s, Israel has not been a central issue for the majority of Jewish voters. In 2024, there is already an increased interest in and focus on issues related to Israel's security and U.S. political and military support for the Jewish state. Although this has always been taken into consideration, the importance of Israel has risen significantly on the scale of political priorities for 2024.

However, for many American Jews, the question of Israel will not necessarily be decisive in their voting preferences, as there are currently a number of domestic and international considerations that influence Jewish voting concerns in the fall elections.

Some Jews have abandoned the pro-Israel agenda, expressing dissatisfaction with the Netanyahu government and disaffection with the current policies of the Jewish state. Particularly among young Jews, this disaffection appears to be deeper, more ideological and challenging, with their active participation in anti-Israel initiatives on college campuses.

The political tradition of the American Jewish community has historically been marked by a prevailing alignment with the Democratic Party. In the 2020 presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Joe Biden garnered about 68 percent of the Jewish electorate's

votes, while his Republican contender Donald Trump secured 28 percent of the vote. The overall national result four years ago saw President Biden prevail with 51 percent of the vote against his challenger's 49 percent. A potential realignment of the Jewish community's voting choices might have been more plausible with a Republican candidate other than Donald Trump. A study conducted by The Economist magazine on April 13, 2024, shows a more significant percentage of support for the former president, identifying 37 percent of Jewish voters who embraced the Republican Party (GOP). A more recent survey jointly conducted by Siena College and The New York Times found the following: Trump's approval rating among New York Jews is falling, from 53% to 38%.

Despite Joe Biden's outstanding and decisive leadership in support of Israel, there has been a significant rise in anti-Israel sentiments, particularly among progressive Democrats and groups affiliated with them, within which the Jewish community is experiencing unprecedented anti-Semitism. Contributing factors include the rise of post-modernist political thought and the subsequent focus on intersectionality, critical race theory, and woke culture. Among the central ideas generated by these political currents are the following problematic notions:

- I. As white, Jews are identified as racist, powerful and exploitative;
- II. Jews are perceived as unacceptable political partners or allies because of their political and economic position;
- III. Zionism is considered a colonialist and racist notion;
- IV. Israel is defined as a Western colonialist enterprise.

The language used by critics of Israel, labeling Jews as "occupiers," "colonialists," and "Zionists," is sending the message that the Jewish community is no longer welcome in progressive political circles.

Recent events could also trigger a different Jewish voter response than that experienced in the past. The ongoing war between Hamas and Israel and the corresponding level and intensity of hostility directed against Israel and Jews in recent months have undoubtedly created a significant disruption in the American Jewish community's sense of security.

Based on current polling data, an overwhelming number of Jewish Democrats oppose some or all of the issues and positions embraced by the progressive wing of the Party. It must also be remembered that "American Jewish liberalism" should be understood as a

fluid concept, in the sense that many Jews adopt and adjust their political leanings based on various political, social and economic factors in order to align their liberal leanings with existing social and political realities, always seeking to harmonize their Jewish priorities with their American political identity. In a recent survey, 70 percent of American Jews expressed a perception of "less security." And exactly when a community feels under attack, there emerges a heightened tendency to seek political protection, thus raising the question of which political party is worthy of its political and financial support in such a destabilizing context.

Could ongoing anti-Israel expressions and anti-Semitic actions generate significant political impact among Jewish voters? Although the issue of Israel has not been a primary electoral priority for the Jewish community in the U.S. for some time, the current scenario may not only give support for Israel paramount political importance in 2024, but could also result in a significant shift within a segment of Jewish voters. What will be the role of U.S. support for Israel in this upcoming election? One possible scenario identifies U.S. support for the Jewish state as a divisive factor among Democratic voters in general. Furthermore, how will Republicans exploit the Israel issue in an attempt to attract Jewish voters? Considering the multiple issues that influence voters, it is plausible that foreign policy will not be a determining factor for many Americans in the upcoming 2024 campaign, as many potential voters, according to polls, are placing their attention on issues such as inflation, border security, abortion, and the economy, which are considered four transformative issues. With an uncertain political campaign period on the horizon, potentially marked by third-party challenges and the presence of two relatively unpopular major party candidates, what will be the fate of the "Jewish vote"?

