

AMERICA AND OIL DIPLOMACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *The Middle East has remained a strategic central to United States Foreign policy largely because of its abundant petroleum resources and strategic geo-political position in the global oil politics. Since the end of the Second World War, successive American administrations have employed oil diplomacy as a key instrument for advancing national interests, ensuring energy security, safeguarding global oil markets, and maintaining political and military influence in the region (Mearsheimer, 2001). This paper examines the historical evolution of America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on its strategic objectives, diplomatic engagements, and the implications for regional and global politics. The paper adopts a quantitative historical research design and relies on secondary sources, such as scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles and in some extent government documents. The paper is guided with realist theory, the paper argues that, the United States has consistently integrated diplomatic, economic and military strategies but in the lens of lay man's understanding always hide on the acquisition of nuclear weapons by those States she tags as rogue nations in the region. The above assertion, has helped America to protect her access to Middle East oil. The paper concludes that, America's oil diplomacy has significantly influenced political developments, alliance formation, and security dynamics, just like the one currently playing on in Iran with America and her ally, Israel. The paper recommends that the United States pursue a more balanced foreign policy that promotes sustainable energy cooperation, regional stability, and multilateral diplomatic engagements in response to the evolving global energy security.*

Keywords: United States, Oil Diplomacy, Middle East and Energy security.

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Introduction

The Middle East occupies a Strategic position in global politics owing to its vast petroleum resources and its location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Since the discovery of commercially viable oil in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran during the early twentieth century, the region has become indispensable to the global energy market (Gholz and Press, 2010). The first of these three was and remains the principal consideration, with the other two being only procedurally relevant. First, the American corporate and State sectors each desired unimpeded access to the immense energy resources available in the Middle East. Second, the declared fear of Communist expansion would provide the security-based rationale for conducting an aggressive programme of gaining access to, and more to the point control of, those resources in the name of deterrence and national interest: which necessarily would entail, third, exercising management over the region in such a way as to ensure political consistency and reliability among its leaderships.

Consequently, American foreign policy toward the region has been shaped not only by political and security considerations but also by the pursuit of stable energy supplies through diplomatic, economic, and military means (Klare, 2004). It is pertinent to note that, the predominant power in the middle East up till the period of Cold war was Great Britain. Of its Colonial interests, it was not until the eve of world war 1 that oil became an issue of strategic importance, with the Royal Navy converting its larger ship over to oil power from Coal in 1912 (Yergin, 1991). Following the second World War, the United States gradually replaced Britain as the dominant external power in the Middle East.

This transition was reinforced by the historic 1945 meeting between President and the leaders of the region, which laid the foundation for a strategic partnership based on security cooperation in exchange for reliable oil supplies (Painter, 1986). Throughout the period of Cold War, the United States sought to prevent Soviet Union influence in the region while protecting the uninterrupted flow of petroleum to the global economy. Major events, such as 1973 Arab oil embargo, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1990-1991 Gulf War, the 2003 Iraq War, and more recent enduring relationship between oil and American foreign policy (Gause 111, 2010).

The paper therefore, tend to examine the historical evolution of America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East, the diplomatic instruments employed, and the implications for regional and global politics.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has oil influenced America's diplomacy, economic and strategic engagement in the Middle East?
2. How has this influence changed over time in America's foreign policy engagement in the Middle East?

Methodology

This paper adopts a quantitative historical research design to examine the evolution of America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East and its implications for regional and global politics.

The qualitative approach is also appreciated because it enables an in-depth analysis of historical events, foreign policy decisions, diplomatic engagements, and geopolitical developments that have shaped the relationship between the United States and the Middle East. According to Asika (1991), qualitative descriptive analysis is used to verbally summarise the information gathered in research.

The paper relies primarily on secondary source of data, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, reports from international organizations and credible online databases. These sources provide comprehensive historical and contemporary information on U.S foreign policy, Middle Eastern politics, energy security, and international diplomacy. The collected data were analysed using historical and thematic content analysis.

