

In the Name of Allah, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful

THE NEW COLD WAR: PROXY, POWER AND PERIL

By

Prof. Dr. Toaha Qureshi MBE

Member of the Order of the **B**ritish **E**mpire (MBE)





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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book grew out of a long preoccupation part personal, part intellectual with the question of why weaker states so often become the battlegrounds of stronger ones. I grew up at the intersection of two worlds that have historically served as proxies for others' ambitions: South Asia and the wider Muslim world. That vantage point did not make me objective. It made me curious. The chapters that follow are the product of years of research, travel, and conversation with scholars, analysts, policymakers, and ordinary citizens living in the shadow of geopolitical decisions made far from their homes. I have tried to be rigorous, but I have not tried to be cold. The human cost of proxy conflict the displacement, the radicalization, the institutional collapse demands that any serious treatment of the subject refuse to treat suffering as merely a variable.

I have drawn on open-source intelligence, academic literature, diplomatic histories, and a wide range of international journalism. Where sources conflict as they frequently do in the study of covert and semi-covert state behaviour. I have noted the disagreement rather than pretended it does not exist. The reader deserves the full picture, including its uncertainties. The title Proxy, Power and Peril reflect the three forces I believe define modern geopolitical conflict. Proxy relationships are as old as statecraft itself; what has changed is their scale, their speed, and the technologies that amplify their consequences. Power is never static; it flows through networks, narratives, and institutions as much as through armies and arsenals. And peril the genuine, systemic risk of escalation, miscalculation, and civilisational fracture is what lends this subject its urgency.

I have written this book for those who wish to understand the world as it is, not merely as they would prefer it to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book of this scope does not emerge from solitude. It is, in the truest sense, a collective endeavour shaped by the generosity, rigour, and patience of many people across many countries. My deepest gratitude goes to the scholars and researchers whose foundational work made this analysis possible, and to those colleagues who gave freely of their time to review early drafts and challenge my assumptions. Their scrutiny made this a better book. Any errors that remain are mine alone.

I am grateful to the community at KNC Mosque, Kennington, whose sense of civic purpose and intellectual honesty has quietly shaped my understanding of what it means to inhabit a world defined by difference. The conversations I have had in that community often informal, always illuminating are woven throughout this work. To the team at Global Affairs Press: your editorial precision, your belief in this project from its earliest stages, and your commitment to producing work that matters to a global readership have been nothing short of extraordinary. To my family in both the United Kingdom and Pakistan whose sacrifice made every page possible: no acknowledgement is adequate. You know what you gave, and I carry it with me.

Finally, to every reader who picks up this book in search of understanding rather than confirmation: this was written for you.

A MESSAGE TO THE READER

You are holding a book about power but more precisely, about what happens at the edges of power: in the corridors where decisions are deniable, in the territories where sovereignty is a polite fiction, and among the populations who absorb the consequences of strategies drawn up in distant capitals.

The study of geopolitics can sometimes feel abstract a game played on maps, narrated by commentators who are never in the room where decisions are made. This book tries to do something different. It tries to make the architecture of modern conflict legible: to show you not just what happened, but why the logic of proxy warfare is so seductive to states, so destructive to peoples, and so difficult to escape.

You do not need to agree with every argument I make. You are not asked to. What I do ask is that you read with the awareness that these are not theoretical stakes. Every chapter describes a world that real people are navigating right now families crossing borders, states fracturing under external pressure, ideologies weaponised by those who do not themselves believe them.

The chapters are designed to be read sequentially, but each also stands on its own as an analytical unit. A glossary of key terms, a bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and a detailed index are provided at the end for those wishing to pursue specific threads further.

If this book leaves you with more questions than it resolves, it will have done its work. In a domain as contested as this one, intellectual honesty requires acknowledging that certainty is a luxury we can rarely afford.

Foreword

The world stands at a precarious juncture, where the echoes of the Cold War resonate not in a neatly bipolar struggle but in a fractured, multifaceted contest for global influence. The Architecture of the New Cold War seeks to unravel this complex tapestry, where economic leverage, military posturing, and ideological battles converge to shape a volatile international order. As a scholar of geopolitics, I have witnessed the evolution of great power rivalries, from the U.S.-Soviet standoff to today's intricate web involving the United States, China, Russia, and a host of proxy actors across South Asia particularly Pakistan, the Middle East, and beyond. This book is not merely an academic exercise but a clarion call to understand the global nuclear risks, cyber threats, and resource wars that threaten humanity's shared future.

The genesis of this work lies in a recognition that the post-Cold War unipolar moment, dominated by U.S. hegemony, has given way to a multipolar reality. My aim is to provide a comprehensive yet accessible framework for readers to navigate the fault lines of this new era, from the Sino-American rivalry in the Indo-Pacific to the proxy conflicts simmering in Afghanistan and Syria. By delving into minute details such as the $113 billion U.S. aid to Ukraine against Russia or the strategic claims of the One China Policy by Xi Jinping. I seek to illuminate the granular decisions driving global tensions. South Asia, with its India-Pakistan rivalry and U.S. realignments, emerges as a critical theatre, where historical grievances and modern ambitions collide.

The book is written in a unique format, as it provides brief glimpses of different issues in the world that have significantly affected the world and are still influencing the planet. These issues are escalating poverty,

environmental destruction, resource loss, and global insecurity-the danger of use of nuclear weapons and possibility to see WWIII. Every short observation is a point of departure to the readers who wish to explore these important issues for further research, academic or not academic.

This book is for policymakers, students, and citizens who seek to understand not just the "what" but the "why" behind today's crises. It challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths about power, betrayal, and the human cost of strategic miscalculations, while offering glimmers of hope through dialogue and de-escalation. My hope is that this work sparks a broader conversation about steering the world away from collision and toward a fragile but achievable coexistence.

Introduction

The term "Cold War" evokes images of a world divided between two superpowers, locked in an ideological and military standoff yet restrained by the spectre of mutual destruction. Today, that binary framework has shattered, replaced by a fragmented global order where alliances shift, proxies proliferate, and new cyber, economic, and ecological battlegrounds that redefine conflict. The Architecture of the New Cold War examines this evolving landscape, where the United States, China, and Russia, alongside regional powers like Pakistan and India have become integral part for dominance in a multipolar world. Far from a singular confrontation, this new Cold War is a mosaic of rivalries, amplified by technological revolutions and resource scarcity, with South Asia serving as a pivotal arena.

The original Cold War was defined by a bipolar standoff between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, characterized by proxy wars, nuclear brinkmanship, and ideological crusades. Today's version is messier, with economic leverage such as China's Belt and Road Initiative or U.S. sanctions on Russia wielding as much power as military might. The Sino-American fault line, cantered on trade wars and Taiwan, overshadows global stability, while Russia's hybrid warfare and Middle Eastern proxy conflicts add layers of volatility. South Asia, with its 2.09 billion people emerges as a microcosm of these tensions: India's rise as a U.S. partner, Pakistan's alignment with China, and Afghanistan's post-withdrawal chaos underscore the region's strategic weight.

Power dynamics in this era are fluid. Economic sanctions, an attempt to cripple Iran and Russia, coexist with military posturing in the South China Sea and the Arctic. Ideological clashes democracy versus authoritarianism

fuel distrust, yet pragmatic alliances, like the U.S.-India Quad or China-Pakistan's China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), blurring traditional lines. Proxy conflicts from Ukraine to Yemen act as shadow wars, where great powers test each other's resolve without direct confrontation. The perils are stark: nuclear risks loom as New START lapses, cyberattacks like SolarWinds expose vulnerabilities, and resource competitions, particularly in the Arctic, threaten escalation.

U.S. foreign policy has evolved dramatically, from the unipolar dominance of the 1990s to a contested multipolarity. The withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked a pivot, redirecting focus to countering China in the Indo-Pacific while managing Middle Eastern quagmires. This book dissects these shifts through detailed examples, revealing the granular mechanisms export controls, drone strikes and legislative acts that shape global outcomes. South Asia, with its India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry and U.S. efforts to balance Pakistan-China ties, illustrates the interconnectedness of regional and global flashpoints.

The stakes could not be higher. A miscalculation over Taiwan, a cyberattack on critical infrastructure, or a flare-up in Kashmir could cascade into catastrophe. Yet, amidst these dangers lie opportunities for de-escalation through Track-II dialogues and multilateral frameworks. This book aims to map the architecture of this new Cold War, offering readers a lens to understand its complexities and a roadmap to navigate its perils. By examining the interplay of great powers, proxies, and emerging threats, we confront the urgent question: can humanity forge a path to coexistence, or are we destined for collision?

Part I:

The Anatomy of New Cold War

CHAPTER 1

Defining the New Cold War



From left to right Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif walking toward the viewing platform at China's massive military parade in Beijing on September 3, 2025, marking the 80th anniversary of the end of

The introduction begins by redefining the concept of a "Cold War" in the contemporary context, moving away from the U.S.-Soviet binary of the 20th century to a fragmented web of alliances and rivalries that spans the globe. Unlike the ideological clash between capitalism and communism that defined the original Cold War, with its relatively clear demarcation between East and West, the New Cold War involves multiple powers primarily China, Russia, North Korea and the United States, alongside influential regional actors such as Pakistan, Iran, India, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia competing across economic, technological, military, and informational domains. This multipolar competition lacks the rigid bipolar structure of the past, resulting instead in a dynamic and often unpredictable geopolitical landscape.

It is argued that this fracturing of traditional alliances, such as the strains within NATO (evident in differing European and American priorities over energy security and defence spending), or the opportunistic partnerships

forged through China's Belt and Road Initiative (which binds developing nations to Beijing through infrastructure debt while allowing them room to manoeuvre with Western investors), creates volatile fault lines that can shift rapidly. Similarly, Russia's deepening ties with North Korea and Iran for military technology and energy trade, or the growing rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and China despite Riyadh's longstanding security dependence on Washington, illustrate how pragmatic calculations now frequently override historical loyalties.

This shift reflects a world where traditional blocs are eroded by pragmatic, often temporary, alignments driven by mutual interests rather than shared ideologies. Nations increasingly engage in "hedging" strategies--maintaining relations with rival great powers simultaneously to maximize leverage and minimize risks. For instance, countries in Southeast Asia and Africa court both American security guarantees and Chinese investment, while Middle Eastern states balance Russian diplomatic cover with U.S. military hardware. In this environment, competition manifests not only through proxy conflicts or arms races but also via control over critical technologies (such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence), supply chains for rare earth minerals, and influence over international institutions. The result is a New Cold War that is less about global domination by one ideology and more about fragmented spheres of influence, where sudden realignments triggered by economic crises, technological breakthroughs, or regional conflicts can reshape the international order overnight.

Proxy Conflicts: The Shadow Wars Shaping World Order



In geopolitics, a proxy refers to a state or non-state actor such as rebel groups, militias, terrorist organizations, or private military companies that serves as a surrogate for an external major power pursuing its strategic interests in a conflict zone. By channelling financial aid, weapons, training, intelligence, or logistical support to these proxies, the sponsoring power advances its geopolitical objectives while evading direct military engagement. This approach minimizes the political, economic, and human costs associated with open warfare, reduces the risk of escalation into a broader confrontation, and provides plausible deniability if operations go awry.

In conflict zones, proxies may engage in illicit activities like oil smuggling, drug trafficking, extortion, and the black-market trade of antiquities to create their own funding streams. Non-state proxies may also receive funding from wealthy individuals, corporations, or diaspora communities aligned with their cause.

Proxy conflicts have emerged as a hallmark of the so-called New Cold War, an era of renewed great-power competition where direct clashes between nuclear-armed states remain unthinkable. Instead, rival powers, primarily the United States, China, Russia, and regional players like Iran wage indirect battles through surrogates to contest influence, secure resources, and reshape global order. Classic examples include U.S. and

NATO military assistance to Ukraine in its defence against Russian invasion, and Iran's extensive backing of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthis in Yemen to counter U.S.-aligned Israel and Saudi Arabia. Russia, in turn, has deployed Wagner Group mercenaries in Africa and Syria to protect its interests.

These shadow wars now span multiple domains, including cyberspace, where state-sponsored hacking collectives disrupt critical infrastructure, steal intellectual property, or spread disinformation on behalf of their patrons. From the protracted civil wars in Syria and Yemen to simmering tensions in the Sahel and South China Sea, proxy entanglements draw in neighbouring states, empower non-state actors, fracture traditional alliances, and redraw borders. The result is heightened global instability, prolonged human suffering, and a fragmented international system where regional crises perpetually threaten to spiral into wider confrontations.

Power Dynamics: Economic Leverage and Military Might

This section delves into the multifaceted exercise of power in the New Cold War era, where economic coercion, military capabilities, and ideological narratives intersect to shape global influence. Economically, the United States wields extensive sanctions regimes, exemplified by ongoing restrictions on Chinese tech giant Huawei, which persisted into 2025 despite the company's advancements in self-developed chips and AI processors like the Ascend series. These measures aim to curb technology transfer and military-civil fusion, though analyses suggest they have inadvertently bolstered Huawei's domestic innovation and market resilience. In response, China leverages its near monopoly on rare earth elements and critical minerals refining over 90% globally imposing new export controls in late 2025 that disrupted semiconductor and defence

supply chains worldwide, compelling Western firms to seek diversification



The USS George Washington (CVN-73) conducts a replenishment-at-sea with USNS Supply (T-AOE-6) in the Pacific waters, 2020s.

Militarily, the U.S. sustains unparalleled projection through approximately 750 overseas bases across 80 countries, enabling rapid response and alliance deterrence. However, this network faces mounting challenges from Russia's hypersonic missile deployments, including the Oreshnik intermediate-range system entering service and planned for Belarus in 2025, alongside advancements in nuclear-propelled cruise missiles. China's rapid naval expansion further contests U.S. dominance, with the commissioning of its third aircraft carrier, Fujian, and coordinated surges of over 100 vessels in the East and South China Seas demonstrating growing assertiveness in disputed waters.

Ideologically, the rivalry contrasts Western liberal democracy with authoritarian governance models promoted by Russia and China through coordinated disinformation campaigns, amplifying narratives that undermine democratic institutions and sow division in the Global South and beyond. These intertwined dynamics foster a precarious equilibrium, where mutual deterrence prevents outright conflict but perpetuates volatility, with no single power achieving unequivocal hegemony.

Perils Ahead: Nuclear Risks, Cyber Threats, and Resource Scarcities



Aerial view of a nuclear power plant's cooling tower releasing water vapor, United States.

This section underscores the existential dangers of the New Cold War, where nuclear proliferation, cyber warfare, and fierce competition over scarce resources threaten catastrophic escalation. The impending expiration of the New START treaty on February 5, 2026, the last major U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control agreement has dramatically heightened risks, with Russia having suspended participation since 2023 and ongoing negotiations yielding no extension as of late 2025. This erosion of verification mechanisms leaves no binding limits on strategic arsenals, fuelling modernization drives across nuclear powers and raising prospects of uncontrolled arms races or miscalculations leading to use.

Cyber warfare adds another layer of peril, with state-sponsored operations increasingly targeting critical infrastructure. The 2020 SolarWinds breach, attributed to Russia, exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, while 2024-2025 saw surges in attacks: Russian hacks on Ukrainian energy and government systems rose nearly 70%, Chinese groups like Volt Typhoon and Salt Typhoon infiltrated U.S. and allied networks for potential disruption, and Iranian actors targeted sectors like space and manufacturing.

Resource scarcities further amplify tensions, particularly over rare earth minerals essential for advanced technologies and defence. China's

dominance refining over 90% globally has been weaponized through 2025 export controls on elements, magnets, and technologies, disrupting Western supply chains amid trade wars and prompting U.S. diversification efforts. Water disputes and other critical materials, intertwined with climate stresses, risk sparking regional conflicts that draw in great powers.

This contends these interconnected threats elevate geopolitical miscalculations to potentially apocalyptic levels, demanding urgent diplomacy to avert direct confrontation in this multipolar shadow conflict.

A Theoretical Framework for Multipolarity and Hybrid Warfare

While the original Cold War was characterised by a relatively stable bipolar confrontation between two ideologically opposed superpowers, the New Cold War examined in this book is fundamentally different. It is a fragmented, multipolar competition among the United States, China, Russia, and a constellation of influential regional powers operating within an anarchic international system. In this multipolar world, great powers increasingly employ a blend of military and non-military means commonly referred to as hybrid warfare or hybrid conflict to pursue their objectives below the threshold of open war, while exploiting ambiguity, deniability, and interconnected global systems.

To move beyond mere description of events and provide deeper explanatory power, this work employs an explicit theoretical lens centred on multipolarity and hybrid warfare (see Figure 1). The "PESTEL Architecture" applied throughout the book was created to map these hybrid dynamics systematically across political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal/multilateral domains.

The framework is rooted in structural neorealism, adapted to contemporary multipolarity (drawing on Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer), but places hybrid warfare as conceptualised by Frank Hoffman (2007, updated 2022) and others at its core. Hoffman describes hybrid warfare as the simultaneous and adaptive employment of conventional, irregular, cyber, informational, and economic tools by state and non-state actors to achieve strategic goals while remaining below the threshold that would provoke decisive conventional response. The structural uncertainty, shifting alignments and heightened miscalculation in today's anarchic multipolar system, drives great powers to favour hybrid methods over direct confrontation. This also renders traditional deterrence less predictable than in the bipolar era.

Key complementary concepts enrich this theoretical framework for Multipolar and Hybrid Warfare

- **Proxy Warfare** (Mumford, Groh): A core subset of hybrid tactics, whereby great powers channel support to surrogates to advance interests with plausible deniability. Examples include U.S. and NATO assistance to Ukraine, Russian Wagner/Africa Corps operations in the Sahel, and Iranian backing of Hezbollah and the Houthis.

- **Gray-Zone Tactics** (Galeotti, Mazarr): Deliberate ambiguity and actions below the threshold of war such as China's island-building and maritime militia deployments in the South China Sea or coordinated surges in the Taiwan Strait designed to achieve incremental gains without triggering full-scale response.

- **Weaponised Interdependence** (Farrell & Newman): The economic pillar of hybrid warfare, where states exploit choke points in global networks (semiconductors, rare earths, financial systems) for coercive effect. U.S. export controls on advanced chips, Trump's 2025 tariff packages, and China's retaliatory restrictions on critical minerals illustrate this dimension.

- **Hedging in Multipolar Systems** (Goh, Kuik): Middle and smaller powers respond to hybrid pressures by avoiding firm alignment, simultaneously engaging rival great powers to maximise autonomy and leverage. Southeast Asian states balance U.S. security guarantees with Chinese investment via the Belt and Road Initiative; Central Asian republics navigate Russian influence alongside the U.S.-led C5+1 framework.

This hybrid warfare lens, embedded within multipolar neorealism and mapped through the PESTEL Architecture, explains why direct great-power war remains unlikely yet competition has intensified across multiple domains. It illuminates the interconnected perils nuclear brinkmanship, cyber vulnerabilities, resource conflicts and underscores the urgent need for confidence-building measures, Track-II dialogues, and selective multilateralism to manage escalation risks in this fragmented era.

The PESTEL Analytical Framework for Multipolarity and Hybrid Warfare

PESTEL is a strategic analytical framework originally developed in business and management studies (originating from Francis Aguilar's ETPS model in 1967 and later expanded) to systematically assess the macro-environmental factors influencing an organisation or system. The

acronym stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors. It provides a structured way to identify external forces that shape opportunities, threats, and strategic choices.

In this book, we adapt the classic PESTEL framework to the realm of international relations and great-power competition, transforming it into a geopolitical tool—the PESTEL Architecture specifically designed to map the multifaceted nature of hybrid warfare in a multipolar world (see Figure 1.1).

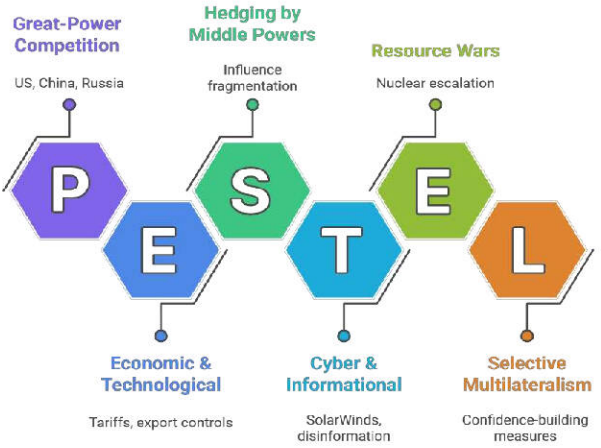
The adaptation is as follows:

- **Political (P):** Encompasses proxy warfare, hybrid operations, Gray-zone tactics, and great-power alignments or realignments (e.g., U.S. support for Ukraine, Russian Africa Corps deployments, Chinese maritime militia activities).
- **Economic (E):** Captures weaponized interdependence and economic statecraft, including tariffs, sanctions, export controls, and supply-chain coercion (e.g., Trump's 2025 tariff packages, U.S. restrictions on advanced semiconductors, Chinese controls on rare-earth exports).
- **Social (S):** Reflects influence fragmentation and hedging behaviour by middle and smaller powers, as well as domestic societal pressures that shape foreign policy (e.g., nationalist surges in India and Pakistan, Southeast Asian balancing between U.S. security ties and Chinese investment).
- **Technological (T):** Focuses on the technological and cyber domains of competition, including AI arms races, cyber intrusions, and dual-use

technology controls (e.g., SolarWinds breach, Volt Typhoon operations, TikTok security debates).

- **Environmental (E):** Addresses resource wars, climate-amplified scarcities, and competition over strategic geographies (e.g., Arctic routes, rare-earth minerals, Indus water disputes).

- **Legal/Multilateral (L):** Examines institutional mechanisms, confidence-building measures, Track-II dialogues, and selective multilateral frameworks that either constrain or enable de-escalation (e.g., Quad initiatives, proposed cyber norms, back-channel diplomacy after



This diagram illustrates the adapted PESTEL framework as the core analytical tool for understanding the New Cold War.

crises).By arranging these six domains in an interconnected chain (as visualised in Figure 1.1), the PESTEL Architecture illustrates how hybrid warfare operates across multiple fronts simultaneously, with actions in one domain reinforcing or spilling over into others. This adaptation allows us to move beyond fragmented event description to a holistic

understanding of how multipolar competition functions today revealing both the heightened perils of escalation and the critical intervention points for mitigation through dialogue and multilateral cooperation.

Throughout the book, the PESTEL Architecture will be referenced at key junctures particularly at the start of major thematic parts and in the conclusion to demonstrate how specific crises and policies fit into this broader hybrid warfare landscape, providing readers with a consistent analytical lens for navigating the complexities of the New Cold War.

In defining this New Cold War, we see a world not of rigid blocs but fluid alliances, where hybrid tactics dominate and perils like nuclear risks demand vigilance. The PESTEL framework reminds us that interconnected domains amplify both threats and opportunities for de-escalation. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics is key to forging paths toward coexistence amid multipolar anarchy.

CHAPTER 2

Make America Great Again (MAGA) – Really?



President Donald Trump, wearing a red MAGA hat, speaks at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, October 5, 2024.