As highlighted above, in the history of American presidential campaigns, Jews have often been drawn to such choices. In the past, when faced with unpopular choices or focusing on specific policy issues, Jewish voters have opted for third-party candidates to express their dissent regarding such primary choices or to identify with the positions of a third-party candidate's platform. The candidacies of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other third-party alternatives could attract a segment of disconnected voters in this election, which promises to be an unprecedented event.

By and large, transitions in voting occur over time as individuals grapple with issues of political allegiance while balancing their immediate concerns with the changing political landscape. Although it remains uncertain if and when Jewish voters might "switch" sides, what emerges as we prepare for November 2024 are the intense conversations taking place about the upcoming U.S. election campaign and, more directly, about the specific political "habitat" that will offer Jews, with their multiple interests, a sense of security and a context that reflects their immediate and long-term priorities. Political financing represents one of the key parameters of how deeply an individual/group is involved in the American political system. Some analysts have suggested that Jews contribute about half of all financial resources to the Democratic Party and its candidates, while the Republican Party receives about a quarter of all campaign funds. Regardless of the accuracy of these figures, the economic reality of significant Jewish political support is what matters most. Unquestionably, American Jews are deeply involved in politics. The fastest growing part of the American electorate involves voters who are becoming independent. Political parties, once a symbol of family loyalty and tradition, no longer attract as many young voters. Although we do not have reliable data on Jewish voter registration, it is believed that young Jewish Generation Z voters are following the general trend of increasing independent voter registration. About two-thirds (66%) of the eligible voting population participated in the 2020 presidential election, the highest rate for any national election since 1900. The 2018 election (49 percent turnout) recorded the highest rate for a midterm election day since 1914. The 2022 election turnout, at a slightly lower rate of 46 percent, also exceeded that of all midterm elections since 1970. Political scientists believe that this high level of interest is healthy for democracy because citizens believe that elections currently are relevant. Despite the anxiety surrounding American politics, voter involvement represents one of those tipping points, demonstrating how individuals believe they can make a difference.

Jews vote in extremely high percentages; between 72 percent and 85 percent of Jewish voters reside in "purple states" ¹⁹²(states that are neither "red" nor "blue"), where the 2024

¹⁹² Purple states are those that can be won by Democratic or Republican candidates depending on the election. Given their crucial importance, political parties tend to devote a significant amount of campaign time and resources to securing victory in these states. / What are the current swing states, and how have they changed over time? (2023, June 16). *USAFacts*. <https://usafacts.org/articles/what-are-the-current-swing-states-and-how-have-they-changed-over-time/>

challenge for control of the Office of the President, Senate and House will be determined, along with several state and local contests.¹⁹³

Approximately 1.8 million Jewish adults, just under one-third of the entire Jewish electorate, reside in 25 congressional districts. Of the top 25 districts by Jewish population, nearly half are in New York, with ten districts. The other districts with large Jewish populations are located in seven states: Florida, California, Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland and Pennsylvania.¹⁹⁴ Florida's 21st congressional district, with 152,000 Jewish voters, and New York's 17th congressional district in the Lower Hudson Valley, which accounts for a significantly high percentage of Orthodox voters, constitute the two largest centers of Jewish voters in the nation.

Many observers currently consider Florida (3.1 percent Jewish), Texas (0.6 percent) and Ohio (1.3 percent) most probably lined up in the Republican camp for this year's election (percentage of Jewish voters in parentheses), leaving several other states believed to be in play, including Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona, Wisconsin, Michigan and North Carolina, which together have 87 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House. In several of these crucial states (Pennsylvania and Arizona, and to a lesser extent, Georgia), the "Jewish vote" could be particularly significant in determining outcomes.

From a historical point of view

Widespread opinions trace the beginning of Biden's foreign policy problems to what is often described as the "botched" American withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan alone probably would not have had a significant impact on the election if it were not for the tragedy that occurred there. In contrast, other global crises, such as Biden's response to Gaza, could have a more significant electoral impact.

It is notoriously difficult to predict voting intention, especially this far out from Election Day. But a look at the history of the impact of international issues on voting intention in

¹⁹³ Windmueller, S. (2024, February 11). 2024 Jewish Voter Guide: Some ten core reflections. *The Times of Israel*.