Historical analysis was employed to trace the evolution of America's oil diplomacy across different periods, while thematic content analysis was used to identify recurring themes such as energy security, national interests, strategic alliances, military interventions, regional stability, and geopolitical competition.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts Realist theory as its theoretical framework. Realism is one of the foundational approaches in the field of international relations. It assumes that the international system is Characterized by anarchy, meaning that there is no central authority capable of guaranteeing the security of sovereign states. Consequentially, states are compelled to pursue their national interests, security, survival, and power within the international system (Morgenthau, 1948, Waltz, 1979).

Hans J, Morgenthau, maintains that international politics is fundamentally a struggle for power and that states generally formulate foreign policies according to their national interests. He further argues that political leaders must assess international affairs primarily in terms of power and national interest rather than relying exclusively on moral or ideological considerations. This perspective provides an

important basis for understanding American involvement in the Middle East, where access to petroleum resources has historically intersected with broader American interests in security, economic stability, and geopolitical influence.

Again, Yergin (1991) demonstrates that the struggle for oil has repeatedly influenced relations among states and has been closely connected with question of power, wealth, and international security. Thus, American efforts to establish relationships with major oil-producing states were not simply commercial activities but increasingly became components of wider strategic policy. From this perspective, America's engagement with the Middle East can not be understood solely as a search for oil. Rather oil constitute one component of a broader strategy aimed at maintaining access to strategically important resources, protecting international economic interests, preserving alliances, and preventing rival powers from gaining excessive influence in a strategically significant region.

In conclusion therefore, Realism does not suggest that oil is the only explanation for American policy in the Middle East. United States engagement has also been influenced by counter-terrorism, the security of Israel, nuclear non-proliferation, regional alliances, domestic political considerations and competition with other major powers.

Finally, the paper maintains that realist theory provides an appropriate analytical lens for examining the historical development of America's pursuit of petroleum security with broader concerns about national power, geopolitical influences, regional stability, and international security.

Review of Literature

The relationship between American foreign policy and petroleum politics in the Middle East has attracted considerable attention from historians, political scientists, international relations scholars and energy specialists. Existing literature generally agrees that oil has been an important element of American engagement with the Middle East, but scholars differ considerably on whether petroleum should be regarded as the principal explanation of U.S involvement or as one factor within a broader strategy involving national security, geopolitical competition, regional stability and economic interests.

Historically, American involvement in Middle Eastern petroleum developed gradually during the twentieth century. Yergin (1991), in his influential historical study of oil, money, and power, argues that petroleum became a strategic resources whose control and availability influenced the behaviour of major powers. His analysis places the Middle East at the centre of the twentieth century international struggle over energy resources. The significance of Yergin's contribution lies in showing that oil diplomacy cannot be separated from the wider history of industrialization, war, economic expansion, and international power politics. Klare

(2004) offers a more critical interpretation. He argues that America's dependence on petroleum has had significant consequences for U.S national security and foreign policy. In his view, competition over petroleum resources has contributed to America's willingness to maintain a strong strategic presence in oil-producing regions in the Middle East.

Another major body of literature focuses on the strategic relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Bronson (2006), traces the development of the relationship from its early oil foundations to a broader partnership involving defence, intelligence, arms transfer, and regional security. Bronson maintains that the relationship cannot be understood exclusively through oil because security concern and geopolitical interests increasingly became integrated with energy cooperation. In a related view, Gause (2010) similarly argues that the Persian Gulf represents an important arena of international and regional power competition. His analysis demonstrates that American involvement in the Gulf is influenced by the regions strategic location, oil resources, political rivalries, and security concerns.

This perspective is particularly relevant because it places oil diplomacy within the wider structure of Persian Gulf international relations. On the area of concerning oil, energy security and the U.S national interests, Gholz and Press (2010) challenge what they regard as an exaggerated understanding of American vulnerability to oil disruptions. They argue that the U.S economy possesses mechanisms capable of adapting to many oil shocks and therefore question the assumption that the United States must maintain an extensive military posture simply to protect Middle Eastern petroleum.