The introduction of sweeping tariffs by President Donald Trump in April 2025 has reignited debates on economic nationalism and protectionism. Think tanks across the ideological spectrum have weighed in on the motivations behind these measures and their potential political consequences. The Trump administration has justified the tariffs, which include a universal 10% levy on all imports and significantly higher rates for specific nations like China (34%) and the European Union (20%), as a necessary response to persistent trade deficits and unfair trade practices (White House, 2025). Analysts from the Heritage Foundation argue that these tariffs align with Trump's broader economic strategy of prioritising domestic manufacturing, reducing dependency on foreign goods, and addressing security concerns linked to global supply chains (Heritage Foundation, 2025). However, the Brookings Institution counters that while these measures may offer short-term political gains by appealing to Trump's base, they risk destabilising global trade and triggering retaliatory actions, particularly from China and the EU (Brookings Institution, 2025).

Politically, these tariffs are expected to have far-reaching implications both domestically and internationally. Domestically, they reinforce Trump's commitment to economic nationalism, a key pillar of his "America First" policy and serve as a rallying point ahead of the 2026 midterms. Analysts from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) suggest that the tariffs will likely deepen partisan divisions, with Republicans framing them as a necessary move to safeguard American industries, while Democrats argue they could increase consumer prices and strain diplomatic ties (CSIS, 2025). Internationally, think tanks such as Chatham House warn that these tariffs could lead to a broader global trade war, especially given initial signals from the European Commission and China hinting at countermeasures (Chatham House, 2025). If retaliatory tariffs escalate, they could disrupt global supply chains and further entrench geopolitical tensions, particularly between the U.S. and its traditional allies.

The broader impact on global politics remains uncertain, but if these tariffs persist, they may accelerate the trend toward economic decoupling between the U.S. and China, reinforcing an increasingly fragmented world economy. Institutions like the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) highlight that this shift could realign global trade partnerships, with emerging markets potentially benefiting from redirected supply chains (PIIE, 2025). Ultimately, while these tariffs may strengthen Trump's political standing in the short term, their long-term consequences on U.S. economic competitiveness and diplomatic relations remain highly contentious within think tank discourse.

Trump - A convicted President



D 2024 Electoral Map: Trump 294, Harris 233 (270 to win).
n (Democratic presidential nominee).

The 2024 United States presidential election marked a historic political turn with the return of Donald J. Trump to the White House, defeating Vice President Kamala Harris. Trump, running alongside Senator J.D. Vance, won approximately 77.3 million votes (49.9%) compared to Harris's 75 million (48.4%), translating into 312 electoral votes for Trump. He secured all key swing states including Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Brookings Institution, 2025). A key factor that shaped voter sentiment, particularly in swing states, was the Biden administration's handling of the Gaza conflict. The U.S. government's unwavering support for Israel during the war led to widespread dissatisfaction among Arab and Muslim Americans, especially in Michigan a state with one of the largest Arab American populations in the country. Think tanks such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace observed that Biden's alignment with Israel alienated critical voting blocs, resulting in reduced turnout or protest votes among traditional Democratic voters (Carnegie Endowment, 2024). In Michigan alone, over 100,000 Democratic primary voters selected the "uncommitted" option as a form of protest the administration's Middle East policy.

This protest led to the allocation of 36 Democratic National Convention delegates to the "uncommitted" faction (Arab Centre Washington DC, 2024). The movement, dubbed #AbandonBiden, was well-organized and particularly vocal in Dearborn and other cities with large Muslim populations. The Centre for Strategic and International Studies highlighted that the backlash was rooted not just in foreign policy but also in a growing sense of political exclusion among American Muslims (CSIS, 2024).

Donald Trump became the first President in American history to be convicted of felony crimes when a New York jury found him guilty on 34 counts of falsifying business records in the first degree on May 30, 2024 (Ballotpedia, 2025; NPR, 2024). These charges stemmed from a scheme to conceal hush money payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 election. On January 10, 2025, he received an unconditional discharge, meaning no prison time, fines, or probation, though the convictions remain on his record pending appeals (ABC News, 2025; NPR, 2025)The Gaza conflict was not the only issue influencing voter behaviour, but its visibility in media coverage and its emotional resonance among progressive and minority voters made it an electoral flashpoint. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Democratic attempts to downplay the Gaza issue failed to address the community's demands, particularly concerning humanitarian aid and arms sales to Israel (CFR, 2024). Beyond Michigan, states like Georgia and Arizona also swung to Trump. These shifts were partly attributed to voter concerns about the economy, energy policy, and border security, but the Gaza issue played a role in consolidating the GOP base and demotivating certain left-leaning blocs. Pennsylvania and Wisconsin witnessed similar trends. The Hoover Institution noted that the Democrats' decline in key swing counties was

exacerbated by the administration's inability to rally its base considering foreign policy discontent (Hoover Institution, 2024).

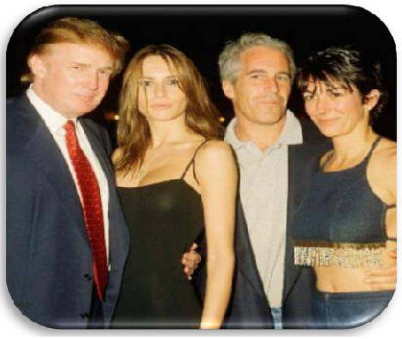
Trump's campaign benefited from more disciplined messaging and targeted engagement with minority voters. He made notable gains among Black and Latino men and improved performance among young voters disillusioned with the Biden-Harris platform. This demographic movement, as analysed by the American Enterprise Institute, suggests a continuing political realignment with non-white working-class voters becoming more open to Republican appeals, especially when progressive concerns like the Gaza war are sidelined (AEI, 2025). In conclusion, the 2024 U.S. presidential election illustrated how foreign policy, especially the Gaza conflict, can directly impact domestic electoral outcomes. The Democratic Party's perceived failure to represent moral clarity on the issue cost them key constituencies in pivotal states. For the first time in modern history, U.S. policy on a Middle Eastern war visibly reshaped a presidential race, underscoring the need for parties to understand the domestic resonance of international affairs.

Trump's second-term immigration policies, emphasizing mass deportations and restrictions on both illegal and legal immigration, are projected to have significant negative economic consequences. Analyses indicate that reducing the workforce through deportations could lower U.S. GDP growth by 0.1 to 0.4 percentage points in 2025 alone, equating to losses of $30–110 billion (Brookings Institution, 2025). Longer-term estimates suggest a reduction in annual GDP growth by nearly one-third over a decade, with potential labour shortages in sectors like agriculture, construction, and hospitality driving up inflation and consumer prices (National Foundation for American Policy, 2025; CNN Business, 2025).

These effects arise from removing millions of workers who contribute substantially to tax revenues and economic output.

Similarly, Trump's aggressive tariff policies in 2025 including a baseline 10% on all imports and higher rates on specific countries have been linked to reduced economic output. Models project long-run GDP reductions of up to 8%, with wages falling by 7% in severe scenarios, alongside higher household costs averaging $1,200 annually (Tax Foundation, 2025; Penn Wharton Budget Model, 2025). While tariffs have generated revenue and temporarily narrowed the trade deficit, they risk inflationary pressures, global retaliation, and disruptions to supply chains.

Moral Bankruptcy and the American Ruling Class



Donald Trump and Melania Knauss with Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, New York, early 2000s.

Donald Trump and Jeffrey Epstein forged a close social and professional relationship in the late 1980s that flourished through the 1990s and early 2000s, marked by frequent appearances together at high-profile events such as the 1992 Mar-a-Lago party where Trump introduced Epstein to a 15-year-old pageant contestant, and multiple flights on Epstein's private jet between 1993 and 1997 (The Week, 2025). In a 2002 New York Magazine interview, Trump praised Epstein as a "terrific guy" who shared his affinity for "beautiful women," reflecting their mutual immersion in elite social circles that included Ghislaine Maxwell and

Melania Knauss (PBS News, 2025; CNN, 2025). The partnership soured around 2004–2007 amid a property bidding war and allegations that Epstein had recruited underage Mar-a-Lago staff, prompting Trump to ban him from the resort and later distance himself by calling Epstein a "creep" (The New York Times, 2025a; Forbes, 2025). Despite this rift, Epstein's post-conviction emails through 2019 revealed ongoing fixation on Trump, including claims that Trump spent "hours" at his home with a victim and assertions of intimate knowledge capable of "taking him down," though no evidence has implicated Trump in Epstein's criminal activities (The New York Times, 2025, Rolling Stone, 2025).



Prince Andrew Epstein Files

Donald Trump remains the only U.S. president to have been convicted of felony crimes. In May 2024, he was found guilty on 34 counts of falsifying business records in the New York hush-money case, related to payments made to silent allegations of an affair during his 2016 campaign (Governor of California, 2026). On January 10, 2025, he received an unconditional discharge as sentencing, meaning no prison time, probation, or further penalties beyond the conviction itself (Houston Public Media, 2025). This conviction stands as of January 2026, marking him as a felon, though it did not prevent his re-election in 2024 or inauguration in January 2025 (Governor of California, 2026).

The recent publication of approximately 3.5 million pages of records under the **Epstein Files Transparency Act**, signed into law in November 2025, represents the most significant disclosure of government documents regarding Jeffrey Epstein to date (Britannica 2026). These files, released by the Department of Justice (DOJ) in late January 2026, include over 180,000 images and 2,000 videos that were previously held in FBI and DOJ archives (US Department of Justice 2026). While investigators noted that many files contain unverified or sensationalist tips from the public, they offer a detailed look at Epstein's interactions with global elite figures and the internal failures of the federal investigations (The Guardian 2026).

Key Political and Financial Revelations

The 2026 releases have specifically illuminated the depth of Epstein's influence within political circles after his 2008 conviction. Emails released in early February suggest that **Peter Mandelson**, a former UK Cabinet minister, shared market-sensitive information with Epstein during the 2010 financial crisis (The Guardian 2026). Additionally, the records include previously unseen photos of **Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor** (the former Prince Andrew) and details of an invitation he extended to Epstein to visit Buckingham Palace for "privacy" in September 2010, contradicting his previous public claims that



Images of Peter Mandelson in his underwear were released in the latest tranche of the Epstein files. In some images, he is standing next to a woman whose face is redacted.

he had distanced himself from the financier at that time (The Guardian 2026; CBS News 2026).

Prominent Figures Mentioned in 2026 Disclosures

Figure	Nature of Revelation	Date of Content
Peter Mandelson	Allegedly shared confidential UK government documents on asset sales.	2010
Prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor	Photos of him with an unidentified woman; Buckingham Palace invitations.	2010
Elon Musk	Emails suggesting cordial contact and potential plans to visit Epstein's island.	2012–2013
Donald Trump	Files containing various unsubstantiated FBI tips and unverified photos.	2020

Investigative Limitations and Victim Privacy

Despite the volume of the release, an Associated Press review of the records indicates that the FBI struggled to find definitive evidence to prosecute a broader sex-trafficking ring serving other powerful men (Associated Press 2026). Memos from 2025 suggest that while proof of Epstein's personal abuse was ample, proof of high-level co-conspirators remained "scant" or relied on witnesses with inconsistent accounts (PBS NewsHour 2026). Furthermore, the January 2026 release was marred by

significant redaction failures, where the Justice Department inadvertently exposed the full names and sensitive information of at least 43 victims, leading to calls for the website's immediate removal (Wikipedia 2026; Wall Street Journal 2026).

Legal and Ethical Fallout

The fallout from these files has already led to renewed legal scrutiny. In the UK, materials regarding Peter Mandelson have been referred to the police for potential market abuse (The Guardian 2026). Meanwhile, in the United States, the House Oversight Committee has moved to hold figures such as Bill and Hillary Clinton in contempt for refusing to testify on matters related to the Epstein affair (Britannica 2026). Survivors and lawmakers continue to argue that the 3.5 million pages represent only a fraction of the 6 million files identified by investigators, suggesting that more evidence of institutional complicity may still be withheld (Washington Post 2026).

Fragile Gaza Ceasefire and Trump's Bold Claims

President Donald Trump's stance on the Gaza Palestine conflict during his second term has been marked by a mix of assertive diplomacy and controversial proposals, aiming to end hostilities swiftly but often raising serious concerns in legal and humanitarian circles.



President Donald Trump with Secretary of State Marco Rubio (left) and Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth (right) during a Cabinet meeting at the White House, 2025.

Following his re-election in 2024, Trump made clear commitments to "end the war quickly," reportedly urging Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to bring the conflict to a close within two months. He also communicated directly with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to stress his intention for a rapid de-escalation (Middle East Institute, 2025).In a particularly controversial move, Trump proposed that the United States "take over" the Gaza Strip and relocate approximately two million Palestinians to neighbouring Arab states, envisioning a redevelopment of the territory into a commercial "Riviera of the Middle East." He even hinted at the possible deployment of American troops to enforce this vision. Although Netanyahu supported the idea, the proposal received widespread international condemnation, including from the United Nations and major Arab states, for contravening international humanitarian law and raising the spectre of forced displacement (Brookings Institution, 2025).

The proposal, while later walked back as a "recommendation," was widely perceived as a reflection of Trump's non-traditional, top-down diplomatic style, with critics arguing it ignored the realities of Palestinian national identity and legal sovereignty (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025). Think tanks such as the International Crisis Group have cautioned that such a strategy could further inflame regional tensions and undermine U.S. credibility as a neutral mediator in the Israeli Palestinian conflict (ICG, 2025).Despite growing global outcry over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza where tens of thousands of civilians, including women and children, have been killed Trump's administration remained firmly committed to military and political support for Israel. In April 2025, the U.S. Senate rejected efforts to block $8.8 billion in arms

sales to Israel, a move strongly aligned with Trump's foreign policy priorities (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

Diplomatically, Trump maintained high-level engagement, meeting Netanyahu in April 2025 at the White House to discuss the conflict's trajectory and regional stability. However, these interactions, critics argue, continued to exclude Palestinian representation and lacked any robust peace-building framework rooted in mutual recognition and two-state principles (Chatham House, 2025).In summary, while President Trump's stance is framed as a mission to stop the Gaza conflict, his strategies such as relocation proposals and unconditional support for Israel have been widely criticized by international institutions and legal experts. His approach reflects a broader shift in U.S. foreign policy under his leadership: transactional, unilateral, and often at odds with international consensus.

Trump Prioritises Energy Over Environment

As of April 2025, President Donald Trump has enacted a sweeping series of executive orders that represent a marked reversal in U.S. climate policy. On January 20, 2025, his first day back in office. President Trump signed an executive order titled *"Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements"*, which directed the immediate withdrawal of the United States from the Paris



President Donald Trump holds a "Trump Digs Coal for Mt. Carmel" sign at a campaign rally in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, October 2024.

Agreement. The Paris Agreement (formally the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) is a 2015 international treaty adopted by nearly 200 parties to combat climate change. It entered into force in November 2016 and aims to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C, through nationally determined contributions (NDCs) for greenhouse gas emission reductions, adaptation measures, and financial support (UNFCCC, NRDC, 2025). This move, marking the second U.S. withdrawal from the accord, reinforced his administration's broader goal of prioritizing domestic fossil fuel interests over international environmental commitments.

In a further move to consolidate federal authority over climate regulation, Trump issued an additional executive order in April 2025 that sought to block state-level environmental policies that conflicted with federal priorities. The order specifically targeted progressive states such as California, New York, and Vermont nullifying their cap-and-trade programs, emissions permitting systems, and climate litigation frameworks. The administration justified this move by asserting that such independent state actions hindered federal goals to revitalize fossil fuel industries, especially coal (Politico, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

Alongside these deregulatory measures, President Trump introduced multiple executive actions designed to support the coal sector. These included removing federal restrictions on coal mining, extending the operational life of ageing coal-fired power plants, and granting temporary exemptions from emissions regulations. The administration cited rising energy demands from artificial intelligence technologies, data centres, and electric vehicle manufacturing as rationale for keeping coal in the energy

mix (The Guardian, 2025; AP News, 2025). These decisions were framed as efforts to ensure national energy security and economic growth.

However, these policy changes have been met with swift criticism from environmental organizations, legal scholars, and several state governments. Critics argue that the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the suppression of state-led climate initiatives severely undermine U.S. efforts to combat global warming. Legal experts have also pointed out that the executive orders may face constitutional challenges based on the principle of states' rights (Politico, 2025). Democratic governors have responded by reaffirming their commitment to localized climate action and vowing to continue with decarbonisation strategies despite federal opposition (Reuters, 2025).

These policy decisions reflect a significant shift in the U.S. environmental agenda, steering away from global cooperation and climate responsibility, and toward a fossil-fuel centric energy doctrine. The long-term implications of these policies could be profound, both for the U.S.'s global credibility in climate negotiations and for its domestic emissions trajectory.

Unpredictable U.S. Foreign Policy

The final subsection traces the transformation of U.S. foreign policy from the post-Cold War unipolar moment to a reactive stance in a multipolar world. The book details how the U.S. shifted from global hegemony in the 1990s to countering rising powers through alliances like AUKUS and the QUAD. Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by the chaotic 2021 Kabul withdrawal, reflect a retreat from nation-building to strategic containment of adversaries like China and Russia. The introduction

critiques this evolution as a struggle to adapt to a world where U.S. influence is increasingly contested by regional powers and non-state



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2025.

actors.

A Surge in Anti-Immigration Riots



Pro-Trump supporters clash with U.S. Capitol Police at the west front of the Capitol building during the January 6, 2021, riot in Washington, D.C.

The year 2025 has witnessed a marked escalation in far-right protests across multiple continents, driven primarily by anti-immigration sentiments, economic anxieties, and populist rhetoric amplified through social media platforms. These demonstrations, often organized by established extremist networks, have transcended local grievances to form a

transnational movement, with events in Europe, North America, Australia, and beyond resulting in violent clashes, arrests, and heightened societal divisions. In the United Kingdom, the "Unite the Kingdom" rally in London on September 13, 2025, organized by far-right activist Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon), drew an estimated 110,000 to 150,000 participants, marking one of the largest nationalist gatherings in British history and leading to over 140 arrests amid assaults on police and counter-protesters (CNN, 2025; PBS NewsHour, 2025). Protests targeted asylum-seeker hotels, fuelled by misinformation about migrant-related crimes, and echoed broader themes of "Islamization" and national identity erosion, with international figures like Elon Musk and French politician Éric Zemmour addressing the crowd remotely (The Guardian, 2025a; The New York Times, 2025). Similarly, in France, demonstrations erupted on April 6, 2025, in Paris following the embezzlement conviction of National Rally leader Marine Le Pen, attracting solidarity from global far-right allies including Viktor Orbán, Geert Wilders, and Jair Bolsonaro, who decried the verdict as judicial overreach.

This pattern of mobilisation extends to other regions, underscoring a coordinated far-right strategy leveraging digital networks for recruitment and escalation. In Australia, the "March for Australia" anti-immigration rallies in early September 2025 across cities like Sydney and Canberra involved tens of thousands chanting "send them back" and "stop the invasion," with neo-Nazi elements chanting "heil Australia" and clashing with counter-protesters, prompting government condemnation of the events as "racist and ethnocentric" (The New York Times).In the United States, far-right activity spiked in June 2025 with 18 reported incidents of violence and extremism, including Telegram-orchestrated threats ahead of "No Kings" protests against President Trump's military parade,

reflecting a blend of anti-government sentiment and white nationalist ideology. Social media has been pivotal, with platforms like Telegram serving as "safe spaces" for extremists to coordinate, as seen in the UK's asylum hotel protests organized via WhatsApp and Facebook groups. Counter-movements, such as the UK's Stand Up to Racism marches with 5,000 participants, have pushed back against this tide, emphasizing solidarity with migrants and decrying the far-right's exploitation of local fears (Al Jazeera, 2025; NPR, 2025).

The global resonance of these protests highlights a deepening ideological polarisation, where far-right groups capitalise on migration crises and institutional distrust to advance agendas of exclusion and nationalism. Analysts note that while initial sparks often stem from isolated incidents like the UK's summer assaults on asylum hotels the rapid spread via online echo chambers transforms them into widespread unrest, with over 40 UK police injuries and similar patterns in Europe and Australia (The Guardian, 2025b; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, n.d.). As of October 2025, ongoing events, including Turning Point UK's demonstrations outside the BBC protesting labels of "far-right," signal no abatement, raising concerns for democratic stability and the need for robust counter-extremism measures (X Post, 2025; Post, 2025). This surge not only exacerbates ethnic tensions but also intersects with broader geopolitical shifts, such as alliances between European populists and U.S. conservatives, potentially fuelling further transnational solidarity among far-right factions.

Economically, the universal 10–60% tariffs and targeted levies represent classic weaponized interdependence, leveraging America's market access to coerce adversaries and accelerate the decoupling of global supply

chains. Socially, the measures deepen domestic polarisation by appealing to Trump's core supporters yet imposing higher costs on consumers, while prompting middle powers worldwide to hedge by diversifying trade partnerships. Technologically, restrictions on semiconductors and critical minerals feed directly into the broader AI arms race and export-control battles. Environmentally, the rerouting of supply chains intensifies pressure on rare-earth mining regions and emerging Arctic resource routes. Finally, in the legal and multilateral domain, these unilateral actions risk undermining WTO mechanisms, underscoring the broader tension between isolationist impulses and the selective multilateralism required for meaningful de-escalation. Viewed through the PESTEL chain, Trump's tariff policy emerges as a primary instrument of great-power rivalry in the New Cold War, amplifying both economic fragmentation and the urgent need for structured confidence-building dialogues.

Trump's MAGA revival exposes the double-edged sword of economic nationalism, fuelling domestic divisions while accelerating global decoupling. Yet, in this multipolar era, such unilateralism risks isolating the U.S., highlighting the need for balanced alliances. True greatness may lie not in tariffs, but in collaborative strategies to mitigate shared perils. I would strongly recommend that countries like United States need to revisit its foreign policy i.e. instead of invading the countries or regime change or kidnapping the elected presidents it is imminent that the developed countries utilise their technologically advanced systems to extract resources in the developing countries and share them in accordance with the agreements. This will empower the developing nations to alleviate poverty.

Part II:

Global Chessboard

CHAPTER 3

US-China: Escalation in the Fight for Global Dominance



President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping shake hands at the Filoli Estate during their high-stakes summit on the sidelines of the APEC conference in Woodside, California (November 15, 2023).

In the shadow of a new Cold War, the United States and China stand as titans locked in a contest for global primacy, their rivalry reshaping the contours of the 21st century. From the historic handshake between Nixon and Mao in 1972 to the tariff volleys of the late 2010s, the arc of U.S.-China relations traces a journey from cautious engagement to strategic confrontation. This chapter delves into the historical foundations, the unravelling of economic interdependence, military posturing in contested waters, proxy battles through allies and initiatives, the granular mechanics of U.S. policy, and the delicate balance of alliances with Japan and South Korea against China's regional sway.

Trade Wars (1972–2018)

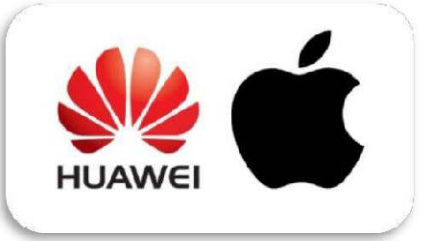


U.S. President Richard Nixon shakes hands with Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong during their historic meeting in Beijing, February 21, 1972.

The story begins with a bold gambit President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to Beijing, a diplomatic earthquake that cracked open the Iron Curtain separating the West from the People's Republic of China. Orchestrated by Henry Kissinger, this "opening" was less about ideological alignment than mutual necessity countering the Soviet bear and resolving the Vietnam quagmire (Dallek, 2007; Kissinger, 2012). The Shanghai Communiqué, a delicate dance of words, acknowledged one China while sidestepping Taiwan's fate, setting the stage for normalized ties in 1979 under Carter (U.S. Department of State, 2023). What followed was an economic boom: U.S.-China trade ballooned from near-zero to $660 billion by 2018, making China America's top trading partner (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025a).