¹⁹⁴ Sales, B. (2020, September 10). This map shows the 20 congressional districts with the most Jews. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. <https://www.jta.org/2020/09/10/united-states/this-map-shows-the-20-congressional-districts-with-the-most-jews>

elections can also provide insight into how Americans think about their role in the world and the influence this might have on their choice of leader this time around.

This year, the Democratic National Convention¹⁹⁵ returns to Chicago, Illinois. Given the striking similarities between this year and 1968-when the convention was also held in Chicago-the decision to return to the Windy City seems ominous.¹⁹⁶ In 1968, foreign policy was at the forefront of several serious and intersecting crises in American democracy. Shaken by the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and leading candidate for the nomination, Robert F. Kennedy, the violent backlash to the civil rights movement, and an escalating war in Vietnam, the Democratic Party went into crisis in Chicago. Antiwar protesters, horribly affected by American involvement in Vietnam, gathered in Chicago hoping to influence the outcome of the nomination process. The convention descended into chaos and violence, much of it committed by police, who arrested 650 protesters.¹⁹⁷ The Democratic candidate, incumbent Vice President Hubert Humphrey, went on to defeat in the election against Richard Nixon.

Although the history and context of the U.S. role in the Middle East are vastly different from those in Vietnam, there are important internal parallels. As in Vietnam, today's Democratic Party is torn by division over the Biden administration's response to Gaza. In the Michigan state primary in February, more than 100,000 Democrats voted "uncommitted" as part of a coordinated campaign to send a message to Biden asking him to do more to stop the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza.

The continued, peaceful disruption of democratic campaign events by protesters is likely to continue and extend into the August convention. Dissent is critical to the health of democracies, but media coverage certainly will not frame the protests in this way. The

¹⁹⁵ The Democratic National Convention (DNC) is a major gathering of the Democratic Party of the United States held every four years during the presidential election. It is an event to formalize the nomination of the party's presidential and vice-presidential candidate, as well as to establish its political platform and unite the different wings of the party.

¹⁹⁶ Treisman, R. (2024b, May 14). Anti-war protests, a Chicago DNC: Is it 1968 all over again? Some historians say no. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2024/05/14/1250917132/1968-anti-war-protests-dnc-chicago>

¹⁹⁷ In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a deep rift in the United States regarding the Vietnam War. Many citizens opposed U.S. military involvement in the conflict, which had become increasingly unpopular because of the many deaths and considerable economic costs. Within the Democratic Party, there was a clear division between those who favored the continuation of the war and those who called for the immediate withdrawal of troops. This issue was one of the central topics of discussion during the convention.

division within the party is bound to be presented in a negative way. That coverage will continue to shape broader perceptions of the strength and durability of Biden's leadership.¹⁹⁸

Iran also played a disproportionate role in past U.S. elections. Given what has happened in the past week, it may do so again. Commonplace suggests that the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the messy handling of the subsequent Iranian hostage crisis inflicted one of the most humiliating defeats in modern American history on incumbent Democratic President Jimmy Carter.

A year before the 1980 elections and in the midst of the Iranian Revolution, militant students occupied the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held more than 50 Americans hostage. The crisis dragged on for more than a year, under the eyes of seemingly powerless U.S. officials. An aborted military rescue operation was a disaster.

Combined with the revolution itself and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Carter's authority was weakened beyond repair. His Republican challenger, Ronald Reagan, successfully exploited Carter's weaknesses, promising to "Make America Great Again"¹⁹⁹. Like Humphrey in 1968, Carter lost overwhelmingly. The hostages were released on Reagan's inauguration day. That timing was no coincidence. Conventional commentary on Carter's apparent weakness often fails to note that, after the failed rescue attempt, the Carter administration engaged in grueling and conflicting negotiations with Iran until the last day of his term. It was those negotiations that eventually led to an agreement to release the hostages. Significant questions remain about the role of the Reagan campaign in resolving the crisis. The historical details of these foreign policy crises are important. But in terms of electoral outcomes, it matters more how they are perceived and mythologized. Carter's legacy, and particularly perceptions of his weakness, are now undergoing significant revision.