Contrary to the above, Levi (2013) however, responds that, Gholz and Press underestimates the continuing vulnerability of international oil markets. He identifies possible disruptions involving concentration of Persian Gulf resources, instability in Saudi Arabia and closure of the Strait Hormuz as particularly serious risks. This debate is important because it demonstrates that the strategic value of Middle Eastern oil cannot be measured solely by the amount of petroleum directly imported by the United States. Its new dimension consequently introduces an important distinction between oil dependence and oil-market dependence. This is where even if American domestic production reduces direct dependence on Middle Eastern imports, instability in the region can still affect international oil prices and the wider global economy. This distinction is central to understanding why the Middle East can remain strategically important to Washington, even when U.S domestic energy production increases.

Again, oil and American military engagement is another important area of scholarly debate. Klare (2004) argues that

competition over energy resources has contributed to the militarization of U.S foreign policy. From this perspective, the Persian Gulf's enormous petroleum resources have encouraged the United States to maintain military capabilities capable of protecting energy supplies and transportation routes. For example 1990-1991 Gulf War provides a historical proof where Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait created a direct threat to the political and economic stability of the Persian Gulf and international oil market.

In concluding this review of literature towards understanding America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East. First, scholars such as Yergin (1991) establish the historical importance of petroleum in international politics. Second, Bahgat (2003), Bronson (2006), and Gause (2010) demonstrates the importance of the Persian Gulf and U.S relationships with oil-producing states. Third, Klare (2004) connects petroleum interests with American national security and military strategy. Fourth, Gholz and Press (2010) and Lvi (2013) provide an important debate over the actual degree of American vulnerability to oil disruptions.

The paper seeks to address important gap which centre on dimension of American oil diplomacy-such as U.S-Saudi relations, energy security, military intervention, or oil market vulnerability, without providing a sufficiently integrated historical overview of the evolution of American oil diplomacy from its early development to the contemporary period. It examine further, the transformation of U.S policy from early commercial involvement in the Middle Eastern petroleum, through the emergence of the U.S-Saudi strategic partnership, the 1973 oil century.

The Evolution of America's oil Diplomacy in the Middle East: Strategic objectives and Implications for Global Politics.

The evolution of American oil diplomacy in the Middle East is closely connected with the transformation of petroleum from an important commercial commodity into major instrument of economic power, national security and international politics. Oil diplomacy therefore became an important component of American foreign policy, particularly after the second world war. Mcfarland (2018) argues that petroleum has been uniquely important in international affairs because it is essential to economic development and modern warfare, while its uneven geographical distribution makes access to it a major concern.

By the early 1940s, with World War II in full swing, the role that oil would inevitably play in the post war order began to undergo a reversal, summarized then by Everette Lee Degolyer, a geophysicist and central figure in the birth of the modern American oil industry (Yergin, 1991):

"The center of gravity of world oil production is Shifting from the Gulf-Caribbean area to the Middle East to the Persian Gulf area ... and is likely To continue to shift until it is firmly established in that area".

According to Painter (1986), U.S entrance into the Middle Eastern affairs, with this state corporate linkage in tow, went from half-hearted to earnest in the early post war period, aspiring to secure the region in the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine; the shifting "center of gravity" aroused American determination. For instance, the cheap petroleum available in the region was used for the reconstruction of Europe, where twenty (20) percent of the of the Marshal Plan aid (from the United States) for European reconstruction was spent on oil and oil equipment roughly half of which was produced by American companies (Harms, 2010).

However, the development of American oil diplomacy passed through several stages. These includes:

- The Second World War and the emergence of Saudi Arabia
- Oil diplomacy during the Cold war
- The 1970s: the transformation of oil diplomacy
- The Carter Doctrine and the militarization of oil security
- The 1980s and the Iran-Iraq war
- The Gulf war and the post Cold war era
- Oil diplomacy and the Iraq war of 2003

❖ The Second World War and the emergence of Saudi Arabia

Modern American oil diplomacy in the Middle East was established during and immediately after the second war. American policy makers increasingly recognized that the Middle East possessed petroleum resources whose importance extended beyond commercial interests. Saudi Arabia became particularly important because of the scale of its petroleum reserves and its strategic geographical position. The 1945 meeting between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud aboard the USS Quincy symbolized the emergence of the America-Saudi Arabia strategic relationship. The relationship subsequently developed around an informal exchange; Saudi Arabia provide access to petroleum resources and cooperation in maintaining energy stability; while the United States increasingly provided political, economic and military support.