But beneath the surface, tensions simmered. China's state-driven model, epitomized by the "Made in China 2025" plan, clashed with U.S. complaints of trade imbalances and intellectual property theft (Tellis, 2017). The 2016 election of Donald Trump ignited these embers into a full-blown trade war, with tariffs slapped on $50 billion of Chinese goods in 2018, costing the U.S. economy $46 billion in jobs and consumer prices (Thrall, 2021). The 2017 National Security Strategy crystallized this shift, branding China a "strategic competitor" and signalling the end of engagement (White House, 2017).

Tariffs, Huawei Bans, and Supply Chain Realignments (2018–2025)



The trade war morphed into a broader decoupling, a tectonic realignment of global commerce and technology. Trump's tariffs escalated to 25% on $300 billion of Chinese imports by 2019, met with Beijing's retaliation and a shaky Phase One deal in 2020 that left structural issues unresolved (Wikipedia, 2025a). Biden's administration doubled down, targeting Chinese electric vehicles and solar panels, while export controls choked off advanced semiconductors to firms like Huawei (Woodburn Global, 2025). The 2019 Huawei ban, citing national security, crippled the tech giant's access to U.S. chips, spurring China's pivot to domestic champions like SMIC (South China Morning Post, 2025). By 2025, U.S. firms had slashed reliance on Chinese electronics from 60% to under 40%, rerouting supply chains to Vietnam and India (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025b). Trump's second term upped the ante with 60% tariff threats and Executive Order 14195, targeting fentanyl precursors as a national emergency. This decoupling, while shielding U.S. interests, has slowed global innovation and edged the powers closer to conflict (Quartz, 2025).

Military Posturing: South China Sea Disputes



A China Coast Guard vessel (hull 3105) shadows and approaches a Philippine civilian supply boat during a to Second Thomas Shoal, South China Sea, 2024.

The South China Sea (SCS) is a cauldron of contention, where China's "nine-dash line" claims asserting dominion over 90% of the waters collide with U.S.-backed international law under UNCLOS. Since 2013, Beijing's island-building spree has militarized reefs, prompting U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs). By 2025, over 20 annual FONOPs challenged China's claims, with destroyers like the USS Chung-Hoon sailing within 12 nautical miles of the Paracels (U.S. Department of Defence, 2025; Council on Foreign Relations, 2025c). Beijing calls these provocations; a 2025 Australian report warned they risk escalation without deterring China's incremental gains (Radio Free Asia, 2025).

The Taiwan Strait, meanwhile, is a tinderbox. China's PLA sent 348 aircraft into Taiwan's air defence zone in February 2025 alone, normalizing gray-zone tactics (Wikipedia, 2025b). U.S. transits, like the USS Ralph Johnson's in February 2025, assert navigational rights but face China's legal rebuttals, decrying FONOPs as baseless (South China Morning Post, 2025a; Global Times, 2025). With U.S. carriers like the USS Carl Vinson drilling nearby, the strait teeters on the edge of miscalculation (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Proxy Engagements

The Indo-Pacific is a chessboard of proxy struggles. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a $1 trillion juggernaut spanning 139 countries, builds ports and railways to cement influence (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The U.S. counters with aid to allies like the Philippines, allocating $500 million in 2024 for maritime security amid clashes at Second Thomas Shoal, and hosting trilateral summits with Japan (White House, 2025a).

Vietnam, upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, received defence funds to offset BRI's pull in Laos and Cambodia (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2025). The U.S.-led Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative struggles to match BRI's scale, leaving allies like Manila and Hanoi to hedge between superpowers (National Institutes of Health, 2021; Atlantic Council, 2025).



Map of major Indo-Pacific country groupings and alliances, 2025.

United States Strategic Engagements



Leaders of the Quad: U.S. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stand together at the Quad Leaders' Summit.

The United States' strategic engagements in export controls, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) bloc, and the AUKUS pact represent interconnected pillars of its Indo-Pacific and global competition strategy. As of October 10, 2025, these mechanisms reflect a U.S. effort to safeguard technological supremacy, bolster alliances against authoritarian influence, and counter economic multipolarity amid the second Trump administration's "America First" pivot. Export controls aim to throttle adversaries' access to dual-use technologies, QUAD and AUKUS fortify Mini lateral partnerships for deterrence, while BRICS elicits a reactive U.S. response through tariffs and diplomatic isolation. This discussion examines U.S. involvement extensively, drawing on recent developments to assess their efficacy, challenges, and implications for global order.

QUAD: Mini lateral Deterrence and Indo-Pacific Resilience



The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), comprising the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan, has solidified as a linchpin of U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, emphasizing maritime security, supply chain resilience, and counterterrorism amid China's assertiveness. U.S. involvement reached a milestone at the July 1, 2025, Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington, DC the 10th such gathering where Secretary of State Marco Rubio joined counterparts to unveil an "ambitious agenda" on four pillars: maritime/transnational security, economic prosperity, climate/health resilience, and critical technologies. The joint statement condemned terrorism, including a recent Jammu and Kashmir attack, and advanced the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, deploying coast guard observers across partner vessels for real-time Indo-Pacific surveillance starting in 2025.

The 7th Leaders' Summit, slated for late 2025 in New Delhi, builds on the September 21, 2024, Wilmington gathering, with President Trump expressing interest in attending to elevate QUAD's profile. Initiatives include the Quad Cancer Moonshot for cervical cancer elimination in the region and enhanced AI/semiconductor cooperation to counter China's dominance, aligning with U.S. export controls. A July 24, 2025, South Asian Voices analysis highlights QUAD's unprecedented

counterterrorism focus, proposing joint exercises and intelligence sharing on groups like ISIS-K, though India's non-alignment tempers ambitions.

Legislatively, the Strengthening the Quad Act (H.R.1263), introduced in the 119th Congress, mandates a U.S. strategy for deeper cooperation, including annual summits and $500 million in funding for joint infrastructure like undersea cables. However, Trump 2.0 introduces uncertainties: A October 2025 Diplomat article warns of a "crossroads," with U.S. tariff threats on allies risking QUAD cohesion, as seen in Australia's hedging via AUKUS. A September 2025 Lowy Institute piece dubs it the "incredible shrinking QUAD," citing delayed Pillar II (non-nuclear) projects amid U.S. domestic priorities. An August 2025 Hudson Institute report urges an "America First" recalibration, emphasizing QUAD's role in deterring Taiwan contingencies through hypersonic missile co-development. A July 3, 2025, ORF America commentary praises the Washington meeting's drama-free tone but critiques vague commitments on South China Sea freedom of navigation. Overall, U.S. leadership has invested $2 billion since 2021, yielding interoperable assets like the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative, yet sustaining momentum requires navigating Trump's transnationalism.

AI Race: Throttling Technological Proliferation



U.S. export controls on advanced semiconductors and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have evolved into a cornerstone of national security policy, targeting China and Russia to prevent military advancements in surveillance, autonomous weapons, and cyber capabilities. Initiated under the Biden administration in October 2022, these controls restricted exports of high-performance chips like Nvidia's A100 and H100 GPUs, as well as related manufacturing equipment, under the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) at the Department of Commerce. By 2025, the framework has tightened further, with the January AI Diffusion Rule intended to tier licensing for AI model weights and computing power rescinded amid legal challenges and industry pushback, shifting focus to entity-specific bans. In September 2025, BIS issued guidance deeming any use of Huawei's Ascend AI chips a violation, effectively blacklisting Chinese alternatives and prompting a 90 FR Federal Register update on enforcement.

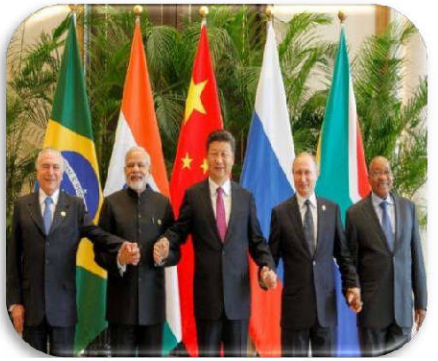
The controls' scope expanded in December 2024, adding 140 entities to the Entity List and capping high-bandwidth memory exports, while the Foreign Direct Product Rule extended restrictions to foreign-made items incorporating U.S. technology. This has reshaped global AI development, limiting China's access to frontier models and forcing domestic innovation; for instance, Huawei's 2025 output remains capped at 200,000 chips annually, hampering firms like DeepSeek despite their benchmark-competitive models. Russia faces parallel curbs, with 2025 sanctions

blocking AI for drone and cyber operations in Ukraine, though smuggling via third countries like Malaysia persists, where data centres consume 3GW of power for illicit processing.

U.S. involvement extends to allied coordination, as analysed in a March 2025 CSIS report, which details legal authorities for 18 partners (e.g., Japan, Netherlands) to implement parallel controls under the Wassenaar Arrangement. However, challenges abound: China's retaliatory Announcement No. 61 of 2025 imposes the strictest rare earth and permanent magnet export controls yet, threatening U.S. defence supply chains for missiles and EVs. Bipartisan lawmakers, via October 7, 2025, Reuters report, urged broader bans on chipmaking tools after data showed $38 billion in U.S.-allied sales to China in 2024, arguing narrow measures fail to stem proliferation. The Select Committee on the CCP's September 2025 report criticizes BIS for insufficient advanced node (≤16nm) oversight, recommending the Foundry Due Diligence Rule's full enforcement by January 31, 2026.

Economically, controls have boosted U.S. exports to $57.5 billion in 2024 but spurred China's stockpiling and $10 billion in Sahel mining investments for lithium alternatives. A September 2025 Texas National Security Review article draws parallels to Cold War CoCom regimes, warning that overly aggressive measures risk alienating allies and accelerating decoupling, potentially costing the U.S. $1 trillion in lost market share by 2030. Under Trump 2.0, enforcement has intensified with trackers embedded in high-risk shipments since 2024, yet smuggling via UAE and Saudi reroutes persists, underscoring the controls' asymmetric enforcement.

BRICS: Countering Multipolarity and De-Dollarisation



BRICS leaders unite: Brazilian President Michel Temer, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and South African President Jacob Zuma join hands at the 2017 BRICS Summit in Xiamen,

While not a member, the U.S. has positioned itself as BRICS' primary counterweight, viewing the bloc's 2023-2025 expansion adding Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE as a threat to dollar hegemony and Western-led institutions. The 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro on July 6-7, 2025, focused on global governance reforms and a multilateral guarantee fund to rival the IMF, prompting U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to decry it as "anti-Western cartelization." Expansion has swelled BRICS to represent 45% of global population and 35% of GDP, accelerating de-dollarisation via local-currency trade and a proposed BRICS Pay system.

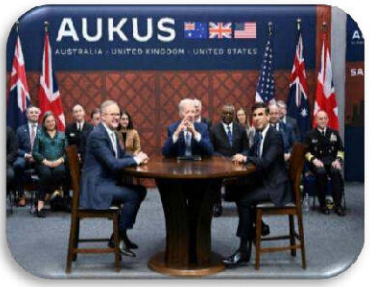
Trump's response has been aggressively economic: September 2025 tariffs of 25% on BRICS imports, framed as retaliation for "dollar degeneration," have unified the bloc's virtual emergency summit on September 9, coordinating trade countermeasures and multipolar governance calls. A July 31, 2025, Americas Quarterly analysis notes BRICS proposals to bypass SWIFT via blockchain settlements have ramped global tensions, with U.S. sanctions on Iranian BRICS banks freezing $5 billion in assets. Hudson Institute's September 2025 report urges preserving dollar dominance through QUAD-linked alternatives like the Asia-Pacific

Economic Framework, warning BRICS' $100 billion New Development Bank could erode U.S. leverage in Africa and Latin America.

Brazil's "active non-alignment," as articulated in a May 2025 CEBRI article, complicates U.S. isolation efforts, with Lula da Silva hosting the summit to balance Trump-era pressures. An August 27, 2025, DW report questions if BRICS will "boom" under Trump, citing coordinated retaliation against U.S. tariffs on steel and EVs, potentially costing American exporters $50 billion annually. A September 17, 2025, Geopolitical Economy piece frames Trump's tariffs on allies like Japan and Korea as forcing factory relocations to the U.S., inadvertently boosting BRICS' multipolar narrative. U.S. diplomatic pushback includes State Department briefings to G7 partners and $1 billion in alternative financing for Global South infrastructure, yet BRICS' intra-trade surged 20% in 2025, signalling resilience.

The economic challenge of maintaining global confidence in the U.S. dollar as the world's dominant reserve currency has been exacerbated by policy volatility under the Trump administration, as highlighted by European perspectives. In April 2025, François Villeroy de Galhau, Governor of the Banque de France and a member of the European Central Bank (ECB) Governing Council, argued that recent U.S. actions particularly erratic trade and tariff decisions were undermining international trust in the dollar despite intentions to preserve its central role (Fortune, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

AUKUS: A Trica of Continental Nuclear Deterrence

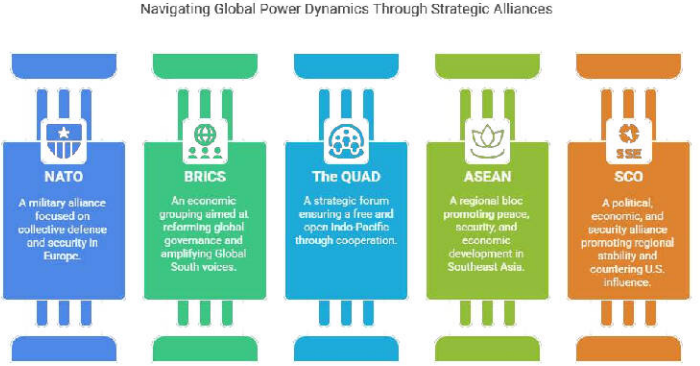


AUKUS leaders' trilateral meeting: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, U.S. President Joe Biden, and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at the AUKUS summit in San Diego, California, March 13, 2023, announcing the pathway for Australia's nuclear-powered

AUKUS, the 2021 trilateral pact between the U.S., UK, and Australia, underscores U.S. commitment to Indo-Pacific deterrence through nuclear-powered submarines (Pillar I) and advanced capabilities like hyper sonics (Pillar II). As of October 2025, U.S. involvement faces scrutiny under Trump's review, initiated in June, which questions the pact's feasibility amid fiscal constraints and submarine production backlogs. The review, per a June 12, 2025, CFR article, evaluates cost overruns now $368 billion over 30 years and technology transfers, with Pentagon spokesperson Pete Hegseth signalling potential scaling back.

Progress persists: Australia received its first Virginia-class submarine in 2024, with U.S. committing three more by 2032 under the optimal pathway, while UK's Dreadnought program integrates AUKUS tech. Pillar II advances include August 2025 joint hypersonic tests and quantum computing R&D, with $3 billion allocated for Australian industry via the 2025 Strategic Defence Review. A June 15, 2025, Politico report cites UK confidence in Trump's backing, viewing AUKUS as complementary to NATO, though an August 4, 2025, Diplomat piece notes Australia-UK bilateralism accelerating sans full U.S. buy-in.

Challenges include China's condemnation as "nuclear proliferation," prompting UN complaints, and domestic U.S. debates over diverting submarines from Pacific needs. An October 9, 2025, Asia Times op-ed labels AUKUS a "bitter burp" of history, signalling U.S. retreat, while



CSIS's August 25, 2025, analysis urges seizing the "inflection" for integrated missile defence with QUAD partners. A September 25, 2025, Bloomberg overview speculates expansion to Japan or Canada, but Trump's review prioritizes cost-sharing, with Australia pledging $10 billion more in 2025. U.S. involvement has invested $8 billion since inception, yielding interoperable forces, but sustainability hinges on resolving review outcomes by December 2025.

U.S. Ties with Japan and South Korea



Japan and South Korea remain pivotal anchors in U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, bolstering deterrence against North Korea and China through deepened alliances. The landmark 2023 Camp David Summit institutionalized trilateral cooperation, committing to annual leaders' meetings, multi-domain joint exercises, real-time missile warning data sharing, and expanded collaboration on supply chains and critical technologies. This framework has proven resilient, with enhanced Japan-ROK intelligence-sharing and bilateral drills responding to escalating regional threats, including thousands of PLA aircraft incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ in 2025 surpassing prior records and heightening tensions across the First Island Chain (Chatham House, 2025; Quincy Institute, 2024).

Japan has countered China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with substantial infrastructure investments in ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations), emphasizing high-quality, sustainable projects under initiatives like the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure. These efforts rival BRI's scale in sectors such as transportation and energy, fostering alternative connectivity and reducing dependency risks. Meanwhile, South Korea under the Yoon administration aligned closely with U.S. views on Chinese assertiveness, hosting high-level defence

dialogues and contributing to regional stability (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2025).

Yet strains persist. China's economic coercion through export controls, cultural boycotts, and selective bans has tested ties with both Tokyo and Seoul. Renewed trilateral trade talks in 2025, including foreign ministers' meetings and pledges to accelerate a China-Japan-ROK free trade agreement, reflect hedging against U.S. tariffs under the second Trump administration, which imposed broad duties complicating export-dependent economies (Reuters, 2025; CSIS, 2024). This delicate latticework of alliances and economic pragmatism underscores the precarious balance in Northeast Asia's security architecture.

The escalating U.S.-China rivalry underscores how economic decoupling and military posturing in hotspots like the South China Sea, risk tipping multipolar balance into conflict. Proxy engagements via initiatives like BRI reveal the subtle power plays at work. Navigating this dominance fight calls for diplomatic ingenuity to prevent a cascade of global instability. One needs to remember that political instability in any region has impact internationally, therefore US needs to observe international laws and regulations to lead the world towards prosperity. One must not believe that covert or overt operation in other countries will not follow disruption back home.

CHAPTER 4

The Taiwan Powder Keg



Taiwanese soldiers carry the national flag of the Republic of China (Taiwan) past an armoured vehicle during a military drill, underscoring the island's readiness amid rising regional tensions.

The Taiwan Strait stands as one of the most volatile flashpoints in contemporary geopolitics, often likened to a "powder keg" due to the intricate interplay of historical grievances, military posturing, and great-power rivalry. This chapter delves into the U.S.'s multifaceted commitments to Taiwan's security ranging from doctrinal ambiguities to tangible military and cyber defences and contrasts them against China's unyielding "red lines," such as any perceived moves toward Taiwanese independence. These dynamics have intensified since 2024, amid Beijing's escalating gray-zone tactics and the return of a Trump administration prioritizing transactional deterrence over multilateral restraint. At its core lies the unresolved question of Taiwan's status: a self-governing democracy of 23 million people that Beijing views as an inalienable province, while Washington maintains a delicate balance of support without formal recognition.

. Drawing on recent analyses, this discussion examines four key dimensions: the ambiguities embedded in the One China Policy, proxy military escalations through aid and drills, cyber and information warfare responses, and granular legislative manoeuvres. Together, they illustrate how U.S. actions, while bolstering Taiwan's resilience, risk crossing Beijing's thresholds, potentially igniting a conflict with global ramifications (RAND Corporation, 2025).

The One China Policy



U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping stand side by side during their bilateral meeting at the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on December 1, 2018.

The cornerstone of U.S.-Taiwan relations remains the "One China" policy, formalized in the 1979 U.S.-China Joint Communiqué, which acknowledges Beijing's position that there is but one China, of which Taiwan is a part yet stops short of endorsing it. This framework, coupled with the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979, commits Washington to provide Taiwan with defensive arms and to regard any non-peaceful efforts to alter the status quo as a "grave concern" (U.S. Department of State, 1979). However, the policy's true genius and peril is in its "strategic ambiguity," a deliberate vagueness on whether the U.S. would militarily intervene in a Chinese invasion. This approach, first articulated during the Carter era, aims to deter both Beijing's aggression and Taipei's formal independence declarations, preserving a fragile peace (Air University, 2025).

Now strategic ambiguity has been reaffirmed as core policy, with officials like Secretary of State Marco Rubio emphasizing opposition to any "forced, compelled, coercive change" in Taiwan's status. President Trump has avoided explicit commitments to defend Taiwan, stating he would "never comment on that" to maintain flexibility. This return to traditional ambiguity contrasts with predecessor Biden's repeated affirmations of defence, walked back as personal views. Ongoing arms sales exceeding $28 billion in Foreign Military Sales notifications from 2015-2025,

including a $330 million sustainment package in November 2025 bolster Taiwan's self-defence without altering the policy's deliberate uncertainty.

Amid escalating PLA (Peoples Liberation Amry) activities and debates over shifting to "strategic clarity," ambiguity endures as a deterrent tool, balancing support for Taiwan's democracy against risks of direct U.S.-China confrontation in this pivotal New Cold War flashpoint.

Cyber Warfare and TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company)



TSMC headquarters building in Hsinchu, Taiwan.

Beyond kinetic threats, the Taiwan powder keg simmers in the digital realm, where Chinese state-sponsored hackers wage relentless campaigns against Taiwan's critical infrastructure, blending cyber espionage with information operations to erode morale and readiness. In 2024, attacks on Taiwanese government networks doubled to 2.4 million daily per the National Security Bureau, targeting power grids, semiconductors, and election systems in a bid to paralyze defences pre-invasion (Reuters, 2025). Groups like APT41 (aka Salt Typhoon) and Flax Typhoon exemplify this, infiltrating telecoms and using "living off the land" techniques to evade detection, as detailed in a January 2025 Congressional Research Service report (Congressional Research Service, 2025).

The semiconductor sector, Taiwan's economic lifeline (home to TSMC), faced intensified spear-phishing in 2025, with undocumented Chinese

actors deploying Cobalt Strike malware to exfiltrate IP and disrupt fabs prompting U.S. warnings of supply-chain Armageddon (The Hacker News, 2025; Proofpoint, 2025). Beijing's broader cyber offensive extended to U.S. targets, with hackers burrowing deeper into infrastructure like water utilities, as revealed in July 2025 interviews with officials (The Washington Post, 2025). A secret December 2024 U.S.-China meeting saw Beijing tacitly acknowledge these operations, framing them as "defensive countermeasures" against perceived encirclement (The Wall Street Journal, 2025).

U.S. responses emphasize resilience and attribution. The FBI's September 2024 disruption of a botnet of 200,000+ routers used by Chinese hackers marked a proactive escalation, while the Soufan Centre highlighted PRC hybrid tactics peaking at 2.4 million daily probes (CNN, 2024; The Soufan Centre, 2025). In January 2025, amid hacks on the U.S. Treasury (linked to Beijing), the Biden holdovers coordinated with Taipei on joint cyber drills, sharing threat intel via the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (FDD, 2025; Falcon Feeds, 2025). These measures, including sanctions on hacking firms, deter escalation but provoke retaliation, as seen in China's amplified disinformation campaigns flooding Taiwanese social media with "reunification" narratives (Congressional Research Service, 2025).

U.S. Military Aid to Taiwan



U.S. Army soldiers stand in front of a HIMARS (M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) launcher flying the American flag during a defence exhibition, showcasing U.S. precision strike capabilities.