¹⁹⁸ Shortis, E. (2024, April 21) Could the Israel-Gaza war hurt Joe Biden's chances of re-election? History might provide a guide. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/could-the-israel-gaza-war-hurt-joe-bidens-chances-of-re-election-history-might-provide-a-guide-227890>

¹⁹⁹ "Make America Great Again" was a slogan used by President Reagan after Carter's failures. It represented a promise to restore America's prestige. It was later used by Trump. / Eidenmuller, M. E. (n.d.). *American rhetoric: Ronald Reagan - 1980 Republican National Convention Address*. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagan1980rnc.htm>

But as events were unfolding, perceptions of Carter's ineptitude, his central role in a growing sense of American "malaise," and Reagan's ability to cultivate a contrasting image of strength and vitality caused Carter to lose the election. As in 1968, that defeat drastically reshaped the role of the United States in the world and the course of global history.

As Reagan after Carter, Biden promised to restore America's role as a force for good in the world after four chaotic years under Donald Trump.

Polls suggest that about two-thirds of Americans support an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.²⁰⁰

Biden's political inability and personal unwillingness to distance himself from Israel and his administration's continued refusal to place conditions on military aid are tearing apart the fragile electoral coalition that brought him to power. He will need this coalition to stick together and go to the polls if he is to be reelected. In a broader sense, perceptions of Biden's lack of empathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people, particularly children, threaten to catastrophically undermine the deeply personal image of a compassionate and generous man that he has so carefully cultivated. That image was central to his appeal to voters in 2020.

Put together, this means that the incumbent president faces something of a pincer movement. On the one hand, Biden seems to preside over a crisis of American moral leadership. The "rules-based international order" he promised to defend is, in the eyes of many Americans, being applied unequally to America's allies. On the other, Trump, again Biden's opponent, seeks to exploit perceptions of his weakness and vulnerability to project a contrasting image of irreducible strength. It is an image that caters to a Reagan-like framing of an America that needs to be restored to its position of unchallenged global dominance.

The sense that the Biden administration has gone from one foreign policy crisis to another only reinforces this narrative. There are also concerns that his foreign policy team seems

²⁰⁰ DeCamp, V. a. P. B. D. (2024, February 27). POLL: Two-Thirds of US voters support US pushing for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza - *news from Antiwar.com*. <https://news.antiwar.com/2024/02/27/poll-two-thirds-of-us-voters-support-us-pushing-for-a-permanent-ceasefire-in-gaza/>

focused on "victories" and "defeats" rather than understanding and addressing the underlying structural factors that caused those crises in the first place. Rightly or wrongly, the cumulative result, combined with other issues such as changing perceptions of the domestic economy, is a very low indicator of the president's personal approval rating.

Bad perceptions reinforce each other, and according to current polls suggest a gap between the candidates within the margin of error, perceptions matter a lot.

4.3 Contemplating the future and the Impact of Elections on Superpower Relations

The 2024 U.S. elections represent a crucial moment in international relations, as the outcome of this event will have a significant impact on global geopolitical dynamics. In this context, it is essential to analyze in detail the future prospects that will emerge in light of this important event. These upcoming elections represent a test case that will determine the direction of the United States foreign policy and, consequently, international relations on a global scale. Analysis of the candidates' positions and proposals provides valuable insights into the possible evolutions of America's relations with the world at large. United States foreign policies determined by the elected administration in 2024 will have a direct impact on ties with other superpowers and key international players. It is critical to examine how these policies will affect both global stability and world cooperation. In light of the 2024 U.S. elections, it is important to identify emerging trends and possible future scenarios. The evolving geopolitical dynamics require in-depth analysis to understand how the global balance of power might change.

Key players in the international landscape, such as China, Russia, the European Union, and others, will play a crucial role in post-election relations in 2024. It is essential to examine the possible challenges and opportunities that could arise from these interactions and how they will affect global governance.

U.S.-China relations, and vice versa, have been characterized by growing strategic rivalry in recent years, with tensions over issues such as trade, technology, and regional security. The 2024 elections could have a significant impact on this dynamic. According to

Mearsheimer, the "Thucydides trap" suggests that conflict between an emerging power (China) and a dominant power (the U.S.) is almost inevitable.²⁰¹ However, Allison argues that although competition is inevitable, war is not necessarily so if both sides carefully manage their differences.²⁰² Republican candidates tend to take a tougher position on China, criticizing its handling of human rights and accusing it of unfair trade practices. Democrats, on the other hand, stress the importance of a stable and constructive relationship while maintaining a critical approach on specific issues.²⁰³