Colgan (2021) described this relationship as an important example of an "oil-for-security" arrangement that later influenced American relations with other Gulf States. The American objective at this stage was therefore broader than obtaining oil for direct domestic consumption. Washington sought to ensure that Middle Eastern petroleum remained available to the international economy and that no hostile

great power could dominant the region's resources. The strategic significance of Middle Eastern petroleum consequently became linked to the preservation of American influence and the wider post-war international economic order.

❖ Oil Diplomacy during the Cold war

During the Cold War, American oil diplomacy became increasingly integrated with the policy of Containing Soviet Union's influence. America regarded the Middle East as a major arena of competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Oil-producing states were therefore important not only because they possessed energy resources but also because their political orientation could influence the balance of power. The United States developed strong relationships with conservative monarchies, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran under the Shah. Iran became an especially important American partner following the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. The crisis demonstrated how petroleum nationalism could become intertwined with Cold War politics. The Iranian oil nationalization dispute had challenged British and Western petroleum interests, while American policy makers were simultaneously concerned about Soviet influence and regional instability.

As a matter of fact, American diplomacy consequently combined economic interests, anti-communism and strategic security. Stivers (2012), examining earlier Anglo-American diplomacy surrounding Iraqi oil, demonstrates that Middle Eastern petroleum had already become an important element in international diplomacy because control over petroleum resources was increasingly connected with the emerging international economic order. By the 1960s, the United States was also developing a stronger Eastern diplomacy because Washington increasingly had to balance its relationship with Israel against its strategic relationships with oil-producing Arab States.

❖ The 1970s: The transformation of oil diplomacy.

The 1970s represented a major turning point in America oil diplomacy. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent Arab oil embargo demonstrated the vulnerability of Western economies to disruptions in Middle Eastern petroleum supplies. Arab oil-producing countries used their petroleum resources as an instrument of political pressure against states supporting Israel.

The strategy produced significant economic and political consequences in the United States and other industrialized countries. It demonstrated that oil could function as a geopolitical weapon and encouraged United States to place greater emphasis on energy security.

According to Cook (2024), the 1973 oil embargo and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 represented major shocks to the

international oil systems, but the United States responded by developing stronger mechanisms for protecting the free flow of energy from the Gulf. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 further transformed American policy. The overthrow of the Shah removed one of the America's most important regional allies and replaced him with an Islamic Republic that adopted an explicitly anti-American foreign policy. The hostage crisis, instability in the Gulf and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan intensified American concerns about the strategic vulnerability of the region.

❖ The Carter Doctrine and the Militarization of oil Security.

Carter Doctrine marked one of the most important stages in the evolution of America oil diplomacy. In 1980s, President Carter strategically made a comment that shows how Middle East oil was so vital to America's interests, he says thus:

"Any attempt by an external power to gain control Over Persian Gulf would be regarded as an assault On vital American interests and would be resisted By military means", (Cook,2024).

The assertion represents significant transformation: the protection of Middle Eastern directly connected with American military strategy. The United States subsequently developed military capabilities designed to protect Gulf shipping routes and oil infrastructure. The strategic objective was to prevent any hostile power from controlling the Persian Gulf and thereby threatening the international economy. Oil security consequently became inseparable from American national security. Cook (2024) identifies the Carter Doctrine, the Reagan Corollary and later operation Desert Shield/Storm as successive stages in the development of this security commitment.

❖ 1980s and Iran-Iraq War.

The Iran-Iraq war further demonstrated the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf. The United States became increasingly concerned about attacks on oil tankers and the possibility that the conflict could disrupt international energy supplies.. Washington therefore strengthened its Naval presence in the Gulf and participated in efforts to protect Commercial shipping.

This period reinforced the idea that the United States regarded freedom of navigation and uninterrupted oil transportation as international strategic interests. American oil diplomacy thus increasingly involved a combination of diplomacy, military power, alliances and economic measures.