U.S. military aid to Taiwan has evolved from sporadic sales to a robust ecosystem of packages, training, and joint exercises, functioning as "proxy drills" that signal resolve without direct confrontation. The oft-cited "$18 billion in 2024" figure, while hyperbolic, reflects cumulative arms notifications under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program during the Biden-Trump transition, including $567 million in Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) aid the largest single package to date for items like 60mm mortars and Stinger missiles (Formosan Association for Public Affairs, 2024; Business Insider, 2024). This aid, drawn from U.S. stockpiles for rapid delivery, addresses Taiwan's "porcupine" strategy of asymmetric defence, countering PLA numerical superiority with mobile, lethal systems (CSIS, 2025).

Escalations are evident in live-fire exercises, where U.S.-supplied hardware takes centre stage. In July 2025, Taiwan's Han Kuang drills the island's largest-ever integrated 38 M1A2T Abrams tanks, procured for $1.45 billion, in urban assault simulations at Hsinchu base, with President Lai Ching-te observing to underscore resolve (Associated Press, 2025; Fox News, 2025). These "proxy" manoeuvres, often coordinated tacitly with U.S. Pacific Command, mimic invasion scenarios and provoke PLA responses, such as the 2025 "Joint Sword" exercises encircling Taiwan post-Lai's Pacific tour (ABC News, 2025). Covert U.S.-Taiwan naval drills in April 2024, involving anti-submarine warfare in the Pacific, further

blurred lines, with participants sworn to secrecy to evade Beijing's ire (Reuters, 2024).

China views these as red lines crossed, equating aid to "arming separatists" and justifying its own escalations, including hypersonic missile tests over the Strait. By February 2025, the Trump administration unfroze $870 million in aid previously stalled over delivery disputes prompting Beijing to accuse Washington of "hegemonism" and accelerate its A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) buildup (NPR, 2025). Taiwan's 2024 budget revealed a $100 million shortfall in undelivered U.S. weapons, highlighting logistical frictions that undermine deterrence (YouTube/Global Taiwan Institute, 2025). As proxy drills proliferate, they risk normalizing brinkmanship, with analysts warning of accidental clashes in crowded seas (NDTV, 2025).

Resilience Act and U.S. Troop Rotations in the Region

Granular U.S. legislative actions underscore a creeping commitment, embedding Taiwan's security into domestic law and forward-deployed postures. The Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (TERA), enacted in 2022 and bolstered in the 2025 National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA), mandates annual reports on arms deliveries and establishes a U.S.-Taiwan military trauma care program, aiming to expedite $28 billion in pending sales from 2015-



USS Shiloh (CG-67) entering Yokosuka, Japan, with Mount Fuji in the background.

2025 (U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Law Revision Counsel, n.d.; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2025). TERA's resilience focus funding cyber hardening and civil Défense directly counters Chinese gray-zone threats, with 2025 amendments authorizing $500 million for joint R&D on drones and chips (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2025; Focus Taiwan, 2025).

Beijing decries these as "irresponsible meddling," with PLA exercises around Penghu Island in September 2025 signalling reprisals (Institute for the Study of War, 2025; American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, 2025). Yet, as Formosan advocates note, such details fortify deterrence without overt provocation (Formosan Association for Public Affairs, n.d.).

China's Multi-Front Challenge to the U.S.

As of April 2025, the economic landscapes of the United States and China are characterized by significant developments in their GDP figures, trade relations, and strategic initiatives. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of their current economic standings, growth trajectories, and future outlooks, supported by recent data and projections.

1) **Current Economic Stand offs**



In 2024, the United States maintained its position as the world's largest economy with a nominal GDP of approximately $26.89 trillion. When adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), the U.S. GDP was estimated at $30.34 trillion. China, on the other hand, reported a nominal GDP of $19.53 trillion in 2024, with a PPP-adjusted GDP of $39.44 trillion, reflecting its substantial economic scale (IMF). The disparity in economic output is further highlighted when examining GDP per capita. In 2023, the U.S. GDP per capita (PPP) was recorded at $74,577.51, indicating a high standard of living. In contrast, China's GDP per capita (PPP) was $23,242.00 in 2025, reflecting its ongoing development and the challenges of its large population base.

2) Economic Growth

China has set an ambitious GDP growth target of around 5% for 2025, aiming to stimulate domestic demand and implement proactive fiscal policies to navigate ongoing trade tensions with the United States. Financial institutions have responded to China's economic performance with revised forecasts. HSBC, for instance, upgraded its 2025 GDP growth forecast for China to 4.8%, citing stronger-than-expected real activity in early 2025. Similarly, Standard Chartered raised its projection to 4.8% from a previous 4.5%, acknowledging robust economic indicators. (Reuters)

In contrast, the United States faces economic headwinds exacerbated by escalating trade tensions and recent tariff implementations. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia's Survey of Professional Forecasters predicts a 2.4% real GDP growth for the U.S. in 2025. However, recent developments, including the imposition of significant tariffs, have led institutions like J.P. Morgan to warn of a potential recession, with forecasts indicating a 60% chance of a global recession and a 0.3% contraction in U.S. GDP in Q4 2025. (Federal Reserve bank of Philadelphia)

3) Trade Relations and Deficits

Trade relations between the U.S. and China have been marked by significant imbalances. In 2024, the U.S. goods trade deficit with China was $295.4 billion, a 5.8% increase from the previous year. U.S. goods exports to China totalled $143.5 billion, while imports from China were $438.9 billion. These figures underscore the persistent trade imbalance and the complexities of the economic relationship between the two nations. (United States Government).

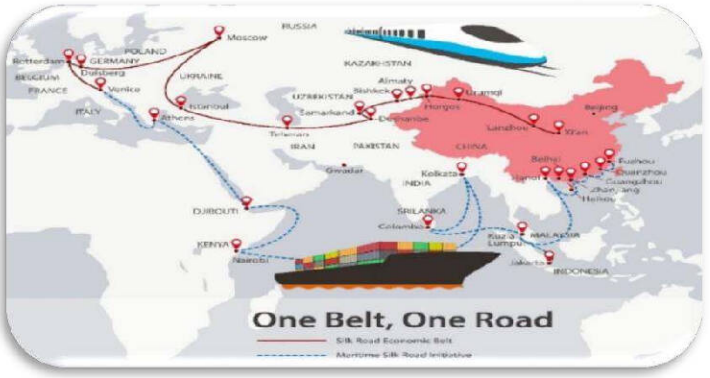
4) Defence Budget

As of 2025, the global military balance is being redefined by the strategic rivalry between the United States and China, with Taiwan emerging as the most volatile flashpoint. The United States maintains the world's most advanced military force, underpinned by a defence budget of approximately $877 billion, which constitutes about 3.5% of its GDP and supports a force of 1.4 million active-duty personnel (IISS, 2024).

Its global power projection is enabled by 11 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, over 1,900 advanced combat aircraft, and a nuclear arsenal exceeding 5,500 warheads (CSIS, 2025). China, while spending significantly less at around $292 billion annually, has focused heavily on regional supremacy, fielding the world's largest standing military with over 2 million personnel and building a navy projected to surpass 400 ships by the end of 2025, including two operational aircraft carriers and one under sea trials (CRS, 2025; CSIS, 2025). Its nuclear arsenal, though smaller, is rapidly expanding and estimated to contain around 350 warheads (IISS, 2024).

Metric	United States	China
Nominal GDP (2023)	$27.97 trillion	$17.73 trillion
GDP (PPP) (2023)	$30.34 trillion	$39.44 trillion
Defence Budget (2023)	$916 billion	$296 billion

Defence Budget as % of GDP (2023)	3.4%	1.7%



Map of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (red lines) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (blue lines), collectively known as "One Belt, One Road ".

OBOR and the Future of Global Order

China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR), later rebranded as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), represents the most ambitious global infrastructure and economic development strategy of the 21st century. Announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the initiative aims to enhance regional connectivity and embrace an inclusive, globalized economy. The BRI comprises two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt, which stretches overland through Central Asia to Europe, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, connecting China to Southeast Asia, Africa, and Europe via major sea lanes (Lowy Institute, 2017). As of 2023, over 147 countries had joined the BRI by signing cooperation agreements with China. These include nations across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and

Europe. Cumulatively, China has invested more than $1 trillion into BRI projects since its inception. In 2022 alone, Chinese firms invested $19.6 billion in non-financial direct investments into BRI partner nations, a 6.5% rise from the previous year (Green Finance & Development Centre, 2022).

Strategically, OBOR enables China to project economic influence globally while securing crucial trade routes and resource flows. It also facilitates China's access to new markets and fosters bilateral relations with key geopolitical players. However, concerns regarding debt sustainability, lack of transparency, and China's geopolitical intentions have been raised by international observers. Institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations (2020) and Air University (2022) have argued that while OBOR offers substantial development opportunities, it also risks trapping vulnerable economies in debt and shifting regional power dynamics in China's favour. Assessing the exact financial returns China anticipates from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is complex due to the multifaceted nature of these projects and the lack of publicly disclosed comprehensive financial data. However, based on available information and typical investment return expectations, we can provide some estimations.

Estimated Financial Returns from BRI and CPEC

Initiative	Total Investment	Estimated Return on Investment (ROI)	Estimated Annual Earnings

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)	Over $1 trillion	Assumed 5% annual ROI	Approximately $50 billion

CPEC and China's Grand Strategy in South Asia



China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) map highlighting the main Gwadar-Kashgar route (yellow) and alternative road connections linking China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea.

Among the hundreds of BRI-related projects, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is often cited as the most strategically vital. Initiated in 2015, CPEC is a collection of infrastructure, energy, and industrial projects linking China's western Xinjiang province to Pakistan's Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea. Initially valued at $46 billion, CPEC's total committed investments had exceeded $60 billion by 2020 (Britannica, 2023).

CPEC comprises several major components:

- **Road and Rail Infrastructure**: Over **2,000 kilometres** of roads and railways are being developed or upgraded to facilitate cargo movement.
- **Energy Projects**: CPEC aims to add more than **10,000 MW** to Pakistan's national grid, significantly reducing energy shortages.
- **Gwadar Port Development**: A central feature of CPEC, this deep-sea port is intended to become a regional trade hub and provide China with direct maritime access to the Arabian Sea.

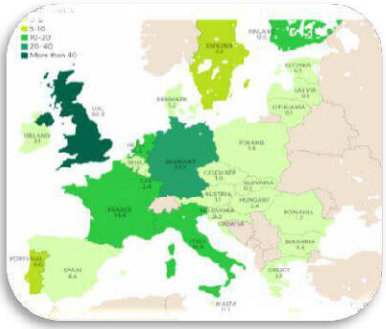
- **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)**: Industrial parks being set up to boost manufacturing and exports.

CPEC holds enormous potential for Pakistan's economy, offering improved connectivity, employment, and energy infrastructure. However, it has also drawn criticism due to the debt burden, lack of local stakeholder inclusion, and security challenges in restive regions like Baluchistan. According to Aid Data (2022), some CPEC loans carry high-interest rates and limited transparency, contributing to Pakistan's growing external debt obligations.

Geopolitically, CPEC is a gamechanger. It allows China to bypass the Strait of Malacca, a vulnerable chokepoint for Chinese trade and strengthens China's foothold in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. This strategic pivot has led to increased tensions with India and concerns in Washington, D.C. Think tanks like the International Crisis Group and Carnegie Endowment have highlighted CPEC as both an economic opportunity and a security flashpoint in the region.

China's Quiet Power Grab in European Economies

China's economic footprint in Europe, and particularly in the United Kingdom, has grown significantly over the past two decades, underpinned by an aggressive strategy of foreign direct investment and infrastructure acquisitions. Since 2000, cumulative Chinese investments across the EU and the UK have exceeded $230 billion, with the United Kingdom consistently ranked as one of the top destinations for Chinese capital (Rhodium Group, 2022; Foreign Affairs Committee, 2023).



Map of cumulative Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) transactions in the European Union by country, 2000–2019 (in billion euros). The UK (50.3), Germany (22.7), France (14.4), and Italy (13.7) received the largest inflows.

These investments span a wide range of sectors, including banking, energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, and education, reflecting both commercial interests and strategic intent. In the UK alone, Chinese-owned assets are estimated to exceed $180 billion (approx. £143 billion) as of 2023, positioning China as a formidable economic stakeholder (The Independent, 2023). Chinese-owned assets in the UK are estimated to exceed $180 billion (approx. £143 billion) as of late 2023 (The Independent, 2023). Key highlights include.

Sector	Chinese Holdings (USD Billion)	Details
Banking and Finance	$60+	49% stake in HSBC ($45B); stakes in Standard Chartered, etc.
Energy (Nuclear & Utilities)	$15–20	Partial ownership in Hinkley Point C and National Grid gas assets
Real Estate & Infrastructure	$10–15	Properties in London; 9.5% stake in Heathrow Airport

Technology and Telecom	$5–10	Huawei R&D centres, stakes in UK startups
Education & Miscellaneous	$3–5	Chinese companies own over 30 private schools and real estate

Much of China's influence in the UK is channelled through significant stakes in critical industries. In the financial sector, Chinese firms have amassed considerable holdings most notably, a reported 49% stake in banking giant HSBC, estimated at $45 billion. In energy, Chinese companies hold minority shares in projects like the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant and National Grid gas transmission assets, valued at around $15–20 billion collectively. Infrastructure investments include a 9.5% stake in Heathrow Airport and extensive real estate acquisitions across London, totalling an additional $10–15 billion. The technology sector has seen active Chinese participation through Huawei's UK-based R&D centres and minority investments in tech startups, while more than 30 private schools across the UK are now owned by Chinese entities, reflecting an asset base of around $3–5 billion (Carnegie Endowment, 2023; Chatham House, 2023).

This is Shanghai, Not New York

The question of whether China can emerge as a global superpower has been central to contemporary geopolitical discourse. While the term "superpower" traditionally denotes overwhelming economic, military, and political influence globally, China's rise has triggered serious debate about a multipolar world order. Drawing from extensive economic data

and strategic assessments from prominent think tanks, this analysis



Shanghai's Pudong skyline at night.

explores China's trajectory toward superpower status. China's economic expansion has been extraordinary. As of 2023, China is the second-largest economy in the world by nominal GDP, valued at $17.73 trillion, compared to the United States at $27.97 trillion (Reuters, 2024; Le Monde, 2024). However, in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), China leads the world with a GDP of $39.44 trillion, surpassing the United States at $30.34 trillion (IMF, 2024).

This rapid economic growth is underpinned by massive infrastructure investment, export-led industrialization, and technological innovation. China has emerged as the global leader in green energy production, electric vehicles, rare earth exports, and telecommunications, with Huawei and BYD being global industry leaders. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) alone has secured Chinese investments exceeding $1 trillion across over 140 countries (Green Finance & Development Centre, 2022). In military terms, China has the second-largest defence budget,

estimated at $296 billion in 2023, behind the United States' $916 billion (SIPRI, 2024). China's modernization of its armed forces, especially its navy and missile systems, aims to counter U.S. dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), China has expanded its naval fleet to more than 370 ships, surpassing the U.S. in numbers, although still trailing in tonnage and global reach (CSIS, 2023).

The Taiwan Strait remains the New Cold War's most dangerous flashpoint, where strategic ambiguity, proxy military aid, and relentless cyber campaigns collide with Beijing's non-negotiable red lines. Every arms package, joint drill, and digital intrusion inch the region closer to accidental or otherwise escalation, with global supply chains especially semiconductors hanging in the balance. In this powder keg, preserving deterrence without provocation demands exceptional diplomatic restraint and renewed back-channel communication if catastrophe is to be avoided. It is evident that the world saw peace in the era of Boris Yelstin because of both superpower willingness to resolve their problems through dialogue and it avoided any chances of WWIII which seems imminent now if the Trumps current approach continues.

CHAPTER 5

Two Old Buddies of Cold War?



Trump and Putin handshake on the tarmac, Alaska summit, August 15, 2025.

The trajectory of U.S.-Russia relations since the Cold War's end encapsulates a descent from tentative détente into an era of hybrid warfare, characterized by mutual suspicions, economic coercion, and proxy confrontations that blur the lines between peace and open conflict. What began as a promise of cooperative security in the early 1990s epitomized by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and initial NATO-Russia dialogues fractured under the weight of perceived betrayals, resource rivalries, and existential threats to spheres of influence. By October 2025, amid the protracted Ukraine war and escalating nuclear rhetoric, this standoff has reshaped global security architectures, with Washington viewing Moscow as a revanchist aggressor and the Kremlin decrying U.S. "hegemonism" as the root of instability (Ziegler, 2020).

This chapter dissects the evolution through six lenses: post-Cold War betrayals, energy sanctions and sabotage theories, nuclear posturing, proxy battles in Ukraine, granular U.S. involvements, and engagements with Russia's neighbours. These threads reveal a vicious cycle where U.S. actions, intended to deter Russian expansionism, often provoke escalatory responses, fostering a hybrid battlefield of arms, algorithms, and alliances that risks broader conflagration (RAND Corporation, 2019).

US-Soviet Rivalry



The Cold War was a prolonged period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union (often referred to in contemporary terms as Russia, though the conflict primarily involved the USSR), lasting from the end of World War II in 1945 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was characterised by ideological rivalry between capitalism and communism, mutual suspicion, proxy conflicts, nuclear arms races, and espionage, but avoided direct military confrontation between the superpowers (Gaddis 2006; Westad 2017).

The Cold War began in earnest with the Truman Doctrine in 1947, when President Harry Truman pledged American support to any nation resisting communist subversion, followed by the Marshall Plan (1948) that provided billions in economic aid to rebuild Western Europe and stem the spread of communism (Gaddis 2006). These moves solidified the policy of containment and deepened the ideological divide. The first major crisis came with the Berlin Blockade (1948–1949), where the Soviet Union cut off land access to West Berlin; the United States responded with the massive Berlin Airlift, supplying the city by air for nearly a year and demonstrating Western resolve without direct combat (Westad 2017).

The formation of opposing military alliances further entrenched the bipolar world: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 united the United States and Western Europe, while the Soviet-led

Warsaw Pact was established in 1955 (Leffler 2007). The Korean War (1950–1953) marked the first hot proxy conflict, with the US-led United Nations forces defending South Korea against North Korean invasion backed by the Soviet Union and China, resulting in a costly stalemate and over 36,000 American deaths. Nuclear tensions escalated rapidly after the Soviet Union's first atomic test in 1949, sparking an arms race that saw both sides develop hydrogen bombs by the mid-1950s and adopt doctrines of mutual assured destruction.

The most dangerous moment arrived during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when US intelligence discovered Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba; President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval quarantine, bringing the superpowers to the brink of nuclear war before Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles in exchange for a secret US pledge to withdraw missiles from Turkey (Gaddis 2006). The prolonged Vietnam War (1955–1975) became America's longest and most divisive conflict, as the United States intervened to prevent communist takeover of South Vietnam, ultimately withdrawing in 1973 and witnessing the fall of Saigon in 1975, which damaged US prestige and fuelled domestic anti-war movements.

A period of détente in the 1970s brought temporary easing, highlighted by the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I, 1972) and President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China and Moscow. However, tensions reignited in the late 1970s with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979–1989), prompting US support for mujahideen rebels and President Jimmy Carter's grain embargo and Olympic boycott. Under President Ronald Reagan, the 1980s saw renewed confrontation, including massive US military buildup and the Strategic Defence Initiative, while Soviet leader

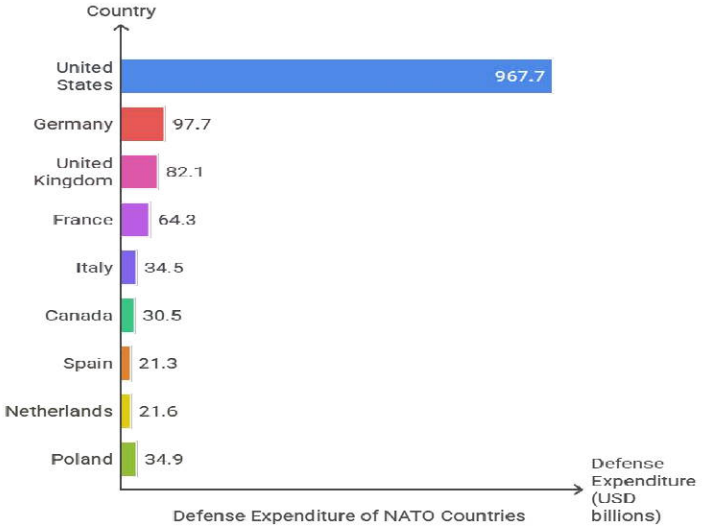
Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms of glasnost and perestroika exposed internal weaknesses. The Cold War's dramatic end unfolded with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, symbolising the collapse of communist control in Eastern Europe, followed by the peaceful revolutions across the region and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 (Westad 2017).

NATO's ever evolving challenge in the new World order

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a strategic military alliance established in 1949, primarily designed to safeguard the security and sovereignty of its member states through collective defence. As of April 2025, NATO comprises 32 countries, with Sweden becoming the most recent member in March 2024 (Statista, 2025). NATO's eastward expansion following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 has consistently raised profound security concerns for Russia. According to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (2023), Russia views this expansion as a direct threat to its national security and a strategic encirclement aimed at undermining its regional influence. Russia's military doctrine explicitly identifies NATO's expansion and the establishment of military infrastructure near its borders as significant external military danger. This perception has led to heightened geopolitical tensions, exemplified by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its involvement in conflicts in Eastern Ukraine and Georgia. Think tanks, including the Council on Foreign Relations (2023), argue that Russia's aggressive policies in Eastern Europe are direct responses to NATO's presence and perceived Western encroachment, reinforcing Moscow's intention to assert its regional dominance and security interests against perceived external threats. These developments underline the

critical geopolitical ramifications of NATO's enlargement policy and its impact on European and global stability.

The United States has historically been the dominant financial contributor within NATO, allocating substantial portions of its defence budget to support the alliance's strategic operations. In 2023 alone, U.S. defence expenditure reached approximately $880 billion, representing nearly 68.7% of the total defence spending of all NATO countries combined (PIIE, 2025). NATO guidelines established in 2006 recommend that member nations allocate at least 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defence spending. Although compliance has historically been inconsistent, efforts to meet this benchmark have improved; from only three compliant nations in 2014, the number increased significantly to 22 countries by 2024 (NATO, 2024).



Muslim massacre in Baltic States in 1995



Refugees from Srebrenica gather outside the U.N. base at Tuzla airport on July 14, 1995, amid the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian men and boys from their town.

The seeds of Russo-American acrimony were sown in the immediate post-Cold War decade, when U.S.-led NATO enlargement framed in Washington as a stabilizing force ignited Moscow's fears of encirclement, culminating in flashpoints like the 1999 Kosovo intervention and the 2014 Crimea annexation. NATO's eastward push, beginning with the 1999 accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, violated informal assurances allegedly given to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 that the alliance would not expand "one inch eastward" (Mearsheimer, 2014). Russian elites, from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin, interpreted this as a betrayal of the post-Cold War order, eroding trust and fuelling narratives of Western duplicity that justified revanchist policies (Ziegler, 2020). By 2004, the inclusion of the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania intensified these grievances, as NATO's frontier abutted Russia's core, prompting Putin's 2007 Munich speech decrying U.S. "unipolarity" as a threat to global multipolarity (Sarotte, 2021).

The 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia over Kosovo epitomized this rift, marking the alliance's first offensive operation and bypassing UN Security Council approval a move Moscow likened to "imperial overreach" that presaged interventions in Iraq and Libya (Daalder and O'Hanlon, 2000). Russia, a traditional Slavic ally of Serbia, saw the campaign as a precedent for dismembering sovereign states, with civilian casualties (estimated at

500) amplifying accusations of Western hypocrisy on humanitarian norms (Human Rights Watch, 2000). This trauma lingered, informing Russia's vetoes on Syrian resolutions and its framing of Ukraine as a parallel "genocide prevention" pretext in 2022 (Krickovic and Bratersky, 2017).