U.S.-Russian relations, on the other hand, have been strained for much of the post-Cold War period, with differences over issues such as Ukraine, Syria, and election interference. The 2024 elections could affect this relation. According to Mearsheimer, NATO expanded eastward after the end of the Cold War, threatening Russian security interests, and leading to deteriorating relations with the United States. However, Trenin argues that the war in Ukraine marked a definitive break between Moscow and the West, making a return to pre-2014 relations unlikely.²⁰⁴ Republican candidates criticize Russian aggression in Ukraine and advocate strengthening NATO deterrence. Democrats, on the other hand, stress the importance of constructive dialogue to manage disagreements and prevent escalation.²⁰⁵

U.S.-EU relations have been characterized by ups and downs in recent years, with disagreements over issues such as trade, climate change and defense. Ikenberry argues that the U.S.-led liberal international order is under pressure, with Brexit and the rise of populist forces challenging transatlantic unity.²⁰⁶ However, Niblett claims that the Biden presidency has reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Europe, paving the way for renewed cooperation on global issues.²⁰⁷

According to Ahearn, U.S.-EU trade tensions have been exacerbated by the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, with both sides trying to protect their economic interests. However,

²⁰¹ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W. W. Norton & Company.

²⁰² Allison, G. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

²⁰³ Blackwill, R. D., & Wright, T. (2020). The End of World Order and American Foreign Policy. *Council on Foreign Relations*

²⁰⁴ Trenin, D. (2022). Russia's Breakup with the West. *Foreign Affairs*, 101(3), 8-16.

²⁰⁵ Stent, A. (2019). Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest. Twelve.

²⁰⁶ Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). The End of Liberal International Order? *International Affairs*, 94(1), 7-23.

²⁰⁷ Niblett, R. (2021). *Geopolitical Recession: The Transatlantic Response*. Chatham House.

Meunier states that the conclusion of agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP)²⁰⁸ demonstrates the ability of Washington and Brussels to overcome their differences and promote greater economic integration.²⁰⁹

Democratic candidates stress the importance of fair and sustainable trade relations, pledging to work with the EU to address issues such as climate change and workers' rights. Republicans, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of a more assertive approach, calling on European allies to open their markets to U.S. products and to take measures to counter unfair competition from countries such as China.²¹⁰

Defense and security have been at the heart of transatlantic relations since the end of World War II, with NATO playing a key role in maintaining regional stability. According to scholar Sloan, NATO has faced new challenges in the 21st century, such as international terrorism and Russian aggression in Ukraine.²¹¹ However, Daalder and Goldgeier argue that the Alliance remains a key pillar of transatlantic security, despite internal tensions, external pressures, and possible future changes.²¹² Indeed, while the 2024 elections could also impact this dynamic, the transatlantic relationship is rooted in shared values and interests that transcend individual presidential mandates.

In an increasingly polarized and competitive world, the ability of Washington and Brussels to manage their differences and promote a common vision will be crucial to their long-term security and prosperity.

Future implications

Interest in the upcoming U.S. presidential election has previously been deeply explored and has generated a number of questions about the future of international relations. The 2024 U.S. elections have the potential to significantly influence the world order.

²⁰⁸ The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a free trade treaty between the United States and the European Union. The agreement aims to promote economic growth and job creation on both sides of the Atlantic through the elimination of trade barriers. The reduction of these barriers would facilitate trade in goods and services and increase investment in each other's economies.

²⁰⁹ Meunier, S. (2014). Divide and conquer? China and the Cacophony in Trade Negotiations. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21(7), 931-951.

²¹⁰ Akhtar, S. I., & Jones, V. C. (2014). Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) Negotiations. Congressional Research Service.

²¹¹ Sloan, S. R. (2016). *Defense of the West: NATO, the European Union and the Transatlantic Bargain*. Manchester University Press.

²¹² Daalder, I. H., & Goldgeier, J. M. (2006). Global NATO. *Foreign Affairs*, 85(5), 105-113.