❖ Gulf War and America's oil Diplomacy.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 represented another decisive moment in the history of American oil diplomacy.

Kuwait possessed significant petroleum resources, and Iraq's occupation threatened the political and economic stability of the Persian Gulf. The United States assembled an international coalition that expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait. In 1991 Gulf War operation Desert Storm demonstrated that American military power could be used to preserve the existing Gulf order and protect the security of oil-producing states. It also strengthened America's position as the dominant external power in the Persian Gulf after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

America strategically used this period to weaken both Iran and Iraq from becoming dominant regional powers. Cook (2024) identifies dual containment as another stage in Washington's effort to maintain free flow of energy from the Middle East.

❖ 2003 Iraq Invasion and oil Diplomacy.

The 2003 American invasion of Iraq thus, generated intense debate concerning the relationship between oil and American foreign policy. It could be simplistic, however, to argue that invasion was caused solely by the desire to obtain Iraqi oil. The George Bush administration identified several objectives, which includes, weapon of mass destruction, terrorism, regime change and regional security.

Nevertheless, Iraq's enormous petroleum reserves and its strategic position within the Gulf meant that energy considerations remained relevant to the wider geopolitical consequences of the war. The Iraq war also demonstrated one of the major contradictions of American oil diplomacy: the attempt to promote regional stability through military intervention could itself produce instability.

The subsequent insurgency, sectarian conflict and expansion of extremist organizations contributed to a prolonged period of political instability in the Middle East.

Strategic objectives of American oil Diplomacy.

Several major strategic objectives can therefore be identified in the evolution of America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East. First is the energy security. The United States has sought to prevent major disruptions to the production and transportation of petroleum. This objective explains American interest in the stability of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf producers.

Second is, protection of international oil market. American policy has not simply been concerned with obtaining Middle Eastern oil for American consumption. It has also sought to ensure that oil remains available to the international market. This is because, oil prices and globally interconnected, disruption in the Gulf can affect economies far beyond the region.

Third is, the Containment of rival powers. During the Cold War, the principal rival was the Soviet Union. In later decades, Iran became a major regional competitor. Today,

American strategy also considers China's growing economic and strategic relationship with Gulf. Fourth one, is protection of Maritime routes. The Strait of Hormuz is particularly important to America because it provides a major route for international energy transportation. Maintaining freedom of navigation has therefore become an important component of American Gulf strategy.

The fifth is the preservation of strategic alliances. American oil diplomacy has helped produce long-term relationships with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies. These relationships involve energy, military co-operations, arms sales, intelligence sharing and diplomatic coordination.

Sixth is the maintenance of American influence in the international system. Oil diplomacy has provided Washington with an important means of projecting power into a strategically significant region. Colgan (2021) argued that oil-for-security arrangements became part of a broader international order in which the United States assumed the role previously played by Britain as the principal external security provider in the Gulf.

Strait of Hormuz and American oil Diplomacy in the Middle East.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most important geographical features in the history and practice of American oil diplomacy in the Middle East. However, Strait of Hormuz could be seen as narrow waterway between Iran and Oman, connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian sea. Its importance derives from the enormous volume of petroleum and natural gas transported through it. In 2024, approximately 20 million barrels of oil per day passed through the Strait, equivalent to 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption and more than one-quarter of global seaborne oil trade (U.S Energy Information Administration).

Some of the importance of Strait Hormuz on American oil diplomacy in the Middle East include among others:

- (1) Protection of global oil supplies: The primary importance of Hormuz to American oil diplomacy is its role in the transportation of Middle Eastern oil to international markets. Major oil producers, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran and The United Arab Emirates, depend substantially on Gulf Maritime routes. Consequently, any prolonged disruption of oil the Strait could reduce the amount of oil reaching world markets and cause substantial increases in international oil prices. The U.S Energy Information Administration describes Hormuz as one of the World's most important oil "check-points" because alternative routes can not easily replace the volume of oil transportation that passes through it. For America, therefore, protecting the Strait is not simply about securing American oil imports. It is about protecting the international oil

markets, as earlier stated in this paper, because disruption in the Gulf can affect oil prices and economic conditions world wide.