The Srebrenica massacre, widely recognised as the Srebrenica genocide, occurred in July 1995 during the Bosnian War (1992–1995), when units of the Army of República Srpska (VRS), under the command of General Ratko Mladić, systematically killed more than 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys in and around the UN-designated "safe area" of Srebrenica (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2004; United Nations, 2024a). This atrocity, the worst mass killing in Europe since World War II, also involved the forcible expulsion of over 25,000 women, children and elderly Bosniaks, constituting a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing (Britannica, 2024).

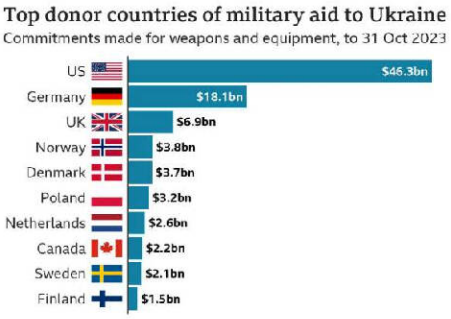
The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was the first to legally classify the events as genocide in 2004, in the case of Prosecutor v. Krstić, confirming the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Bosniak Muslim group in Srebrenica (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2004). This ruling was upheld in subsequent cases, including convictions of high-ranking officials like Radovan Karadžić and Mladić for genocide (International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, 2024). The International Court of Justice (ICJ) affirmed this in 2007, holding Serbia responsible for failing to prevent the genocide (International Court of Justice, 2007).

Despite overwhelming evidence from forensic identifications nearly 7,000 victims confirmed through DNA analysis and international judgments, denial persists in some quarters, prompting the UN General Assembly in

May 2024 to designate 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide, condemning denial and promoting education to prevent future atrocities (United Nations General Assembly, 2024). As of 2025, marking the 30th anniversary, ongoing commemorations underscore the imperative of truth, justice and reconciliation amid enduring trauma for survivors (Amnesty International, 2025).

These tensions boiled over in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea following Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution, which Moscow portrayed as a U.S.-orchestrated "coup" against pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych (Sakwa, 2015). Triggered by NATO's flirtations with Ukrainian membership (enshrined in the 2008 Bucharest Summit), the swift Crimea operation bolstered by "little green men" and a disputed referendum reversed post-Cold War gains, redrawing Europe's map and sparking Western sanctions (Gorenburg, 2015).

NATO's Aid for Ukraine against Russia (2022–2023)



U.S. engagement's granularity reveals a multifaceted intervention: $113 billion in aid from 2022-2023 alone, covert CIA programs, and targeted oligarch sanctions that chip at Russia's elite. Congress's initial $113 billion package encompassing $46 billion in direct military drawdowns funds everything from 155mm

shells (1.5 million delivered) to M777 howitzers, with oversight via the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (CRFB, 2023; GAO, 2024). By October 2025, cumulative aid hits $175 billion across five supplementals, including $61 billion in the April 2024 tranche, audited for accountability amid Republican scrutiny (CFR, 2025; Ukraine Oversight, 2025).

CIA involvement, declassified in September 2024, dates to 2015's "Operation Goldfish" training 12 Ukrainian special forces units in signals intelligence and sabotage near Crimea, escalating post-2022 with drone piloting courses in Western Ukraine (Baker Institute, 2024). These programs, involving 100+ officers annually, enhance Kyiv's hybrid resilience but risk blowback, as Moscow accuses Washington of "direct aggression".

Sanctions on oligarchs Roman Abramovich's $7 billion freeze, Oleg Deripaska's Rusal delisting have seized $30 billion in assets, fracturing Putin's inner circle and funding Ukraine's reconstruction via frozen funds (AEI, 2025). Yet adaptations like crypto evasion persist, highlighting sanctions' limits in hybrid economies (Freedom for All Americans, 2025). These details fortify deterrence but entwine U.S. credibility with Kyiv's fortunes.

U.S. Arming of Ukraine



U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley flank Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov at a Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting, with U.S. and Ukrainian flags in the background.

Proxy warfare in Ukraine has weaponized asymmetry, pitting U.S.-supplied precision munitions against Russia's deniable mercenaries, transforming the conflict into a laboratory for hybrid tactics. Since 2014, over 12,000 Javelin anti-tank missiles portable fire-and-forget systems with 2.5km range have devastated Russian armour, claiming 300+ tanks in Kyiv's 2022 defence and Kharkiv's counteroffensives (United24 Media, 2025). Their "fire-and-forget" autonomy empowered undertrained troops, inverting conventional advantages and prompting Putin's "de-Nazification" rhetoric as cover for escalation (CNN, 2023).

High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), delivered in June 2022, extended this edge with 80km GMLRS precision strikes, destroying 20+ Russian ammo depots and enabling the Kherson retreat (Business Insider, 2025a). By 2025, 39 HIMARS units have fired 10,000+ rockets, degrading 30% of Moscow's logistics while NATO neighbours like Poland procure 48 systems for deterrence (National Security Journal, 2025). This arming, totalling $66.9 billion in military aid by January 2025, embodies U.S. "porcupine" strategy arming for attrition without direct intervention (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

Counterpoised, Russia's Wagner Group rebranded Africa Corps post-2023 mutiny deployed 50,000 mercenaries in Ukraine by 2022, spearheading

Bakhmut's meat-grinder assault with convict recruits and Iranian drones (Martell, 2023). Wagner's hybrid model private funding via gold mines, deniable atrocities evaded sanctions until Yevgeny Prigozhin's death, yet persisted under GRU oversight, blending with Chechen Kadyrovites for urban sieges (Sullivan, 2024). These proxies test U.S. red lines: HIMARS strikes on Crimea prompted nuclear sabre-rattling, while Wagner's African pivots export hybrid threats to Sahel, straining U.S. bandwidth (Diplomat Magazine, 2025). As of 2025, this clash yields lessons in drone swarms and AI targeting, but at the cost of 500,000+ casualties, underscoring proxies' role in prolonging stalemates.

Russia Stretches its muscle in Ukraine against NATO

In the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, now approaching its fourth year, this Institute for the Study of War (ISW) map depicts the frontline situation around December 14, 2025. Red areas represent Russian-controlled territory, primarily in eastern and southern Ukraine including full control of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, significant portions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, and Crimea.



Map of Russia-Ukraine war territorial control (mid-December 2025), showing Russian-held areas in red (eastern/southern Ukraine including Donetsk, Luhansk, parts of Zaporizhzhia/Kherson, and Crimea), recent Russian advances in orange (e.g., near Sumy and Kramatorsk), and assessed Ukrainian gains in yellow (e.g., near Luhansk).

Orange lines highlight recent Russian advances, such as limited incursions near Sumy in the north and ongoing pushes near Kramatorsk in Donetsk Oblast amid heavy fighting in the Pokrovsk sector. Yellow lines indicate assessed Ukrainian gains, including notable counterattacks retaking parts of Kupyansk and areas near Luhansk City. Key cities like Kyiv, Lviv, Kherson, Mariupol, Donetsk, and Luhansk are marked. Source: Based on ISW assessments. The situation remains fluid, with intense battles in Donbas and diplomatic efforts toward negotiations underway.

Weaponisation of Energy by the USA



Worker in safety gear walks beneath the massive pipelines at the landfall facility of Nord Stream 1 in Lubmin, Germany a key node in Russia's direct gas export route to Europe (now decommissioned).

Energy has emerged as a hybrid warfare vector, where sanctions and sabotage intertwine with geopolitical manoeuvring, exemplified by the 2022 Nord Stream pipeline explosions, Russia's SWIFT exclusion, and America's pivot to LNG dominance in Europe. The

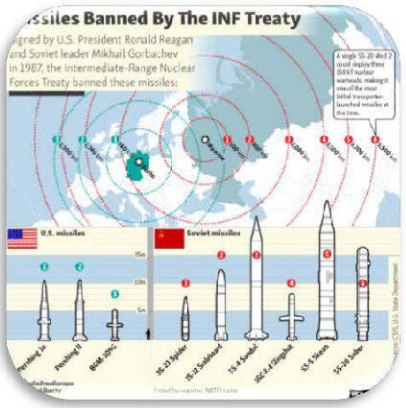
Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, designed to bypass Ukraine and deliver 55 billion cubic meters of Russian gas annually to Germany, symbolized Moscow's leverage over Europe's energy security supplying 40% of EU imports pre-2022 (Stern, 2020). Their sabotage on September 26, 2022, via underwater explosions equivalent to 100kg of TNT, severed this artery, plunging the continent into crisis and spawning theories of U.S. orchestration to kneecap Russian influence and boost American exports (Hersh, 2023).

Conspiracy narratives, amplified by Russian state media, posit U.S. Navy divers or CIA proxies as culprits, citing President Biden's February 2022 vow to "end" Nord Stream if Putin invaded Ukraine (MacAskill et al., 2023). While German investigations point to a pro-Ukrainian sabotage team possibly involving a yacht and Polish divers no conclusive evidence implicates Washington, though declassified U.S. intel on the plot's prelude fuelled speculation (Chayes, 2023). Moscow's Foreign Ministry has leveraged this ambiguity for propaganda, labelling it "U.S. hybrid terrorism" to justify retaliatory gas cutoffs that spiked European prices to €300/MWh in 2022 (Connolly, 2023). By 2025, ongoing probes, including a Ukrainian suspect's arrest, underscore the opacity, with the UN Security Council deadlocked on accountability (UN Press, 2024).

Compounding this, the EU's February 2022 exclusion of select Russian banks from SWIFT the global financial messaging system isolated Moscow's economy, freezing $300 billion in reserves and contracting GDP by 2.1% in 2022 (Gurvich and Prilepskiy, 2023). U.S.-led sanctions targeted oligarchs and entities, aiming to deter aggression, but elicited countermeasures like the SPFS alternative network. Meanwhile, America's LNG surge exports to Europe tripling to 7.1 billion cubic

feet/day by 2024 repositioned Washington as supplier of choice, with deals worth $150 billion through 2030 under the Biden-Trump transition (EIA, 2025). Critics, including European greens, decry this as "energy weaponization," arguing it locks in fossil dependencies while punishing Russia's hybrid tactics (Buchan, 2023). As of October 2025, these dynamics persist, with Nord Stream remnants a rusting testament to hybrid interdependence's fragility. This aligns with the economic dimension of weaponized interdependence in the PESTEL Architecture (see Chapter 1).

Nuclear Posturing by Russia



Nuclear arsenals, relics of Cold War mutual assured destruction, now fuel a posturing contest where treaty lapses and hypersonic innovations erode arms control, heightening escalation risks. The New START Treaty, signed in 2010 and extended to 2026, caps U.S. and Russian strategic warheads at 1,550 and deployed launchers at 700, with verification regimes ensuring transparency (U.S. Department of State, 2010). Russia's February 2023 suspension citing U.S. aid to Ukraine as undermining parity halted inspections, though both sides nominally adhered to limits until expiration on February 5, 2026 (Arms Control Association, 2025). Putin's October 2025 proposal for a one-year extension, contingent on U.S. concessions like lifting Ukraine sanctions, signals tactical flexibility amid domestic pressures, yet Trump's administration

has rebuffed it, prioritizing "peace through strength" over bilateral pacts (Reuters, 2025; Arms Control Association, 2025).

This vacuum accelerates hypersonic races, with Russia's Avangard glide vehicle deployed since 2019 capable of Mach 20 speeds and evading missile defences, prompting U.S. countermeasures like the $15 billion Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent program (Congressional Research Service, 2025). By 2025, both powers field operational systems: U.S. Conventional Prompt Strike tests in July 2024 validated sea-launched variants, while Russia's Zircon missile menaced NATO flanks (Acton, 2023). Posturing manifests in drills Russia's Grom-2025 exercises simulating nuclear strikes on Europe mirroring U.S. B-52 patrols over the Black Sea, each calibrated to signal resolve without crossing red lines (Kristensen and Korda, 2025). Analysts warn that without New START's successor, unchecked modernization could spur a "use it or lose it" mindset, especially in hybrid scenarios where tactical nukes blur thresholds (Sagan and Valentino, 2023). As expiration looms, the standoff evokes 1980s brinkmanship, with diplomacy's absence amplifying inadvertent risks.

U.S. Engagements with Poland, and Georgia against Russia

U.S. diplomacy in Russia's periphery bolstering Baltics, Poland, and Georgia counters Moscow's "spheres of influence" doctrine, embedding NATO's eastern flank amid 2025 tensions. Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland host 10,000+ U.S. troops, with Trump's September 2025 pledge to defend them if Russia escalates airspace violations (NATO, 2025; NY Post, 2025). Baltic initiatives, like the bipartisan Baltic Security Act, allocate $500 million for

cyber defences against hybrid probes. Russian jets buzzed Estonian airspace 300 times in 2025 (Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 2025; Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Poland, NATO's eastern bulwark, receives $2 billion in Foreign Military Financing, including 250 Abrams tanks, fortifying the Suwalki Gap against Kaliningrad threats (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Georgia's engagements, via the 2008 Charter and 2025 Black Sea Strategy, counter Abkhazia/South Ossetia occupations with $100 million in demining and EU pathway support, despite Russian vetoes (Hudson Institute, 2025; TVP World, 2025).These ties, per the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, transform the Baltic into a "NATO lake" post-Finland/Sweden accession, yet provoke Moscow's "anti-NATO" drills (FNF, 2025). Trump's vows signal continuity, but funding cuts risk fissures (Reuters, 2025).

The porcupine strategy of arming Poland and the Baltics to be too prickly to swallow is an effective way of shifting the European strategic focus towards the East, and the Baltic Sea is now in effect the NATO lake. Although these multi-billion-dollar investments and cyber defensive guarantees that provide an essential cover to sovereign allies they also, paradoxically, confirm the "encirclement" narrative held by the Kremlin, which makes sure that the frontiers of Georgia and Poland continue to act as the tripwire to global conflagration. Therefore, instead of throwing the world into another potential world war, the leadership needs to think strategically that the future wars are not going to be with the soldiers, guns and tanks. It will be rather a nuclear war that may bring the humanity to end. A very recent example is a war between India and Pakistan, where Pakistani fighter jets did not cross Indian borders but still managed to destroy seven states of the art fighter jets including Rafale. Just imagine if the technologically very advanced developed nations enter a war, what consequences world would face. Hence, the world nations need to heed to this warning.

CHAPTER 6

The Arctic Thaw – Resource Wars and Strategic Encroachment



Aerial view of a remote Arctic radar station, part of the North Warning System, overlooking the Beaufort Sea in the Canadian High Arctic.

The Arctic, once a frozen periphery of global affairs, has thawed into a cauldron of resource competition and strategic manoeuvrings as climate change unlocks an estimated 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and 30% of its natural gas reserves, alongside vital minerals and transpolar shipping routes (U.S. Geological Survey, 2008). By October 2025, receding sea ice down 13% per decade since 1979 has amplified great-power encroachments, transforming the region from a zone of "exceptionalism" cooperation into a hybrid arena of military buildups, alliance posturing, and veiled sovereignty disputes (Conley and Rohloff, 2015). Russia's militarization, China's "near-Arctic" ambitions, and NATO's northward pivot have drawn the U.S. into a multifaceted contest, where environmental rhetoric masks hard-power realities. This chapter examines three pivotal dynamics: the duelling naval modernizations amid melting ice claims, proxy alliances via NATO's High North framework and U.S.-Canadian patrols, and granular U.S. assertions over the Northwest Passage cloaked in diplomatic facades. These elements underscore a thaw not just of ice, but of post-Cold War norms, risking

escalation in a resource-rich frontier where cooperation frays against zero-sum stakes (Dodds and Nuttall, 2016).

U.S. Coast Guard vs. Russian Northern Fleet



U.S. Coast Guard MH-60 Jayhawk hoists a rescue swimmer onto the deck of the cutter USCGC Alex Haley (WMEC-39) during training operations in Alaskan waters with snow-capped mountains in the background.

Accelerating ice melt projected to render the Arctic Ocean ice-free in summers by 2035 has catalysed overlapping territorial claims, with the U.S. and Russia racing to assert dominance through naval enhancements that blend enforcement, resource extraction, and deterrence (IPCC, 2022). The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), the nation's primary Arctic operator, has spearheaded a $20.7 billion modernization drive under the 2025 National Defence Authorization Act, prioritizing heavy icebreakers to patrol 1,000-mile exclusive economic zones and counter Russian advances (U.S. Congress, 2025). In August 2025, the USCG commissioned the USCGC Storis, a refurbished Polar-class icebreaker the first addition in 25 years capable of breaking 6 feet of ice at 3 knots, enabling year-round operations from Alaska to the Bering Strait and signalling sovereignty amid Trump's "Arctic dominance" doctrine (U.S. Coast Guard, 2025; Alaska Beacon, 2025). This follows $4.3 billion allocated for three new Polar Security Cutters (PSCs), with the first keel laid in September 2025 at Bollinger Shipyards, integrating unmanned systems for surveillance of Russian submarine incursions (Ted Stevens Centre for Arctic Security Studies, 2025). Concurrently, Base Seattle's $150 million upgrade, contracted in

September 2025, equips it as a logistics hub for Antarctic and Arctic missions, enhancing rapid response to illegal fishing and oil spills while projecting power near disputed Chukchi Sea claims (U.S. Coast Guard, 2025; Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, 2025).

Patrols: US, China, Russia, NATO in Arctic

As bilateral frictions intensify, proxy alliances have proliferated, with NATO's High North Strategy framing the Arctic as a "strategic flank" against Russian hybrid threats, while U.S.-Canadian patrols operationalize binational deterrence (NATO, 2022).



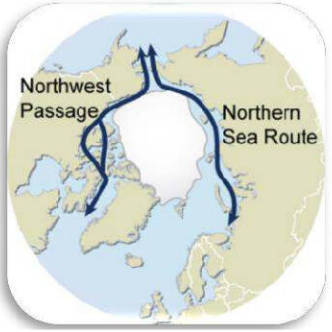
Allied Arctic outpost: U.S., UK, Canadian, and Norwegian flags fly together at a joint military-scientific camp on the Arctic ice, highlighting multinational cooperation in the High North.

Adopted at the 2024 Washington Summit and refined in 2025, NATO's strategy encompassing the "Arctic Seven" (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, U.S.) prioritizes maritime domain awareness, cyber resilience, and rapid reinforcement, allocating €1.2 billion for High North exercises amid Russia's 2025 Grom manoeuvres (The American Legion, 2025; NATO Maritime Command, 2025a). Norway's August 2025 High North Strategy update, unveiled amid Russian vessel seizures, emphasizes "vibrant communities" as force multipliers, integrating Sami Indigenous knowledge for surveillance while hosting U.S. Marine rotations at Værnes (Norwegian Government, 2025; High North News, 2025). This holistic approach, per Arctic Institute recommendations, balances military with economic security, countering

China's Polar Silk Road via joint patrols in the GIUK Gap (The Arctic Institute, 2025a; UK House of Commons Library, 2025).

U.S.-Canadian joint patrols exemplify this proxy layering, with Operation Nanook-Nunalivut 2025 deploying HMCS William Hall and USCGC Healy through the Northwest Passage in an 8,497-nautical-mile circuit, testing interoperability against simulated incursions (Canada Department of National Defence, 2025; Army Recognition, 2025). From September 3-5, 2025, the Alaska Theatre Maritime Security Exercise integrated U.S. F-35s and Canadian CP-140 Auroras for strike drills, enhancing detection of Russian NF assets 500 miles from Alaska (Defence Blog, 2025; Ted Stevens Centre for Arctic Security Studies, 2025). These build on the 2025 NORAD modernization, investing $38.6 billion in over-the-horizon radars to monitor Arctic approaches, while the New York Air National Guard's participation in Nanook underscores rotational commitments (U.S. National Guard, 2025; Policy Options, 2025). Critics note environmental costs fuel spills from increased traffic, but proponents argue they deter "salami-slicing" by Russia, as seen in a seized shadow tanker off Norway in June 2025 (The New York Times, 2025; Captain, 2025). Collectively, these alliances project unity, yet strain resources in a theatre where U.S.-Canada divergences over Passage sovereignty linger (Skies Magazine, 2025).

U.S. Reassertion of Northwest Passage



Arctic shipping routes: the Northwest Passage (western route) and the Northern Sea Route (eastern route) along Russia's coast, both increasingly navigable due to melting sea ice.

Beneath grand strategies lie granular manoeuvres, where U.S. reassertions over the Northwest Passage (NWP) a 900-mile Canadian archipelago route clash with Ottawa's internal waters claim, often veiled in environmental diplomacy to legitimize encroachments (Byers, 2013). In a provocative October 2025 op-ed, analysts warned of Trump's potential "annexation gambit," dispatching warships through the NWP without permission to test Canada's resolve, echoing Reagan-era transits that prompted the 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement (The Globe and Mail, 2025; Griffiths, 2025). The USCG's (**United States Coast Guard Ship)** August 2025 Storis patrol its inaugural NWP transit asserted "innocent passage" under UNCLOS **(United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)**, rejecting Canada's baselines while touting pollution response drills, a facade critiqued as "security theatre" amid stalled $1 billion in joint cleanup funds (Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, 2025; Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2025).

Environmental diplomacy serves as a dual-use veneer, with the U.S. 2025 Arctic Vision emphasizing "resilient ecosystems" through NOAA-led science diplomacy yet reallocating $200 million from climate research to security under the Trump pivot (NOAA, 2025; The New York Times, 2025). Track 1.5 dialogues, like the September 2025 U.S.-Russia expert forum on oil spill response, mask militarisation. Russia's Nagurskoye base

doubles as an environmental monitoring post while H.Res. 431 reaffirms U.S. Arctic Council commitment, suspending cooperation with Moscow post-Ukraine but engaging China on methane protocols (U.S. Congress, 2025; Arctic Today, 2025). This "restraint diplomacy," per Arctic Institute scholars, could restore exceptionalism by leveraging Indigenous voices, yet securitisation e.g., DOE's $50 million for Arctic energy resilience prioritizes critical minerals over emissions cuts (The Arctic Institute, 2025c; U.S. Department of State, 2025; U.S. Department of Energy, 2025). High North News critiques this as "facades," where green rhetoric justifies FONOPs, eroding trust in forums like the 2025 Arctic Circle Assembly (High North News, 2025; Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

US Rhetoric to Annex Canada and Greenland



The United States perceives the Arctic's evolving dynamics as a potential threat to its national security and geopolitical standing. The increasing presence of Russian and Chinese activities in the region has raised alarms about the U.S.'s ability to protect its interests and maintain strategic superiority. In December 2024, during a meeting with Canadian officials, President Trump suggested that Canada consider becoming the 51st U.S. state. Initially perceived as a jest, this notion was later reinforced through statements and social media posts advocating for annexation, citing potential economic benefits and enhanced security for Canadians. Canadian leaders, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, firmly rejected these suggestions, emphasizing Canada's sovereignty and

independence. Trudeau stated there was not "a snowball's chance in hell" of Canada joining the United States (Politico, 2025).

The Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap is a crucial maritime corridor for naval operations and the defence of the North Atlantic. Control over this passage is vital for monitoring and deterring adversarial movements. Greenland's strategic position within this gap enhances its significance for U.S. defence planning (RAND Corporation, 2021).