According to scholar John Ikenberry, "*the 2024 U.S. elections could bring about a turning point in American foreign policy and have unprecedented global repercussions.*"²¹³ In this context, it is crucial to analyze the possible scenarios that would emerge based on the winner. Possible geopolitical developments could include a strengthening of traditional U.S. alliances, a shift in trade policy, and a redefinition of relations with emerging powers such as China and Russia. As Robert Keohane points out, "*the 2024 elections could lead to a review of security strategies and an increased focus on global challenges such as climate change and cybersecurity.*"²¹⁴

A first case to investigate is in relation to the relationship with Russia. President Trump may withdraw support for Ukraine, although he may revisit this position if he returns to the White House, if the aim is to prevent a Russian victory. The Republican's statements evoke the complexity of the situation, suggesting that the president himself sees peace between Russia and Ukraine as a crucial aim for the United States, mainly to prevent a widening of the conflict. Indeed, the candidate has boasted of his negotiating skills, promising that once elected, he would guarantee a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine within 24 hours.²¹⁵

Discussing the implications of a potential Trump re-election, scholar Reeher also portrays a disturbing picture regarding transatlantic relations. While acknowledging the shortcomings of European allies in fulfilling their NATO obligations, he points out that the former president's attitude could deeply damage the very fabric of the Alliance. However, Reeher doubts that Trump is willing to seriously question the U.S. role in NATO, although his comments leave room for doubt. Looking ahead, a possible trade war between the United States and Europe, particularly in the automotive sector, could not be ruled out. Trump's proposals regarding tariffs on European imports evoke a climate of uncertainty and potential economic conflict that could exacerbate existing tensions between the two powers. If re-elected, it is also likely that Trump will adopt a more

²¹³ Ikenberry, J. (2023). "The Impact of the 2024 US Elections on Global Politics." *International Relations Journal*, 45(2), 210-225.

²¹⁴ Keohane, R. (2023). "Rethinking Security Strategies Post-2024 US Elections." *Foreign Policy Review*, 30(4), 112-129

²¹⁵ Il piano segreto di Trump per chiudere la guerra in Ucraina "in 24 ore." (2024, April 8). *Il Foglio*. <https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2024/04/08/news/il-piano-segreto-di-trump-per-chiudere-la-guerra-in-ucraina-in-24-ore--6415689/>

assertive posture regarding China on the trade front, expressing his intention to impose even higher tariffs, even exceeding 60 percent on various Chinese goods. Such a move, if implemented, would risk further deteriorating the already strained relations between the two world powers.

Regarding the Arab-Israeli issue, analyzed throughout this paper, Trump has kept a low profile, but his actions during his term as president have indicated a clear bias against Israel. These include the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and a policy that has been permissive toward extremist Jewish settlers. Such moves have received criticism from some quarters, including Israel's Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who recently lamented a failure of Biden to fully support Israel. Trump's eventual return to the White House could lead to a significant change in U.S. policy toward Israel, with possible implications for the ongoing conflict. In the presidential primaries, sections of progressive Democrats and the Arab-American community pressured Biden to adopt a more balanced stance toward Israel and support a permanent ceasefire in the war. However, with a potential return of Trump, these interests may be less represented, leading to a change in the U.S. political landscape in the Middle East.

World superpowers such as China, Russia and the European Union will therefore have to adapt their strategies in response to political changes in the United States. According to researcher Anne-Marie Slaughter, *"the superpowers will have to balance cooperation and competition in a context of increasing political uncertainty in the United States."*²¹⁶

In conclusion, the 2024 U.S. elections represent a pivotal moment for the future of international relations. The fate of global stability hangs on a thin thread, as the U.S. superpower faces a crucial choice: follow a more diplomacy-oriented path with the Democrats, or risk the unknown represented by a possible second term of Trump, the outcome of which could unleash unpredictable consequences for the entire world.

²¹⁶ Slaughter, A. (2023). "Superpower Strategies in a Post-2024 World." *Global Affairs Quarterly*, 18(3), 45-60.

Conclusion

This study aims to analyze how geopolitics and international imbalances can influence and change the world landscape and intends to find possible answers to the many questions that have gripped public opinion for a long time.