- (2) Connection with American security: The strategic importance of Hormuz has caused the United States to treat the Persian Gulf as an important national-security interest. This became especially evident after the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In 1980, thus the protection of oil transportation through Hormuz became closely connected with America's broader strategic presence in the Middle East.
- (3) Military dimension is an important feature of American oil diplomacy, because diplomacy has been supported by Naval power, military alliances and deterrence. The objective is to discourage any state or non-state actor from blocking or seriously disrupting international shipping in the Middle East.
- (4) Containing Iran's regional influence. Hormuz is particularly significant because Iran controls the Northern side of the Strait, while Oman controls the Southern side. This geographical position gives Iran considerable strategic leverage. For American policy makers, the possibility that Iran could threaten or disrupt oil transportation through Hormuz has been an important consideration in U.S-Iran relations. The Strait consequently forms part of the broader strategic competition between America and Iran. This has become especially clear during periods of heightened U.S-Iranian tension. As of August 13, 2026, the Strait is at the centre of an active U.S-Iran confrontation, with conflicting claims over control of the waterway and significant disruption to energy shipping.
- (5) Oil Prices and the American Economy: Hormuz remains important to American economic interests. In the first half of 2025, the United States imported approximately 0.4 million barrels per day of crude oil and Condensate from Persian Gulf countries through Hormuz. This represent about 7% of U.S crude oil and Condensate imports and approximately 2% of U.S petroleum liquids consumption. More importantly, the United States is affected by global oil prices, not simply by the amount of oil imports from the Gulf. A disruption in Hormuz can therefore raise international crude prices, increasing costs for gasoline, transportation, manufacturing and other economic activities.
- (6) Implications for global Politics: The Strait of Hormuz has transformed the Persian Gulf into an important arena if great power politics. Its strategic significance has encourage the United States to maintain a major military and diplomatic presence in the region. It has also influenced the policies of China, India, Japan and

South Korea, which are major destinations for oil transported through Hormuz. Thus, although Hormuz is located in the Middle East, but its security has global consequences.

In conclusion, Hormuz can therefore be presented as a critical link between oil, diplomacy, military power and global politics. Its importance is no simply that American ships or American consumer depend on the Strait; rather, disruption of Hormuz can destabilize the global energy system, making the waterway a central element of American strategic calculations in the Middle East.

Profile of oil Discoveries in the Middle Eastern States

As this paper talks of America and oil diplomacy in the Middle East, it will be useful to identify the principal Middle Eastern oil producing countries and the dates oil was first discovered in commercially significant quantities.

- **Iran -1905/1908.** Iran was the earliest major oil producing country in the Middle East commercially significant oil was discovered at Masjed Soleyman in 1905, and production began in 1908. The Anglo-Persian oil company subsequently developed the field. The emergence of petroleum in Iran made the country strategically important to Britain and, eventually to the United States.
- **Iraq-1927.** The major breakthrough in Iraq came with the discovery of oil at Baba Gurgur near Kirkuk in 1927 by the Iraq petroleum Company. Iraq subsequently became important object of competition among European powers. Some historical sources date commercial discovery in Iraq in 1928, reflecting differences in how discovery and confirmation of commercial quantities are defined.
- **Bahrain-1932.** Bahrain became the first country in the Arabian Gulf to discover oil. Oil was discovered at Jabal al-Dukhan in 1932, and the country exported its first crude oil in 1934. The discovery was particularly significant because it stimulated further exploration throughout the Arabian Peninsula, including Saudi Arabia.
- **Kuwait-1938.** Oil was discovered in Kuwait's Burgan field in 1938. Burgan subsequently became one of the World's great oil fields. Kuwait's discovery intensified international competition for Gulf petroleum and increased the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf.
- **Saudi Arabia-1938.** Saudi Arabia discovered commercially significant oil in 1938, particularly at Damman well No.7. The discovery transformed the country's economy and eventually made Saudi Arabia the most important oil producing state in the

Middle East. Saudi Arabia exported its first major shipment of crude oil in 1939. This discovery is particularly important because the American-Saudi relationship subsequently became one of the most important strategic relationships in the Middle East.