Furthermore, the Arctic serves as a critical area for missile defence systems and early warning capabilities. The U.S. operates facilities such as the Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base) in Greenland, which are integral to monitoring potential missile threats and conducting space operations (Space News, 2025The prospect of Greenland attaining independence from Denmark raises concerns in Washington about the island potentially aligning more closely with Russia or China, thereby compromising U.S. security interests in the Arctic (RAND Corporation, 2021).

This addresses resource wars, climate-amplified scarcities, and competition over strategic geographies as mentioned in the PESTEL framework.

Greenland Acquisition Plan



Trump's profile overlaid on a globe highlighting Greenland in red, with a snowy Arctic village and mountain backdrop.

The United States' interest in Greenland is driven primarily by strategic geopolitical considerations, national security imperatives in the Arctic, and access to critical minerals and rare earth elements, amid escalating competition with Russia and China. This interest has historical roots but has intensified significantly under President Donald Trump's administration in 2025–2026.

Greenland's location between North America and Europe, at the intersection of the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic, makes it crucial for monitoring potential missile threats, controlling key maritime gateways like the GIUK Gap (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom), and supporting early-warning systems and defence operations (Pincus, 2026; CSIS, 2026). The island's proximity to emerging Arctic shipping routes, opened by climate-induced ice melt, further enhances its value for projecting power and securing trade lanes (Merrild Hansen, 2026). Trump has repeatedly emphasized that acquiring Greenland is essential to deter adversaries, stating that "if we don't take Greenland, Russia or China will take Greenland" (BBC, 2026; Trump, Reuters, 2026). He has framed the issue as a matter of ownership rather than mere leasing, arguing that current military access under the 1951 Defence Agreement is insufficient for full defence (Trump, cited in BBC, 2026; New York Times, 2026).

A secondary but significant driver is Greenland's abundance of untapped resources, including the world's second-largest reserves of rare earth

elements (estimated at 1.5 million tons), as well as uranium, graphite, lithium, and other critical minerals vital for defence technologies, electric vehicles, renewable energy, and high-tech industries (CSIS, 2026; US Geological Survey, cited in CNBC, 2026). The U.S. seeks to reduce dependence on China, which dominates global rare earth processing (over 90%), especially after export restrictions in 2025 disrupted supply chains (CSIS, 2026; Euronews, 2026). Although Trump has publicly downplayed minerals as the primary motive, administration discussions and investments (e.g., potential U.S. Export-Import Bank loans for projects like Tanbreez) indicate resource security as a key national security priority (Reuters, 2026b; CSIS, 2026).

Historical precedents include U.S. offers to purchase Greenland in 1946 and basing rights during the Cold War, but the current push under Trump (revived from 2019) involves proposals for outright acquisition, economic incentives, or even military options, despite strong opposition from Denmark, Greenland, and European allies (Reuters, 2026). This has strained NATO relations, with warnings that forced action could undermine the alliance (Reuters, 2026d]).

The "Arctic Thaw" has fundamentally transitioned the region from a zone of scientific research and cooperation into a high-stakes arena where environmental rhetoric often masks a raw race for mineral wealth and naval supremacy. By detailing radical geopolitical manoeuvres from the contest for the Northwest Passage to the controversial proposals for Greenland's acquisition underscores a shift where traditional alliances are being strained by the zero-sum logic of resource security and the strategic necessity of the GIUK Gap. Now if US continues to threaten its allies to take over Greenland and/or Canada, US will lose such allies and maybe European Union will follow the suit

CHAPTER 7

U.S threats to change regime in Iran



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif face each other across the table during final negotiations for the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) in

U.S.-Iran relations in 2025 remain ensnared in a labyrinth of sanctions, covert operations, and proxy skirmishes, casting a long nuclear shadow over the Middle East's fragile stability. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, mutual antagonism has defined the bilateral dynamic, with Tehran viewing Washington as the "Great Satan" orchestrating regime change, while the U.S. perceives Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism feeling regional chaos (CFR, 2025).

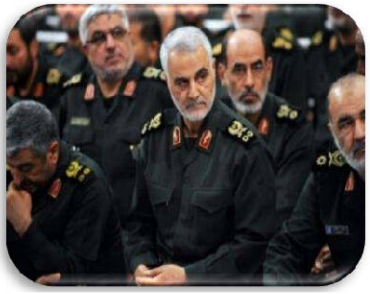
The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)[1] of 2015 briefly illuminated a path to détente, curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for sanctions relief, but its unravelling under Trump and subsequent escalations have entrenched a cycle of "maximum pressure" and retaliation. By October 2025, amid stalled Vienna talks and Iran's uranium enrichment nearing weapons-grade levels (90% purity at Fordow), U.S. sanctions have frozen $100 billion in Iranian assets, while

[1] JCPOA stands for Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. It is an international agreement, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, reached in 2015 to regulate Iran's nuclear program and prevent it from developing nuclear weapons.

Tehran's "axis of resistance" proxies from Yemen's Houthis to Lebanon's Hezbollah stretch American forces thin (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

This chapter dissects the JCPOA's demise, proxy entanglements, oil chokepoint tensions, granular U.S. interventions, and alliances countering Iranian influence via the Abraham Accords. These threads reveal a hybrid warfare paradigm where economic strangulation, cyber sabotage, and deniable strikes risk miscalculation, potentially igniting a broader conflagration amid Israel's shadow war and Gulf normalisation efforts (CFR, 2025)

Soleimani Assassination (2020)



Major General Qasem Soleimani among senior IRGC commanders, Tehran.

The 2018 U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA derided by Trump as the "worst deal ever" ushered in a "maximum pressure" doctrine blending crippling sanctions with targeted eliminations, accelerating Iran's nuclear breakout and regional adventurism. Reimposing secondary sanctions on Iran's oil exports slashed revenues from 2.5 million barrels per day to under 500,000 by 2020, crippling the economy and inflating inflation to 40%, yet failing to compel JCPOA re-entry (FDD, 2025). Tehran's retaliatory breaches enriching uranium to 60% purity by 2021 were compounded by the January 3, 2020, drone assassination of IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani at Baghdad International Airport, ordered by Trump to deter imminent threats but framed by Tehran as

"state terrorism" (Al Jazeera, 2025). The strike, executed via MQ-9 Reaper with Hellfire missiles, killed Soleimani alongside Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, prompting Iran's Operation Martyr Soleimani: 16 ballistic missiles on U.S. bases in Iraq, injuring 110 troops with traumatic brain injuries (Brew, 2020). **Iranian Support for Houthis and Hezbollah**



Iran's "Axis of Resistance": Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (centre) with fighters in Lebanon, Palestinian militants in the West Bank, and Houthi forces in Yemen, illustrating Tehran's network of allied proxy militias across the Middle East.

Iran's proxy ecosystem bolstered by $700 million annually via IRGC Quds Force sustains asymmetric warfare, countered by U.S. precision strikes that degrade capabilities but risk escalation ladders. Hezbollah, armed with 150,000 rockets, has clashed with U.S.-backed Israel along the Blue Line since October 2023, while Houthis' Red Sea drone barrages over 100 since November 2023 disrupt 12% of global trade, attributed to smuggled Iranian Paveh cruise missiles (NPR, 2024; Wikipedia, 2025a). In retaliation for the January 28, 2024, Tower 22 drone attack killing three U.S. troops and wounding 47, claimed by Islamic Resistance in Iraq the Biden administration launched 85 strikes on 16 IRGC-linked sites in Syria and Iraq, destroying munitions depots with F-18s and Tomahawks (CFR, 2024).By 2025, U.S. operations have neutralized 20 Houthi radars and command nodes via carrier-based strikes, yet Tehran's rearming via shadow fleets delivering Shahed-136 drones sustains the campaign, with Houthis vowing intensified attacks post-Trump's March airstrikes (Chatham House, 2025; CNN, 2025). IRGC

support, channelled through Yemen's smuggling routes, has empowered proxies to strike U.S. assets 170 times since October 2023, inverting deterrence and straining CENTCOM resources (NCR-Iran, 2025; FDD, 2025). Strikes have curbed Iraq-Syria attacks by 80%, but Houthi resilience fuelled by ideological fervour highlights sanctions' limits against ideological networks (Stars and Stripes, 2024; NPR, 2024b).

Attacks on Saudi Aramco (2019) and U.S. Tanker Escort Operations

The Strait of Hormuz, transiting 21 million barrels daily (20% of global oil), remains a flashpoint where Iranian minelaying and U.S. escorts collide, exemplified by the September 14, 2019, Abqaiq-Khurais Aramco strikes drones and missiles halving Saudi output for weeks, blamed on IRGC via Yemen (BBC, 2019). Riyadh's 5% GDP hit spurred Operation Sentinel: multinational escorts for 50+ tankers monthly, with U.S. Navy destroyers

like USS McFaul screening against limpet mines, echoing the 1980s Tanker War (DW, 2019; Bloomberg, 2020). June 2019 Gulf of Oman incidents four tankers limpet-mined, two Saudi escalated fears, with U.S. video evidence implicating IRGC speedboats, prompting BIMCO calls for armed escorts amid 20% oil price spikes (Guardian, 2019; Washington Post, 2019). By 2025, Iran's threats to mine the Strait post-Israel strikes have revived Earnest Will-style convoys, costing $1 billion annually in U.S. carrier deployments, while shadow fleets evade sanctions, sustaining Tehran's oil sales at 1.5 million bpd (Atlantic Council, 2025; Columbia University, 2019). USNI reports highlight the asymmetry: Iran's asymmetric threats versus U.S. $500 million/month patrols, deterring closure but inflating insurance premiums 300% (USNI News, 2019; USIP, 2019).



Ship-to-ship transfer of sanctioned Iranian oil at sea: multiple tankers clustered around a floating platform, illustrating the "dark fleet" tactics used to evade U.S. and international sanctions.

US-Israel Cyber War against Iran

U.S. covert actions punctuate the shadow war, from Stuxnet's sabotage to transactional diplomacy, underscoring hybrid coercion. The 2010 Stuxnet worm. U.S.-Israeli "Olympic Games" operation infected Natanz centrifuges, destroying 1,000 of 9,000 via Siemens PLC



exploits, delaying enrichment by 1-2 years without kinetic strikes. No confirmed 2023 "revival," but echoes persist in 2025 attributions of IR-1 centrifuge failures to successor malware, per IAEA logs of anomalous vibrations (Stanford FSI, 2015; DGAP, 2023).

The September 2023 prisoner swap freeing five Americans for $6 billion in unfrozen Qatari-held Iranian funds highlighted sanctions' leverage, though restricted to humanitarian use; Tehran accessed $2.7 billion by mid-2025 for food imports, averting famine but criticized as ransom (NCRI, 2025). IAEA inspections, hampered by 2021 camera blackouts, resumed partially in 2024 under Vienna talks, verifying 5,500kg uranium stockpiles but decrying opacity at undeclared sites like Turquzabad (EBSCO, n.d.; NDU Press, 2012). These minutiae Stuxnet's ethical precedents in cyber LOAC debates (Case Western Reserve, 2012) exemplify calibrated pressure, yet fuel Tehran's breakout incentives (YouTube, 2012; ISIS, 2010).

Abraham Accords Framework



The Abraham Accords signing ceremony at the White House, September 15, 2020: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, U.S. President Donald Trump, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani, and UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed sign the historic normalization agreements between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain.

The Abraham Accords, normalizing Israel-UAE/Bahrain ties in 2020 and expanding to Morocco/Sudan, anchor U.S. containment of Iran via Gulf bulwarks, fostering $50 billion in trilateral trade by 2025 despite Gaza strains (UK House of Commons Library, 2025; Wikipedia, 2025d). Saudi Arabia's 2025 I2U talks tied to U.S. security pacts leverage Vision 2030 investments, with $20 billion in joint arms deals countering Houthi drones (U.S. Department of State, 2020; Carnegie Endowment, 2025). UAE-Israel defence integration, including 2025 Red Sea patrols, deters IRGC naval forays, while Accords' resilience post-October 2023 $3 billion tourism surge underscores economic glue over Palestinian vetoes (Atlantic Council, 2025; MERIP, 2025).

Israel's strikes on Iranian assets in Syria (300+ in 2024) benefit from UAE intel-sharing, straining Tehran but risking Accords' "cold peace" amid Saudi hesitance on full normalization (Times of Israel, 2025; Washington Institute, 2025). FDD credits Trump's framework for prosperity-led peace, yet Carnegie warns Gaza's fallout could fracture unity if Iran exploits divides (UAE Embassy, n.d.; FDD, 2025).

Operation Midnight Hammer



B-2A Spirit stealth bomber from Whiteman AFB releases a full load of 80 Mk 82 500-pound bombs during a training mission showcasing the aircraft's massive precision conventional payload capacity.

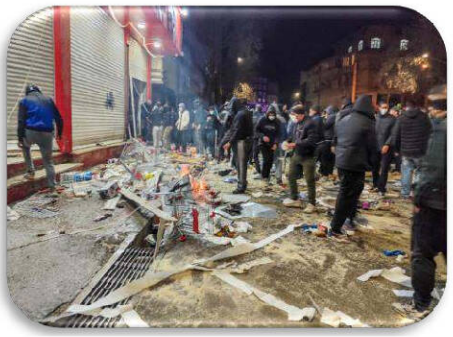
On 22 June 2025, the United States launched a precision airstrike operation codenamed Operation Midnight Hammer against three key Iranian nuclear facilities the Fordow Uranium Enrichment Plant, the Natanz Nuclear Facility, and the Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre as part of the escalating Iran–Israel war. This marked the first direct US offensive action on Iranian soil since the 1988 naval engagements and the first major strike on nuclear sites, aimed at disrupting Tehran's nuclear weapons program amid reports of Iran amassing near-weapons-grade uranium stockpiles (BBC, 2025). The operation involved seven B-2 Spirit stealth bombers departing from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, each carrying two 30,000-pound GBU-57A/B Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) "bunker-buster" bombs, totalling 14 munitions designed to penetrate deeply buried targets (Reuters, 2025; CBS News, 2025). These $2.1 billion aircraft, known for their low-observable radar-absorbent materials and flying-wing design, flew an 18-hour non-stop mission eastward across the Atlantic and Mediterranean, supported by over 125 aircraft including F-22 and F-35 escorts, KC-135 tankers for multiple in-flight refuelling's, and a US submarine firing more than two dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles to suppress air defences (PBS News, 2025; The Aviationist, 2025).

The mission's success hinged on elaborate deception tactics to evade detection by Iran's degraded air defence network, which had been pre-

weakened by prior Israeli strikes coordinated with US intelligence (Air & Space Forces Magazine, 2025). While amateur spotters and media tracked decoy B-2s heading west toward the Pacific and Guam drawing attention to a potential Pacific theatre diversion the primary strike package proceeded in near-radio silence, minimizing emissions and employing edge alignment to reduce radar cross-sections (Business Insider, 2025; India Today, 2025). Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Caine, described the incursion as "flawless," noting that Iranian radars failed to detect the bombers, no fighter jets scrambled, and no surface-to-air missiles were fired, allowing the B-2s to release their payloads undetected around 6:40 p.m. EDT (2:10 a.m. local time in Tehran) (BBC, 2025b; Fox News, 2025). President Donald Trump announced the strikes publicly on 21 June, framing them as a response to failed diplomacy and Iran's non-compliance with nuclear limits, though the timing masked the ongoing operation (ABC News, 2025).

Iran Protests and Political Unrest

As of January 12, 2026, Iran faces one of its most severe internal crises since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, with nationwide anti-government protests that erupted on December 28, 2025, continuing to escalate despite a brutal security crackdown and a near-total nationwide internet blackout imposed since early January (The Guardian,



Tehran, January 2026 Aftermath of nightly clashes: Protesters remain on the scene amid scattered debris, burnt remnants, and shattered glass outside closed shopfronts in central Tehran during the ongoing nationwide uprising.

2026; Reuters, 2026). Triggered initially by the catastrophic collapse of the Iranian rial plunging to record lows around 1.4 1.47 million rials per US dollar amid hyperinflation projected to exceed 40–50% in 2026 the demonstrations have evolved into broad calls for regime change, the downfall of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and an end to clerical rule (Iran International, 2026; DW, 2026; Wikipedia, 2026a). Protests have spread to all 31 provinces and hundreds of cities, including Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Zahedan, featuring chants such as "Death to Khamenei," the burning of regime symbols, and the waving of the pre-1979 Lion and Sun flag (The Guardian, 2026b; Reuters, 2026).

The death toll has risen sharply, with the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) verifying over 544 protesters killed (including children) and more than 10,600 arrested by mid-January, alongside reports of 109 security personnel deaths; authorities have framed the unrest as a battle against foreign-backed "rioters" and "terrorists" (CBS News, 2026; The Independent, 2026; ABC News, 2026). Security forces have employed lethal live ammunition, leading to overwhelmed hospitals and widespread reports of arbitrary detentions, while the internet shutdown reminiscent of the 2019 crackdown has severely restricted information flow and concealed violations (Amnesty International, 2026; UN News, 2026). In response, Ayatollah Khamenei (aged 86) has vowed that the regime will "not back down," labelling protesters as "vandals" and "saboteurs" acting to "please" US President Donald Trump, accusing them of ruining streets for foreign agendas, and signalling an intensified clampdown (The Guardian, 2026c; NPR, 2026; The New York Times, 2026).

President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened "very strong options," including potential military intervention or strikes, to "rescue" peaceful protesters if killings continue, while noting that Iran has reached out for negotiations amid the pressure (The Independent, 2026b; Reuters, 2026c; Al Jazeera, 2026). Iran has warned of retaliatory attacks on US bases, Israel, and regional interests if attacked, framing the situation as a "war against terrorists" and remaining open to talks but prepared for conflict (The Guardian, 2026; House of Commons Library, 2026). Exiled opposition figures like Reza Pahlavi have urged protesters to seize control and called for international support, while pro-government rallies mourn security forces (CBS News, 2026). The crisis, fuelled by post-June 2025 war fallout, reimposed UN sanctions, and chronic mismanagement, underscores deep societal fractures, with risks of further escalation, regime fracture, or foreign entanglement remaining high (House of Commons Library, 2026; The Atlantic Council analyses cited in various reports, 2026).

U.S.-Iran relations have reached a terminal breaking point, where the transition from "maximum pressure" sanctions to direct kinetic strikes like Operation Midnight Hammer 2025 has dismantled decades of precarious diplomacy. This escalation, combined with a dent in the Iranian economy and the resulting uprising, has forced the relationship into a volatile endgame where regime survival and regional conflagration are now the primary, high-stakes variables. Iran has shown remarkable resilience. It was forced into a devastating war with Iraq, has faced long-term U.S. sanctions ever since, and continues to deal with Israeli military aggression while Israel possesses nuclear weapons and faces no similar international sanctions. In contrast, the United States has a debt-to-GDP ratio of around 124%, the United Kingdom is at approximately 96%, yet Iran maintains a remarkably low government debt-to-GDP ratio of about 7% even while

operating under extensive international sanctions for years. Iran has always blamed United States for an undue and unfair pressure on Iran due to the Israeli influence on US establishment as it is evident that in June 2025 US did attack Iranians nuclear research sites without any provocation. Israel has engaged in direct unprovoked aggression against at least 10–12 distinct sovereign countries or territories over the decades but Iran did not attack any of its neighbouring country but still US threatens Iran for an imminent attack as it did in June 2025.

CHAPTER 8

Failed US attempt of regime changes in Iran



Thousands of demonstrator's marches through London toward the US Embassy, brandishing Iranian and Palestinian flags alongside portraits of slain Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, demanding an end to US-Israeli airstrikes on Iran, March 7, 2026.

The recent conflict, commonly referred to as the **2026 Iran War** or **Operation Epic Fury**, began on February 28, 2026, following a massive joint military operation by the United States and Israel. In retaliation, the Islamic Republic of Iran launched a series of high-intensity drone and missile strikes targeting U.S. military assets, diplomatic missions, and the critical infrastructure of neighbouring Arab states. The transition from covert regime-change efforts to overt kinetic warfare marked a definitive shift in 21st-century geopolitics. Following the failure of foreign-backed internal protests to destabilize the Islamic Republic largely due to the Iranian populace's refusal to participate in mass civil unrest despite active Mossad and CIA support Israel executed a unilateral strike against Iranian soil. This escalation was preceded by nine distinct visits by Prime Minister Netanyahu to the White House, casting significant doubt on the US establishment's claims that they were "dragged" into the fray without prior consent. Instead, the strategic synchronization suggests a calculated,

albeit disorganized, escalation that shattered the long-standing facade of American neutrality in the region (Smith 2024).

In previous chapter we have discussed US Israel threats of regime change in Iran by hook or by crook. They tried first to stage violent protest Iran, but Iranian people did not come out in masses. The shift from covert subversion to direct military confrontation marks a critical juncture in the Iran-Israel conflict, as initial attempts to spark a mass uprising failed to destabilize the Iranian government despite alleged intelligence support from the CIA and Mossad (Lynch, 2011). This failure culminated in Israel's June 2025 unilateral strike Operation Rising Lion which, despite Benjamin Netanyahu's numerous consultations at the White House, reportedly left the U.S. military establishment unprepared and "dragged" into a conflict without formal prior consent (American Journal of International Law, 2025). The ensuing war is characterized by conflicting strategic narratives ranging from nuclear non-proliferation and humanitarian regime change to the securing of global oil corridors (Scholar Works, 2010) leading some analysts to warn that such massive military overextension, coupled with a lack of clear objectives, could catalyse a systemic global crisis and the eventual decline of United States hegemony (Shalom, 2016; Chinese Journal of International Review, 2025).

Strategic Ambiguity: The Tri-Lens Objective of the Coalition



President Donald Trump speaking at a podium announces US strikes on

This coalition entry into the war was defined by a "tri-lens" objective strategy that fluctuated depending on the audience and the specific briefing. At various intervals, the objective was portrayed as a moral imperative to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, a humanitarian mission to "liberate" a people portrayed as oppressed by their regime, or a cynical but necessary operation to control the Persian Gulf's oil reserves to maintain the global petrodollar (Jones & Aras 2025). Because Israel initiated the kinetic phase without formal American permission, the subsequent US military involvement was characterized by extreme unpreparedness, setting the stage for what many analysts now describe as the final World War a conflict with catastrophic consequences for the international order and the eventual fall of the United States.

The Martyrdom of the Supreme Leader



Former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks to the Iranian people in Tehran.

A pivotal moment in the conflict was the assassination of the Supreme Leader, an act intended to decapitate the Iranian state, but which instead triggered an unprecedented religious and political fallout. From a religious

perspective, this action transformed a political figure into a "Living Martyr" (*Shahid*), effectively unifying various factions of the Shia world against "The Great Satan." Rather than causing a systemic collapse, the regime's theological framework provided a resilient structure for immediate succession and intensified resistance, turning a local conflict into a global spiritual crusade (Nasr 2024).

The Intelligence Shadow War: Spies, Purges, and Double Agents

This resistance was further complicated by the discovery of spies within the Iranian Army; while Mossad and CIA assets provided tactical data for initial strikes, subsequent purges within the IRGC and the regular army revealed the depth of the shadow war. Double agents became a primary tool for Iranian counterintelligence, intentionally feeding false coordinates to Israeli pilots during the early stages of the invasion to trap high-value assets and lead them into sophisticated "kill zones" (Levitt 2025).



IDF special forces, with K-9 unit in tow, advance through the streets of a Lebanese

The Erosion of Naval Supremacy: Historic Losses in the Persian Gulf



The USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group steams through the Arabian Sea, readying F/A-18 Super Hornets for airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in coordination with Israeli forces, March 7, 2026.