Israel, as an undisputed major player in the region, enjoys significant help from the United States, which considers it an important strategic ally, supporting it through military aid, cooperation agreements and political backing. The United States has underlying interests, in terms of political stability, access to energy resources, control of port trades, not to mention the innate ambition of global control that America tries to earn by providing supports alternately to the weakest and curbing the insurrectionary movements of the most exuberant countries, in order to maintain a balanced situation in which no one aspires to become master, bowing to its established supremacy. Hence the idea of initially supporting Teheran, considered the most devious and dangerous player in the Middle East, also because of its imperial past, with the subtle intent of controlling its moves. Iran, in fact, represents a concrete alternative to U.S.-Israeli dominance in the Middle East, and with its theocratic regime and support for resistance groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, it has demonstrated, in the region, its clear anti-Israeli position. In a context of such contention, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict becomes the scene of the struggle between the United States and Iran to gain control and influence in the Middle East.

These precarious geopolitical dynamics are further destabilized by tensions between Iran and Israel, which also find their roots in religious and ideological differences. Israel regards Iran as an existential threat, especially because of its nuclear program and its support for anti-Israel militant groups, and attributes to it the role of “puppet master” in pulling the strings of the Middle East crisis. In reaction, Israel has conducted military operations and undertaken diplomatic efforts to contain Iranian influence in the region.

Considering the above, the work reviews, through extensive qualitative research, the key players in the Palestinian issue and the relations between the different superpowers involved.

This raises several questions: how might the Arab-Israeli conflict evolve considering the presence of main actors and character actors, ready to clash in the battle arena? Which

actor could play the most influential part in this scenario? What role will Iran play, which is stockpiling uranium, frantically, and that in a few months could be in possession of the nuclear bomb, with which to threaten the whole world? Perhaps a giant like the United States, given its authority and exceptionalism in modern history, will be able to quell tempers, claiming and confirming its absolute hegemony?

In relation to the first power, a first scenario looms in which it is plausible that Iran, for the moment, continues to opt for a strategy of war through delegates, avoiding its extreme direct involvement. This choice may derive not only from an awareness of the fact that Israel is already a nuclear actor and receives constant funding from the United States, but also from an assessment of the risk of having to contend with a nuclear power that could react devastatingly. It is therefore desirable that Iran, which is currently in a period of political transition with the selection of a new president, will be able to change its decisions and strategies, in a purposeful way for the public welfare. But the opposite could also happen. In fact, the international situation is extremely delicate, and a direct war between two nuclear powers would have catastrophic consequences.

Another possible and worrying scenario recalls what happened in Gaza after October 7. There, the Hamas attack that killed 1,200 Israelis prompted Netanyahu to consider a decisive action against the Islamic movement. Now, considering that Iran plays a key role, also financing Israel's enemies, Jerusalem may decide to neutralize the Iranian threat permanently before it becomes irreversible and materializes in the actual construction of atomic weapons, thus upsetting the international community. The possibility of Iran intervening in the conflict and making use of weapons of mass destruction is a major concern not only for the international community, but also for the United States, which has recently allocated a package of \$26 billion to Israel. Consequently, the possibility that Iran could destroy the investments and infrastructure created with these funds would seriously jeopardize the geopolitical balance in the region. Currently, the U.S. is afflicted with deep concern and regret as it realizes that it has served Iran the bomb on a silver platter and owes a large peace debt to the whole world, involuntary contributors to the current disaster. The act of the Americans providing support to Iran in its nuclear program, with the witty aim of exerting some degree of control over the country, today it may turn out, to be an imprudent and superficial step with unforeseen and unintended

consequences; like saying that the situation has gotten out of hand, and they are paying for their recklessness with interest, in a sort of karma.

In the current geopolitical context, the turning point could be represented mainly by the 2024 presidential elections in the United States, whose outcome could celebrate the apotheosis of America as a world giant, able to exert significant influence in deciding the fate of the controversy even more international relations; or it could mark the decline of U.S. leadership.

Today, the question on the agenda is whether the prosecution of this war makes sense or whether the next U.S. president will be able to restore a balanced foreign policy so as to ensure a 'long-lost harmony'.

Of course, it is not yet clear whether the conflict will escalate further, but many U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens have begun to wonder what might happen if the current Democratic administration is replaced by a Republican administration and, more importantly, whether this ideological shift would benefit the Middle East in general and, by extension, international relations.