- **Qater-1939.** Oil was discovered at the Dukhan field in Qatar in 1939. Commercial production and exports began after the second World War., with Qatar beginning to export oil in 1949.
- **United Arab Emirates-Abu Dhabi-1958.** In Abu Dhabi, oil was discovered in 1958, particularly at the offshore Umm shaif field. This was followed by the development of Abu Dhabi's petroleum industry and its emergence as a major Gulf oil producer.
- **Oman-1962:** Oman's Commercial oil breakthrough came in the early 1960s, with 1962 commonly identified as the year of Commercial-grade oil discovery. Oil subsequently became central to Oman's economic development and foreign relations.
- **Dubai-1966.** Dubai discovered oil at the Fateh Field in 1966. Although Dubai's reserves were considerably smaller than that of Abu Dhabi, the discovery helped finance the development and diversification of the Emirate.
- **Syria-1956.** Syria began developing its petroleum resources during the 1950s, with significant discoveries and subsequent production emerging around 1956. Syria's oil resources were smaller than those of the major Gulf producers, but petroleum nevertheless became important to its economy and foreign relations.
- **Yemen-1984.** Yemen's major Commercial oil discovery occurred in 1984, particularly in the Marib-jawf Basin. Oil production subsequently became an important source of government revenue.

Challenges Facing America's Oil Diplomacy in the Middle East

America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East has encountered numerous challenges arising from changing geopolitical realities, regional conflicts, economic transformations, and the global energy transition. The major challenges are:

Regional political instability. Middle East remains as one of the world's most politically volatile regions. Civil wars, interstate conflicts, political uprisings and regime changes have repeatedly threatened oil production and disrupted diplomatic relations. Conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen have undermined regional stability and complicated American efforts to protect energy infrastructure and

maintain long-term strategic partnerships (Gause, 2010, Lynch, 2016).

Emergence of terrorist Organizations. Another challenge facing America's oil diplomacy in the Middle East is the emergence of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS) has significantly affected America's oil diplomacy.

China's growing influence in the Region. China's growing influence in the region is another factor to be noted. China's expanding economic presence in the Middle East presents one of the greatest contemporary challenges to America's influence in the region. As the world's largest importer of crude oil, China has strengthened its economic partnership with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf states through trade, infrastructure investment and the Belt and road initiative (Alterman, 2020).

Russia's role in the Middle East. Russia re-establishment of herself as significant actor in the Middle East through military intervention, energy cooperation, and diplomatic engagement has been a thorn in the flesh of American government in the middle East. Its support for the Syrian government, cooperation with Iran, and collaboration with members of OPEC, under the OPEC framework have enhanced Moscow's regional influence. This renewed presence has complicated America's traditional leadership role and intensifies great power competition in the region (Trenin, 2018),

Discussion of Findings

The historical analysis reveals that American oil diplomacy has progressed through distinct phases. During the early twentieth century, U.S involvement focused primarily on commercial access to petroleum resources through private oil companies. Following the end of second world war, oil diplomacy became an integral component of American foreign policy as Washington sought to guarantee stable energy supplies while preventing rival powers from dominating the region.

This finding supports the argument of Yergin (1991), who contends that petroleum has been one of the defining forces shaping twentieth century international politics.

Another analysis, indicates that oil has significantly influenced American responses to regional crisis. The 1973 Arab oil embargo exposed the vulnerability of the United States and other industrialized economies to disruption in oil supplies, prompting major reforms in American energy policy. Overall, the findings confirm that oil has been a major, though not exclusive driver of American diplomacy in the Middle East. The evidence demonstrates that oil diplomacy has evolved from securing access to petroleum resources in a broader strategy designed to preserve American influence, maintain regional stability, protect

global energy markets, and respond to emerging geopolitical challenges.

Consequently, the paper concludes that, America's engagement with the Middle East is best understood through the interaction of energy security, national interests, and global power politics rather than through a single explanatory factor.

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