The US military, forced into the conflict without a finalized mobilization plan, suffered historic losses of military assets in the Middle East. A high-resolution depiction of this failure can be seen in the sinking of the USS Gerald R. Ford class carrier, which was seen listing in the Persian Gulf with smoke billowing from its deck following a massive swarm drone strike. The financial and asset breakdown was staggering: the disabling of one carrier and two destroyers resulted in an immediate loss of approximately $18 billion, while twelve F-35 Lightning II jets were lost to Iranian S-300/S-400 systems and "loitering munitions." Furthermore, Central Command (CENTCOM) bases in Qatar and Bahrain sustained $4.2 billion in damage from ballistic missile salvos, marking the most significant loss of American hardware since World War II (Military Balance 2025).

Asymmetric Dominance: Iran's Mosaic Défense and the Axis of Resistance



Iranian Shahed-136 suicide drones arrayed in a Tehran underground

Iran's war strategy, defined as "Asymmetric Dominance," focused on a "Mosaic Defense" that decentralized command and utilized the "Axis of Resistance" including Hezbollah, the Houthis, and the PMF. This forced the US to fight a 360-degree war, stretching naval resources from the Red Sea to the Strait of Hormuz. This strategy relied heavily on mobile, land-based missile batteries and hidden tunnel networks, making it nearly impossible for coalition air power to achieve total air superiority. Central to this strategy was the "Drone Paradox," which highlighted a critical cost-exchange ratio crisis. Iran's cheap Shahed-series drones, costing roughly $20,000 each, forced Israel and the US to use Patriot and Iron Dome interceptors costing $2 million to $5 million per shot. This math of attrition where $2 million worth of drones could deplete $300 million worth of interceptors became a primary factor in the rapid depletion of US munitions stockpiles and the eventual destruction of Israeli infrastructure as the "Iron Dome" was saturated by sheer volume (World Defense Report 2025).

The Psychological Collapse of the Israeli Home Front



IDF personnel survey the devastation in a Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut's suburbs after precision Israeli airstrikes targeted Iranian-supplied weapon caches, intensifying the regional war.

The resulting destruction of Israel had a profound psychological impact on the Israeli public, who had long been accustomed to a sense of total security. Major urban centres like Tel Aviv saw significant infrastructure collapse, leading to a "reversal of Aliyah" where dual-citizenship holders fled to Europe and the US, causing a total breakdown of the domestic economy. The erosion of the "invincibility myth" of the IDF led to widespread social fragmentation and a loss of confidence in the political leadership (Cohen 2025).

Global Energy Crisis: The Closure of the Strait of Hormuz



Strategic overview of the Strait of Hormuz, the vital oil chokepoint where Iranian naval forces vowed to disrupt global shipping lanes in retaliation for the US-Israeli airstrikes on Tehran, heightening fears of economic fallout, March 10,

Meanwhile, the Arab ruling class found themselves in a precarious "neutrality trap" as Iran followed through on its threat to close the Strait of Hormuz. With 30% of global seaborne oil halted, a global energy crisis ensued with oil prices exceeding $250 per barrel, effectively ending Western economic stability. The dependency of the international market on this narrow waterway proved to be the Achilles' heel of the global financial system. This economic despair,

combined with mounting military casualties, led to a domestic "Blue Red" schism during the US Midterm Elections, where civil unrest mirrored the Vietnam era but with higher stakes. The polarization of the American electorate, fueled by soaring inflation and the perceived failure of the military intervention, signalled the definitive end of the "American Century" and the beginning of a multi-polar world order (Johnson 2026).

The Irrational Turn: Pastors and Magicians in the White House

In the final, desperate months of the administration, the White House shifted toward irrationality, with reports emerging of "Pastors and Magicians" spiritual advisors and esoteric consultants being brought into the inner circle. This signalled a complete breakdown in rational military planning as the establishment sought "miraculous" exits from a war that had no winning scenario (Brown 2025) As the US questioned Israel on the efficacy and ethics of its bombing campaigns, the damage was already done; the international order had fractured, the petrodollar had collapsed, and the geopolitical landscape was forever altered by a war that began with a unilateral strike and ended with the fall of a superpower.



President Donald Trump seated at the Oval Office desk with his head bowed as a diverse group of advisors and faith leaders lay hands on him in a prayer circle.

Iranian Strikes on Neighbouring Countries

Following the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the opening wave of the conflict, Iran initiated a regional counter-offensive targeting nations that host U.S. forces (Britannica 2026).



Dubai Marina hit by several Iranian drones.

- **United Arab Emirates (UAE):** Iran launched over 1,400 drones and 240 ballistic missiles toward the UAE. While the majority were intercepted, strikes hit **Dubai International Airport (Terminal 3)** and **Jebel Ali Port**, causing fires and temporary closures (Wikipedia 2026).

- **Saudi Arabia:** Drones and missiles targeted the **Ras Tanura** oil facilities and the **Prince Sultan Air Base**. A projectile strike in Al Kharj resulted in the first reported civilian deaths in the Kingdom during this conflict (Long War Journal 2026).

- **Kuwait:** Iranian drones successfully struck jet fuel storage tanks at **Kuwait International Airport** and the National Insurance building in the capital. The Ali Al-Salem Air Base also reported damage to several structures (Israel-Alma 2026).

- **Bahrain:** A drone strike targeted a vital **water desalination plant**, which Bahraini officials condemned as an attempt to sabotage the nation's drinking water supply. Additional strikes were reported near the capital, Manama (1News 2026).

- **Iraq & Jordan:** The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was targeted by suicide UAVs, while the Erbil International Airport—a key hub for U.S. forces sustained damage to multiple structures (Israel-Alma 2026).

Losses to U.S. Infrastructure and Assets

The financial and operational impact on the United States military infrastructure has been extensive, with losses estimated at nearly **$2 billion** within the first four days of the conflict (Anadolu Agency 2026).

Major Military Infrastructure Damage

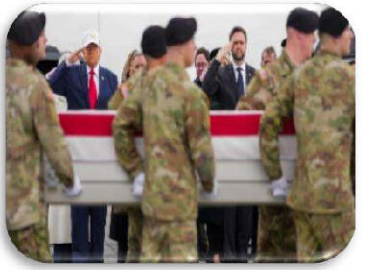
Asset Impacted	Location	Details of Loss
AN/FPS-132 Radar	Qatar (Al Udeid)	$1.1 billion early warning system destroyed by a missile.
5th Fleet Headquarters	Bahrain	Two SATCOM terminals and several command buildings destroyed.
THAAD Radar (AN/TPY-2)	UAE (Al-Ruwais)	$500 million radar component confirmed hit by satellite imagery.
F-15E Strike Eagles	Kuwait	Three aircraft lost in a friendly-fire incident by local defences.

Diplomatic and Digital Infrastructure

In addition to military sites, the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait and the U.S. Consulate in Dubai were both struck by drones, resulting in fires and the evacuation of non-essential personnel (Washington Post 2026). In the digital realm, Amazon Web Services (AWS) reported that one of its data centres in the region caught fire after being struck by "objects," causing localized power issues for cloud services (Wikipedia 2026).

U.S. Personnel Casualties

As of March 9, 2026, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has confirmed the deaths of **seven U.S. service members** (SANA 2026).

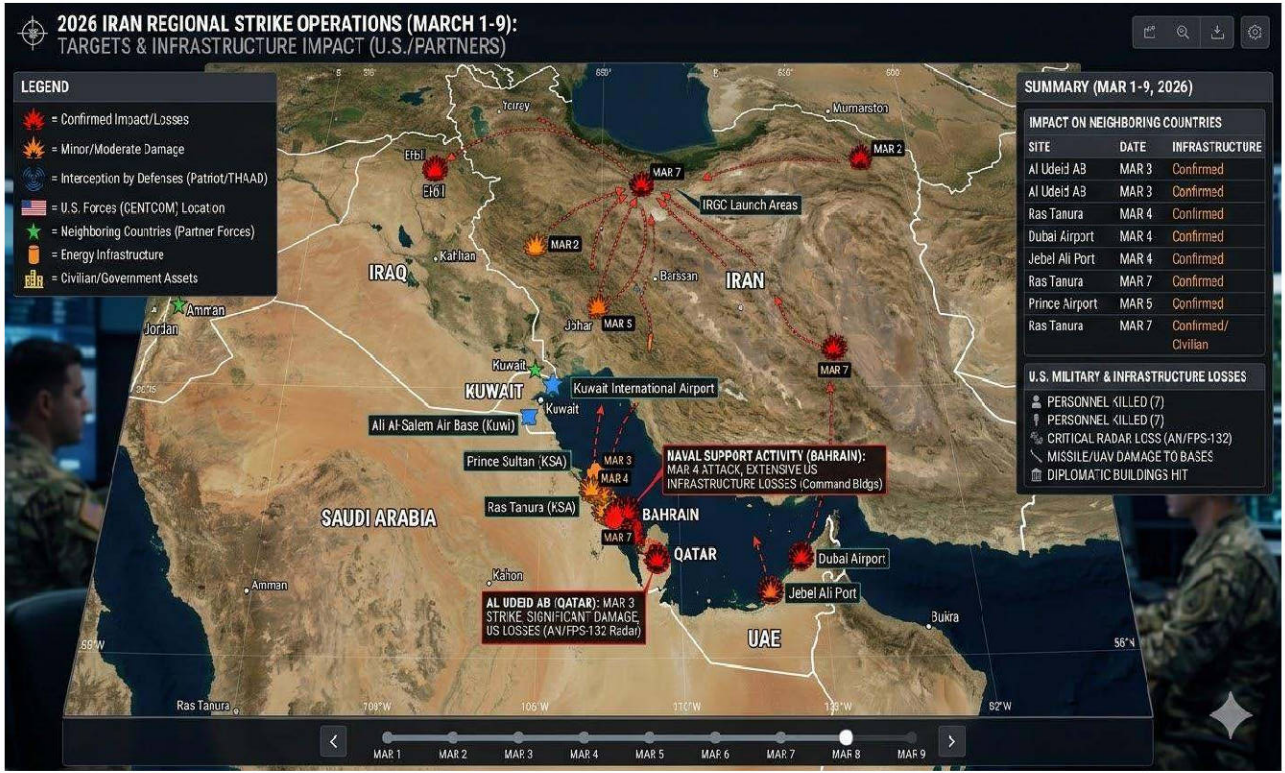


President Donald Trump and Senator JD Vance stand in solemn salute during a dignified transfer of remains for fallen U.S. service members.

- Six personnel were killed during a "ferocious" initial counterattack in **Kuwait**.
- The seventh fatality was a service member who succumbed to injuries sustained during a missile strike on U.S. troops in **Saudi Arabia** on March 1 (Long War Journal 2026).
- Additionally, at least 20 other personnel have been reported as injured across various regional installations.

The NYT Revelations on the School Attacks

The *New York Times* investigation revealed that the wave of reported poisonings affected thousands of students across more than 200 schools in nearly every province of Iran (Fassihi and Engelbrecht 2023). While the Iranian authorities initially dismissed the symptoms which included nausea, respiratory distress, and numbness as "mass excitability" or "stress," the *Times* cited medical experts and witnesses who suggested the presence of nitrogen-based gases or other irritants (Fassihi 2023). Furthermore, the reporting highlighted a significant delay in the government's investigation, which many activists interpreted as a tactic to intimidate young women who had been at the forefront of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests (Fassihi and Engelbrecht 2023). The *Times* also documented evidence of security forces surrounding hospitals and preventing families from obtaining independent medical tests, suggesting a coordinated effort to suppress the scale of the crisis (Fassihi 2023).


2026 IRAN REGIONAL STRIKE OPERATIONS (MARCH 1-9):
TARGETS & INFRASTRUCTURE IMPACT (U.S./PARTNERS)
LEGEND
= Confirmed Impact/Losses
= Minor/Moderate Damage
= Interception by Defenses (Patriot/THAAD)
= U.S. Forces (CENTCOM) Location
= Neighboring Countries (Partner Forces)
= Energy Infrastructure
= Civilian/Government Assets
SUMMARY (MAR 1-9, 2026)
IMPACT ON NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES
SITE | DATE | INFRASTRUCTURE
Al Udeid AB | MAR 3 | Confirmed
Al Udeid AB | MAR 3 | Confirmed
Ras Tanura | MAR 4 | Confirmed
Dubai Airport | MAR 4 | Confirmed
Jebel Ali Port | MAR 4 | Confirmed
Ras Tanura | MAR 7 | Confirmed
Prince Airport | MAR 5 | Confirmed
Ras Tanura | MAR 7 | Confirmed/ Civilian
U.S. MILITARY & INFRASTRUCTURE LOSSES
PERSONNEL KILLED (7)
PERSONNEL KILLED (7)
CRITICAL RADAR LOSS (AN/FPS-132)
MISSILE/UAV DAMAGE TO BASES
DIPLOMATIC BUILDINGS HIT
IRAQ
IRAN
KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
BAHRAIN
QATAR
UAE
Jordan
Amman
Kuwait
Kuwait International Airport
Ali Al-Salem Air Base (Kuwi)
Prince Sultan (KSA)
Ras Tanura (KSA)
Kahon
Dubai Airport
Jebel Ali Port
Bukra
Murmarston
Tcirey
Etbil
Erbil
Kalhan
Berissan
Johar
IRGC Launch Areas
MAR 2
MAR 3
MAR 4
MAR 5
MAR 7
NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY (BAHRAIN): MAR 4 ATTACK, EXTENSIVE US INFRASTRUCTURE LOSSES (Command Bldgs)
AL UDEID AB (QATAR): MAR 3 STRIKE, SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE, US LOSSES (AN/FPS-132 Radar)
MAR 1
MAR 2
MAR 3
MAR 4
MAR 5
MAR 6
MAR 7
MAR 8
MAR 9

Russian Intelligence and Targeting Support



A building beside the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters in Juffair, Bahrain, was damaged by an Iranian attack drone over the weekend. (Reuters)

According to a detailed report by the Washington Post on March 6, 2026, Russia has begun providing the Iranian military with "exquisite intelligence" to facilitate precision strikes on American assets (Washington Post 2026). Moscow has reportedly shared the real-time locations of U.S. warships and aircraft in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. This data is believed to have enabled the "Russian-grade precision" seen in recent Iranian drone and missile barrages (Euromaidan Press 2026). Because Iran possesses a limited domestic satellite network, it has relied on Russian high-quality satellite imagery to identify U.S. command-and-control centres and early-warning radar systems, such as the **AN/FPS-132** in Qatar (Washington Post 2026a; ISW 2026). Analysts suggest that the Kremlin is using the Iran conflict to divert Western military resources away from the war in Ukraine, essentially forcing the U.S. into a "two-theatre quagmire" (Time 2026).

Chinese Logistical and Material Assistance

While Russia has focused on intelligence, China's support has centred on the "industrial backbone" of Iran's missile program.

On March 7, 2026, the **Washington Post** revealed that two Iranian state-owned cargo ships, the *Shabdis* and the *Barzin*, departed from China's

Gaolan port laden with **sodium perchlorate** (Washington Post 2026b). This chemical is a vital precursor for solid rocket fuel, which Iran requires to replenish its rapidly depleting ballistic missile stockpiles (Iran International 2026). U.S. intelligence suggests that Beijing is preparing a broader package of financial assistance and dual-use electronics to help Iran repair its defence industrial base, which has been heavily targeted by U.S.-Israeli "Operation Epic Fury" (ISW 2026).

Despite the direct military confrontation, Beijing has refrained from using administrative or customs holds to stop these shipments, a move described by experts as an "uncharacteristically bold" signal of support for Tehran (Washington Post 2026).

The NYT Revelations on the School Attacks

The *New York Times* investigation revealed that the wave of reported poisonings affected thousands of students across more than 200 schools in nearly every province of Iran (Fassihi and Engelbrecht 2023). While the Iranian authorities initially dismissed the symptoms which included nausea, respiratory distress, and numbness as "mass excitability" or "stress," the *Times* cited medical experts and witnesses who suggested the presence of nitrogen-based gases or other irritants (Fassihi 2023). Furthermore, the reporting highlighted a significant delay in the government's investigation, which many activists interpreted as a tactic to



Excavators and workmen dug close to 100 graves at a cemetery in Minab, Iran, before the funeral for children and teachers killed in an airstrike on a school on Feb. 28, 2026.

intimidate young women who had been at the forefront of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests (Fassihi and Engelbrecht 2023). The *Times* also documented evidence of security forces surrounding hospitals and preventing families from obtaining independent medical tests, suggesting a coordinated effort to suppress the scale of the crisis (Fassihi 2023).

Decisions that can lead to WWIII

The current geopolitical landscape in 2026 has been defined by a significant military escalation involving the United States and Israel against Iran, an action that many international observers fear could be the catalyst for a broader global conflict. This campaign, initiated on 28 February 2026, was characterised by President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a pre-emptive necessity to neutralize Iran's nuclear infrastructure and ballistic missile capabilities (Smith 2026). The strategic execution of "Operation Epic Fury" included the high-profile assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, a move that decapitated the Iranian leadership but also triggered a violent regional backlash involving drone and missile strikes across the Middle East (The Global Monitor 2026).



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu American President Donald

While Trump has framed the intervention as a means to liberate the Iranian people from a "terrorist regime," critics argue that the lack of a diplomatic exit strategy and the resulting surge in global oil prices which exceeded $100 per barrel following the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz

threaten the stability of the international order (World Economic Forum 2026). Furthermore, the spillover of the conflict into NATO airspace and the involvement of regional proxies like Hezbollah have heightened anxieties regarding a "World War III" scenario, as the risk of miscalculation between global powers remains at its highest point in decades (International Security Review 2026). In desperation they will be doing the same thing that America did in 1945 against Japan i.e. using nuclear weapons and made Japan to accept ceasefire.

CHAPTER 9

The Roots of Conflict: Britain's Balfour Declaration and Israel's Birth



A distraught child, covered in dust and soot, clings to a relative amid the rubble-strewn streets of Gaza following an airstrike a heartbreaking image of civilian suffering in the ongoing conflict.

The establishment of modern Israel in 1948 remains one of the most enigmatic and polarizing chapters in 20th-century history, a saga woven from the threads of imperial ambition, wartime expediency, religious aspirations, and a series of contradictory British policies that sowed chaos in Palestine. At its core lies the Balfour Declaration of 1917, a cryptic 67-word letter that pledged British support for a Jewish "national home" in a land overwhelmingly inhabited by Arabs, setting off a chain reaction of hope, betrayal, and violence. Compounded by Britain's conflicting wartime promises, its mismanagement of the Palestine Mandate, and a legacy of diplomatic sleight-of-hand, the creation of Israel emerges not as a triumph of clear intent but as a mystery shrouded in what historians have called Britain's "imperial nonsense" (Segev, 2000, p. 512). This account unravels the labyrinthine motives, betrayals, and consequences of Britain's role in shaping a conflict that endures to this day.

The Balfour Declaration: A Promise Born of War

On November 2, 1917, amidst the carnage of World War I, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour penned a letter to Lionel Walter

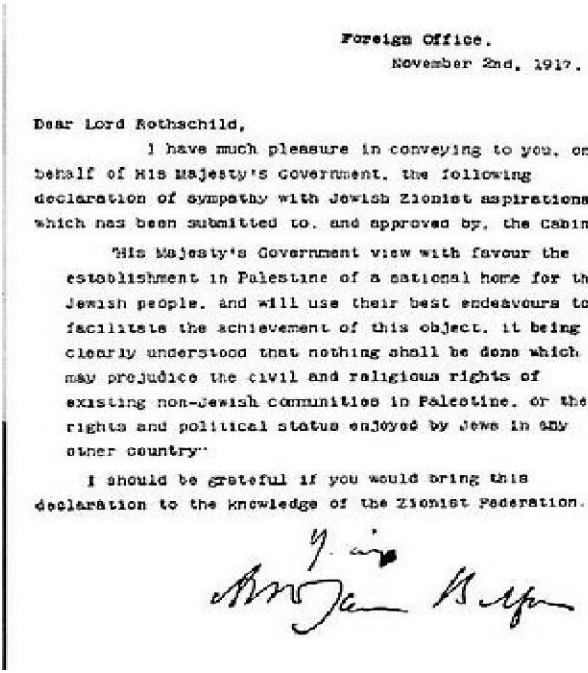


British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour

Rothschild, a prominent British Jewish leader and scion of the Rothschild banking dynasty. The Balfour Declaration, as it became known, stated that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object," while adding a vague caveat that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" (Balfour, 1917, cited in Schneer, 2010, p. 152). At the time, Palestine, then under Ottoman rule, was home

to approximately 700,000 people, over 90% of whom were Arab Muslims and Christians, with Jews constituting less than 10% (Khalidi, 2020).

The declaration's origins were less idealistic than strategic. Britain, locked in a gruelling war against the Central Powers, sought to bolster its position by appealing to Jewish communities in neutral America and revolutionary Russia, hoping their influence would sway Allied support (Schneer, 2010). Simultaneously, Britain aimed to outmanoeuvre France, its rival for post-war control of the Middle East, by staking a claim to Palestine (Barr, 2011). The Zionist movement, galvanized by Theodor Herzl's 1896 vision of a Jewish state, saw an opportunity to secure international backing, with



Foreign Office.
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

The photograph shows the original handwritten letter of the Balfour Declaration, dated November 2, 1917, from British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild.

leaders like Chaim Weizmann lobbying tirelessly in London (Herzl, 1896, cited in Khalidi, 2020). Yet the declaration's ambiguity promising a "national home" rather than a state and offering scant protection for Arab rights reflected Britain's reluctance to commit fully to either side (Segev, 2000).

1917: Early Zionist Settlement and Ottoman Palestine



Early Zionist pioneers from the Second Aliyah (1908–1914) rest in a field near tent encampments during the founding years of Degania, the world's first kibbutz, on the southern shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Palestine, under Ottoman rule until 1917, was a diverse region with a population of approximately 700,000, predominantly Arab Muslims (80%), alongside Christians (10%) and Jews (8–10%) (Khalidi, 2020). The Zionist movement, articulated by Theodor Herzl in 1896, sought a Jewish homeland to escape European antisemitism, identifying Palestine as the biblical "Land of Israel" (Herzl, 1896). Early Zionist settlers, mainly from Eastern Europe, began purchasing land from absentee Ottoman landlords, establishing agricultural colonies like Petah Tikva (1878) and Rishon LeZion (1882). By 1914, Jewish immigrants owned about 2% of Palestine's land, concentrated in coastal plains and the Jezreel Valley (Segev, 2000).

These purchases, though legal, often displaced Palestinian tenant farmers, sowing early tensions. The Ottoman authorities-imposed restrictions on Jewish immigration, but enforcement was lax (Khalidi, 2020). By 1917, the

Jewish population reached 60,000, compared to 600,000 Arabs, with settlements forming the nucleus of future Israeli territory (Morris, 2008).

1917–1948: British Mandate Enabled Zionist Land Grabs in Palestine



British Union Jack being lowered at Government House in Jerusalem, marking the end of the British Mandate for Palestine on 14 May 1948, as the Union Jack is replaced by the Israeli flag (visible at half-mast above).