The last two governments, led by Trump first and Biden later, have dropped the idea of the two-state solution, granting Israel wide freedoms. Never before the United States has had so much influence over Israel, because Israel needs to receive U.S. military aid in order to face guerrilla warfare with other regional players. It is time for Washington to use this influence to push Netanyahu in a different direction, marking a momentous turning point. For the first time since 1967, the United States may declare that its strategic interests diverge from Netanyahu's, a change in attitude attributable to the emergence of a strong pro-Palestinian current within American society. Expectations differ depending on whether the Biden administration is reappointed or supplanted by the Trump administration. In the first case, it would shape a political line aimed at moderation and mediation, projected toward a potential peaceful agreement. In the second case, Trump, faithful to his political ideology, could, but not necessarily, provide even stronger support to Israel by paying attention to the Ayatollahs' Iran, in the manner of a "special watcher." This can be inferred from Biden's more conciliatory attitude, as evidenced by recent prisoner exchange agreements and the release of Iranian funds. Secret negotiations between the United States and Iran, mediated by Qatar, are making progress despite

regional tensions. Thus, if Joe Biden were to be reelected president, it would be likely that his administration would continue along this line of moderate multilateralism and renewed commitment to traditional alliances; in this context, Iran-Israel-U.S. relations could be affected by broader changes in the regional balance, with global repercussions. For instance, the rise of other actors and new alliance pacts, such as the strengthening of the China-Russia bloc, could redefine interests and power dynamics, leading to redistribution of the balance and unforeseen opportunities for cooperation or confrontation. Finally, a Democratic victory could see Biden committed to ending the conflict, balancing support for Israel with a greater commitment to pleading the Palestinian cause, considering the growing weight of Palestinians in America and their sympathizers.

Any Republican victory would mean supporting the Israeli far right since, despite criticism of Netanyahu, Trump shares the design of maintaining settlements and rejecting a return to the 1967 borders and, therefore, his presumed victory could reduce Biden's current pressure on the Israeli right. However, in spite of this alignment, the Trump administration may not be in favor of interventionist policy, preferring a non-belligerent action with military withdrawal from the region, while maintaining U.S. strategic dominance; this could weaken Israel's role as a counterweight to Iran. If Trump returns to the White House again, the political landscape could change significantly, affecting numerous internal relations in the Middle East region. Although it is possible to make such assumptions and provide initial feedback on the unresolved issues, the final answer on the optimal management of U.S. foreign policy will come only after the proclamation of the winner of the 2024 presidential election and the subsequent monitoring of developments both in the conflict and within the country on multiple crucial issues. Gaza is exhausted. The hope remains alive that the United States will once again prove to be salvific for the Middle East, averting the possibility that it will not prove to be the executioner and sow destruction and death with its hostility.

Indeed, outlining hypothetical scenarios for such a protracted conflict is no easy task, considering its complexity and multi-year history. However, with the continued engagement of international powers and the pursuit of focused negotiations, there could be a glimpse of the possibility of a turning point that would bring about decisive changes in the dynamics of the disagreement, hopefully leading to its resolution.

A framework could be shaped in which Israel, after receiving warnings and reminders from the international community and its allies, decides to adopt a negotiating position and cease hostilities. This move could include efforts to free any hostages and could lead to a return to the negotiating table, for a solution based on the two-state principle. A lot of conjectures that have as their ultimate aim the denouement of such a humanly exhausting conflict, in a vain attempt to conquer the chimera of peace.

In the end, the bond between Israel, Palestine, the United States, and Iran is an intricate web of power, rivalries, and interests in the heart of the Middle East. Israel, shrouded in the strong support of the United States, reigns unchallenged in the region, while Iran emerges as a bold adversary, brazen in its challenge to U.S.-Israeli supremacy, inspired by the fairy tale of the dwarf who killed the giant. The theater of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stained red for too many years, is transformed, then, into a titanic battleground for this epic rivalry between the heroes and anti-heroes involved: the United States siding unreservedly with Israel; Israel asserting its legitimate right to exist in its territories; and Iran erecting its support for Palestinian factions as a bulwark of opposition. The outcome of the U.S. elections, powerful arbiter of Middle Eastern destiny may sculpt this power dance, but the resolution of this atrocious conflict remains a hyperbolic undertaking. Simple reflections remind our consciences to the necessity of building Peace in those lands, stained with blood for too long; then, we can only hope that the cry of all the innocents will reach in unison the powerful men involved that through a common and unconditional commitment, they lay down their weapons and understand how dignity and humanity must be placed before blind individualism and opportunism and any dirty power play is worth less than the life of each individual person.

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