The 1917 Balfour Declaration, issued by Britain, endorsed a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, while vaguely promising to protect "non-Jewish" rights (Schneer, 2010). After defeating the Ottomans in 1918, Britain governed Palestine under a League of Nations mandate, tasked with implementing Balfour's vision. Jewish immigration surged, from 83,000 in 1922 to 250,000 by 1939, fuelled by antisemitism in Europe and Zionist organizations like the Jewish Agency, which facilitated land purchases (Segev, 2000). By 1947, Jewish entities owned about 7% of Palestine's land, though strategic purchases in fertile areas amplified their influence (Khalidi, 2020).

British policies, such as the 1921 Land Transfer Ordinance, eased Jewish land acquisition, often at the expense of Palestinian peasants, who faced evictions (Morris, 2008). Tensions erupted in riots (1921, 1929) and the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt, which Britain suppressed, killing or exiling thousands of Palestinians (Khalidi, 2020). The 1937 Peel Commission proposed partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, allocating 20% for Jews, but both sides rejected it (Segev, 2000). By 1947, the UN's Resolution 181 recommended a partition giving 56% of the land to a

Jewish state, despite Jews comprising only 33% of the population and owning 7% of the land (Morris, 2008).

1948: The Nakba and Israel's Establishment

The 1948 Arab Israeli War marked a pivotal expansion of Israeli territory. On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence, following Britain's withdrawal. The UN partition plan was rejected by Arab states and Palestinian leaders, who viewed it as unjust (Khalidi, 2020). Civil war escalated, and after Arab armies intervened, Israel's forces bolstered by pre-state militias like the Haganah captured 78% of mandatory Palestine, far exceeding the UN's 56% allocation (Morris, 2008). Key cities like Haifa, Jaffa, and West Jerusalem fell to Israeli control, while 700,000 Palestinians over half the Arab population fled or were expelled in what Palestinians call the Nakba (Pappe, 2006). Israeli forces razed over 400 Palestinian villages, and land was repurposed for Jewish settlements (Khalidi, 2020). The 1949 armistice agreements with Egypt, Jordan, and Syria established the "Green Line," giving Israel control over 20,582 km², including the Galilee and Negev, while Jordan annexed the West Bank and Egypt took Gaza (Morris, 2008).



Palestinian refugees fleeing their homes during the Nakba of 1948, carrying what remains of their lives into an uncertain exile.

1967: The Six-Day War and Occupation



Israeli Centurion tanks (Shot variant) advance through the Sinai desert during the Six-Day War, June 1967.

The 1967 Six-Day War dramatically expanded Israeli control. Facing tensions with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike, capturing the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights in six days (Oren, 2002). This added 70,000 km² to Israel's control, though Sinai was later returned to Egypt in 1982 (Morris, 2008). The West Bank and Gaza, home to 1.1 million Palestinians, came under Israeli military occupation, with East Jerusalem annexed in 1967, a move unrecognized by most of the international community (Khalidi, 2020). Israel began establishing settlements in the occupied territories, starting with Kfar Etzion in 1967.By 1980, over 50,000 settlers lived in the West Bank and Gaza, supported by government incentives and military protection (Segev, 2000). The occupation altered demographics and land use, with Palestinian access restricted through checkpoints and land confiscations for "security" purposes (B'Tselem, 2023).

The Failure of Oslo Accords



U.S. President Bill Clinton looks on as Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (left) and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (right) shake hands on the White House South Lawn, 13 September 1993.

The 1993 Oslo Accords promised a framework for Palestinian statehood, dividing the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, with Israel retaining full control over Area C (60% of the West Bank) (Shlaim, 2001). However, settlement expansion continued, with settler numbers growing from 110,000 in 1993 to over 450,000 by 2025 (Peace Now, 2025). Land confiscations for settlements, bypass roads, and the separation barrier (begun in 2002) further fragmented Palestinian territory, with the barrier annexing 9% of the West Bank to Israel's side (B'Tselem, 2023).

Gaza saw partial Israeli withdrawal in 2005, when 21 settlements were dismantled, but Israel maintained control over its airspace, borders, and sea access, imposing a blockade after Hamas's 2007 takeover (Khalidi, 2020). Periodic conflicts (2008–2009, 2014, 2021, 2023–2024) devastated Gaza, with Israel retaining de facto control over its external boundaries (UN OCHA, 2024). By 2025, Israel controls 100% of pre-1948 Palestine directly or indirectly, with Palestinians limited to fragmented enclaves in the West Bank and Gaza (B'Tselem, 2023).

The historical trajectory from the 1917 Balfour Declaration to the 2025 reality reveals a transition from "imperial nonsense" to a systematic illegal occupation of Palestinian territory that has fundamentally created unrest in the entire world which can be seen through anti Isreal demonstrations in every country. By dissecting the shift from a 10% Jewish presence under Ottoman rule to the modern reality where Israel exerts control over 100% of the land through occupation, illegal resettlement and fragmentation, this underscores how a 67-word letter catalysed a century of displacement and a "cold peace" that remains the world's most enduring geopolitical enigma.

CHAPTER 10

US-Israel Relations, Lobbying, and Zionist "Takeover"



U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu exchange handshake during a joint press conference at the White House

The notion that "Zionists overtook the USA" or that "Americans were played" by them often stems from antisemitic conspiracy theories that allege Jewish or Zionist control over global affairs, echoing discredited texts like The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (1903), a fabricated document claiming a Jewish plot for world domination (Bronner, 2003). While such claims are rooted in historical prejudice, they oversimplify a complex US-Israel relationship built on strategic alliances, domestic lobbying, and shared cultural narratives. This relationship, which has made Israel a key US ally, reflects mutual geopolitical interests, effective advocacy by groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and domestic political dynamics, rather than a shadowy "takeover."

This analysis explores the historical roots of US-Israel ties, the role of lobbying, the influence of evangelical Christianity, and the persistence of conspiratorial narratives, while addressing whether Americans have been "played" in this dynamic.

From Sympathy to Treachery

The US-Israel relationship began taking shape in the early 20th century, influenced by both humanitarian and strategic factors. The Zionist movement, articulated by Theodor Herzl in 1896, sought a Jewish homeland to escape European antisemitism, gaining early traction among American Jewish immigrants (Herzl, 1896). The 1917 Balfour Declaration, where Britain endorsed a Jewish "national home" in Palestine, received cautious US support under President Woodrow Wilson, who saw it as aligning with self-determination ideals (Schneer, 2010).

However, it was the Holocaust that catalysed stronger American backing. The 1942 Biltmore Conference in New York saw American Zionists demand a Jewish state, fuelled by reports of Nazi atrocities (Gal, 1991). President Harry Truman's recognition of Israel in May 1948, just 11 minutes after its declaration, was driven by sympathy for Holocaust survivors, pressure from Jewish voters, and a desire to pre-empt Soviet influence in the Middle East (Radosh and Radosh, 2009).

The Cold War cemented this alliance. Israel's decisive victory in the 1967 Six-Day War against Soviet-backed Arab states positioned it as a vital US proxy in a volatile region (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007). By the 1970s, US aid to Israel surged to billions annually, including military grants and loans, justified by shared intelligence (e.g., captured Soviet technology) and Israel's role as a counterweight to Soviet-aligned nations like Egypt and Syria (Little, 2013). For example, in 1973, the US airlifted $2.2 billion in emergency aid during the Yom Kippur War, solidifying Israel's strategic value (Quandt, 2005). This wasn't a "Zionist takeover" but a calculated alignment of interests, with Israel offering stability and intelligence in exchange for US support

Power of Lobbying: AIPAC and Domestic Influence



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gives two thumbs-up while addressing the AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., March 2018.

A key driver of US support for Israel is the effectiveness of pro-Israel lobbying, particularly through AIPAC, founded in 1951 as the American Zionist Council (Tivnan, 1987). AIPAC has grown into one of Washington's most influential lobbying groups, with over 3 million members and a budget exceeding $100 million in recent election cycles (OpenSecrets, 2024). It monitors legislation affecting US-Israel relations, from military aid to UN resolutions, and its political action committee (PAC) spent over $100 million in the 2024 US elections, targeting critics like Representatives Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush, who lost their primaries after AIPAC campaigns (Slavin, 2024). In 2024 alone, AIPAC's spending included $23 million against progressive Democrats, drawing accusations of "buying elections" (The Intercept, 2024). Critics, notably Mearsheimer and Walt (2007), argue that AIPAC skews US policy toward Israel's interests, often at the expense of broader American goals, such as by opposing the 2015 Iran nuclear deal or stifling criticism of Israeli settlements. They estimate that the "Israel lobby" influences up to 70% of congressional votes on Israel-related issues (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007, p. 162). However, AIPAC operates legally under the US Lobbying Disclosure Act, not as a foreign agent under FARA, as its funding comes from American citizens (Bard, 2021). Comparisons to other lobbies such as the National Rifle Association ($50 million in 2024) or Saudi Arabia ($27

million in 2023) show AIPAC's influence is significant but not unique (OpenSecrets, 2024b). Its success stems from grassroots mobilisation, bipartisan support (e.g., $40,000 average donations to Democrats, $20,000 to Republicans in 2024), and alignment with US strategic goals, not covert control (Feldman, 2024).

AIPAC Exposed: A Lobbyist Threat to American National Interests



Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY): In a 2024 interview with Tucker Carlson, Massie claimed that "every Republican in Congress has an 'AIPAC babysitter' "a dedicated contact from the group who influences voting on Israel-related issues. He described it as a "buddy system from another country" and noted he is one of the few without one. Massie has also opposed AIPAC spending against him in primaries and suggested the group should register as a foreign agent under FARA.



Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA): In 2025, after calling Israel's actions in Gaza a "genocide," Greene faced AIPAC criticism comparing her to progressive Democrats. She responded by accusing AIPAC of "breaking U.S. laws," claiming it exerts "incredible influence and control" over Congress through trips and funding, and calling for it to register as a foreign agent. Greene stated

she is "one of the only members of Congress that doesn't take money from AIPAC."



Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI): Tlaib has repeatedly called AIPAC "the biggest threat to democracy" and accused it of undermining progressive voices critical of Israel. She has highlighted its role in primary challenges against her and allies, framing it as suppressing criticism of Israeli policies.



Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN): In 2019 (with ongoing echoes), Omar sparked controversy by stating GOP support for Israel is "all about the Benjamins" (referring to AIPAC donations). She later clarified concerns about "allegiance to a foreign country" and has accused AIPAC of Islamophobic attacks and incitement against her and Tlaib.



Zohran Mamdani: I would describe what is happening in Gaza as a genocide. I have spoken about the Israeli government committing genocide, and I have spoken about our government funding it.



Berni Sanders: Democrat should accept money from AIPAC," describing it as aiding an "illegal and immoral war" against Palestinians and claiming the group helped "deliver the presidency to Donald Trump" by supporting Republicans.

US Evangelical Christians for Zionism



Ultra-Orthodox Jewish men from the Neturei Karta sect hold a banner reading 'All Palestine Under Palestinian Sovereignty' during a pro-Palestinian demonstration.

Beyond lobbying, evangelical Christianity has bolstered US support for Israel, adding a cultural dimension often overlooked in "Zionist control" narratives. Since the 1980s, groups like Christians United for Israel (CUFI), with over 10 million members, have framed Israel's existence as fulfilling biblical prophecy about the Jewish return before the Second Coming (Spector, 2009). This belief, rooted in dispensationalist theology, influences Republican voters and politicians, from Ronald Reagan to Mike Pompeo, who called Israel's 1967 victory a "divine mandate" (Spector, 2009, p. 147). CUFI's annual summits draw thousands, and its lobbying rivals AIPAC's, with $1.5 million spent in 2023 alone (OpenSecrets, 2024).

This religious fervour amplifies pro-Israel sentiment, independent of Jewish advocacy. For instance, 44% of white evangelicals 25% of the US electorate view Israel as a divine promise, compared to just 20% of American Jews (Pew Research Centre, 2020). This dynamic explains why US support persists across administrations, from Trump's 2017 Jerusalem embassy move to Biden's $3.8 billion annual aid package (Congressional Research Service, 2024). It's less about "Zionists playing Americans" than a convergence of religious and political incentives.

USAID to Israel

The United States has provided Israel with over $174 billion in bilateral assistance and missile defence funding since 1946, making it the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid (Congressional Research Service, 2025). While early aid included economic grants to support Israel's nascent economy post-independence, contemporary assistance totalling approximately $3.8 billion annually under the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is predominantly military, comprising $3.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants and $500 million for missile defence programs (Congressional Research Service, 2025). This shift reflects Israel's economic maturation into a high-income nation with a GDP per capita of $54,660 in 2024, ranking 21st globally (International Monetary Fund, 2025). The query of



Israeli and U.S. military officers stand in front of an Iron Dome missile defence battery during a joint exercise or inspection, with Israeli and American flags visible in the

how Israel "affords" this aid in relation to its exports can be reframed as an examination of how U.S. military aid indirectly sustains and enhances Israel's export-driven economy, particularly in the defence sector, by freeing fiscal resources, fostering technological innovation, and facilitating global market access. This discussion explores these mechanisms, drawing on historical context and empirical evidence.

US-Israel Strategic Partnership

A primary channel through which U.S. aid enhances Israel's exports is the defines sector, where FMF grants must be spent on U.S.-origin equipment, but with provisions for co-production and technology transfer (U.S. Department of State, 2025). This has transformed Israel's defence industry into a global powerhouse: from 2020 to 2024, Israel ranked 8th in arms exports, delivering 3.1% of the world's major weapons, with exports valued at $12.5 billion in 2024 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025). U.S. aid has been instrumental, providing $14.8 billion for missile defence since FY2006, including over $6 billion for Iron Dome, which involves 30% U.S. workshare and joint production with Raytheon (Congressional Research Service, 2025).



U.S. Air Force C-5M Super Galaxy unloads two armoured MRAP vehicles during a military airlift operation.

Co-production agreements exemplify this synergy. In the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, Israeli firms like Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and Elbit Systems manufacture wing sets and helmets, reinvesting over $4 billion (35% of contract value) into Israel's industry as of 2020 (Lockheed Martin, 2020). This not only builds domestic capabilities but generates exportable technologies: Israeli variants like the F-35I "Adir" incorporate proprietary systems exported to allies. Similarly, systems like David's Sling (co-developed with Raytheon) have secured deals worth $330 million to Finland (2023) and $579 million to Slovakia (2024), while Arrow 3 exports to Germany reached $4.3 billion in 2023 (Congressional Research Service, 2025). These revenues defence exports constitute 70% of Israel's industrial output in the sector directly contribute to the trade balance, with the U.S. market alone accounting for 13% of Israel's 2025 defence exports (Ministry of defence Israel, 2025).

Table 2: U.S. Taxpayers Fund Palestinian Genocide

Category	**Figure (Billion USD)**	**Time Period/Context**	**Source**
Total U.S. Aid to Israel (inflation-adjusted)	310	Cumulative since 1948	Council on Foreign Relations (2024)
Annual U.S. Military Aid (under 2016 MOU)	3.8	FY2019–FY2028 (ongoing)	USA Facts (2023)

U.S. Supplemental Aid to Israel	17.9	Since October 7, 2023 (through 2024)	PBS News (2024)
Israel's defence Exports	14.8	Full year 2024	Reuters (2025)
Israel's Total Exports	61.7	Full year 2024	Al Jazeera (2025)
Israel's defence Budget	30.5	Full year 2024	Statista (2025)
U.S.-Israel Bilateral Trade	50	Full year 2024	U.S. Trade Representative (2025) [from prior context]

The U.S.-Israel relationship is often mischaracterised through the lens of fringe conspiracy theories, yet the reality as detailed in this chapter is a sophisticated architecture of strategic alignment, grassroots religious fervour, and economic synergy. By moving past the "Protocols" myths and focusing on the $174 billion in U.S. aid that functions as an incubator for Israel's $14.8 billion defence export industry, the analysis reveals a partnership where American taxpayers and Israeli influencers/lobbyist like AIPAC are deeply integrated within the American Establishment. Whether viewed as a "calculated alignment" or a "lobbyist threat," the bond is undeniably reinforced by a unique convergence of evangelical Zionism and high-tech military co-production that makes Israel a central, if polarising, pillar of U.S. global strategy.

CHAPTER 11

Jews VS Zionists



Members of the ultra-Orthodox Neturei Karta group hold Palestinian flags and signs reading "The Zionist State does NOT REPRESENT the Jews and Judaism" and "FREE PALESTINE" during an anti-Zionist demonstration.

The terms "Jews" and "Zionists" are often conflated but refer to distinct concepts. Understanding their differences is crucial, especially in the context of discussions about Israel and Palestine, to avoid generalizations and clarify ideological distinctions. Below is a concise explanation, supported by historical and contemporary sources.

Jews

Jews are members of an ethnoreligious group with a shared cultural, historical, and religious identity rooted in Judaism, originating over 3,000 years ago in the ancient Near East. Jewish identity is multifaceted, encompassing religious observance (Orthodox, Reform, etc.), cultural practices, and ethnic heritage, with a global population of approximately 15.7 million in 2025, primarily in Israel (7.4 million) and the United States (6 million) (DellaPergola, 2024). Not all Jews are religious; many identify as secular or cultural Jews, united by shared history, including experiences of diaspora, persecution, and the Holocaust (Segev, 2000).

Jewish identity does not inherently imply political positions, including on Israel's policies or existence.

Zionists

Zionists are individuals Jewish or non-Jewish who support Zionism, a political and ideological movement founded in the late 19th century by Theodor Herzl to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, motivated by centuries of antisemitism and the desire for self-determination (Herzl, 1896). Zionism advocates for a Jewish state, realized in 1948 with Israel's creation, and often emphasizes Jewish sovereignty and security in historic Palestine (Shlaim, 2000). While many Jews support Zionism, others oppose it, viewing it as nationalist or colonialist, particularly considering Palestinian displacement (Pappé, 2014). Non-Jews, such as some Christian evangelicals, also identify as Zionists, often for theological reasons (Spector, 2009).

Jewish Children Chant: "Say No to Zionism"

A significant number of Jews, both in the diaspora and within Israel, support Palestinian rights and reject Zionism, viewing it as a nationalist ideology that conflicts with universal values of justice or religious principles. These individuals and



Two young girls from the Neturei Karta ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist community stand in front of Palestinian flags, one holding a microphone and both wearing scarves that read "PALESTINE" during a pro-Palestinian demonstration.

groups advocate for Palestinian self-determination, an end to the Israeli occupation, and often a one- or two-state solution, arguing that Zionism's emphasis on a Jewish state has led to Palestinian dispossession and systemic inequality (Pappé, 2014). Their stance challenges the narrative that equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism, emphasizing a Jewish identity rooted in ethics rather than territorial nationalism

Al-Fatah VS Hamas?

Fatah (Harakat al-Tahrir al-Wataniyyah al-Filastiniyyah, or Palestinian National Liberation Movement) is a secular nationalist party founded in 1959 by Yasser Arafat and others as the dominant faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It initially pursued armed struggle against Israel but shifted to diplomacy after the 1993 Oslo Accords, leading the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank. Fatah advocates for a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, recognizes Israel, and focuses on negotiations, though its armed wing (Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades) has been involved in past violence. Under Mahmoud Abbas since 2004, it controls West Bank governance but faces criticism for corruption and inefficacy (Britannica, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2017).



A large crowd of Hezbollah supporters waves yellow Hezbollah flags beneath a giant portrait of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during a pro-Palestinian rally in Lebanon.

Hamas (Harakat al-Munawara al-Islamiyah, or Islamic Resistance Movement) is a Palestinian Sunni Islamist organization founded in 1987 during the First Intifada as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. It combines political activism, social services (e.g., schools and clinics in Gaza), and a militant wing (Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades) focused on armed resistance against Israeli occupation. Hamas rejects Israel's right to exist, views the liberation of all historic Palestine as a religious duty, and has governed Gaza since 2007 after winning 2006 elections. It is designated a terrorist group by the U.S., EU, and Israel due to attacks like suicide bombings and the October 7, 2023, assault that killed 1,200 Israelis (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2017).

CHAPTER 12

Israeli Genocide in the Gaza Conflict (2023–2025)



Residents and rescue workers gather amid the rubble of a destroyed building in Gaza following an Israeli airstrike, surveying the damage and searching for survivors or belongings.

The ongoing Israel-Hamas war, triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel which killed approximately 1,200 people and resulted in 251 hostages has led to widespread allegations of war crimes by Israeli forces in Gaza. These claims, documented by international human rights organizations and judicial bodies, centre on violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). By October 2025, over 43,000 Palestinians have been killed, with Gaza's infrastructure devastated, prompting accusations of genocide, crimes against humanity, and disproportionate attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2025a). Israel rejects these as biased and maintains its actions are lawful self-defence. This analysis examines key allegations, legal proceedings, and responses, drawing on reports from the United Nations

(UN), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the ICC.

Indiscriminate killings and Disproportionate Attacks

HRW documented over 1,000 Israeli airstrikes from October 2023 to mid-2024 that struck civilian areas without apparent military targets, killing at least 2,000 civilians, including 1,000 children (Human Rights Watch, 2025). A notable case is the October 31, 2023, bombing of Jabalia refugee camp, which killed 126 civilians, including 69 children, using 2,000-pound bombs in a crowded area (Human Rights Watch, 2025a). Amnesty International analysed 15 such strikes, finding no evidence of Hamas presence and evidence of deliberate civilian targeting (Amnesty International, 2024). These acts, per HRW, constitute war crimes due to their foreseeably excessive harm (Human Rights Watch, 2025).



A Palestinian woman stands amid the wreckage of her home in Gaza, surrounded by scattered belongings and rubble after her house was destroyed in an Israeli airstrike.

Destruction of Civilian Infrastructure

UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese reported in 2025 that Israel's systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare, education, and water systems rendering 90% of hospitals inoperable and displacing 1.9 million people amounts to an "economy of genocide" (Albanese, 2025). The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) detailed the razing of 80% of Gaza's agricultural land and 60% of housing, labelling it a war crime of pillage and destruction not justified by military necessity (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2025). By July 2025, 37,000 structures were demolished, exacerbating famine risks for 500,000 people (Human Rights Watch, 2025).



A heavily damaged multi-storey residential building city.

Destruction of Hospitals in Gaza



An image of destructed hospital in Gaza by Israeli Armed forces.

Since the escalation of hostilities in Gaza following October 7, 2023, the healthcare infrastructure has faced systematic devastation through repeated Israeli military attacks on hospitals and medical facilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) has verified over 735 attacks on healthcare between October 2023 and mid-2025, resulting in hundreds of deaths among patients and staff, damage to 34 out of 36 pre-war hospitals, and the near-total collapse of the system, with 94% of facilities damaged or destroyed by late 2025 (World Health Organization, 2025a; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2025). Major hospitals like Al-Shifa, Kamal Adwan, Al-Ahli, Nasser, and the Indonesian Hospital have been besieged, raided, or directly struck multiple times, often leading to forced evacuations, premature patient deaths due to lack of care, and the detention or killing of medical personnel (OHCHR, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025). These actions have stripped northern Gaza of functional hospitals and overwhelmed remaining southern facilities amid shortages of fuel, supplies, and staff. Israeli authorities justify such operations by alleging military use of hospitals by Hamas, presenting evidence of tunnels or weapons in some cases, though independent assessments, including from UN experts and the International Criminal Court, have often found these claims insufficient to strip protected status under international

humanitarian law or described the scale of destruction as disproportionate and potentially constituting war crimes (OHCHR, 2025; Wikipedia, 2025).

Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity



Child in Gaza injured due to Israeli bombing.

Amnesty International's December 2024 report concluded Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, citing intent inferred from statements like defence Minister Yoav Gallant's October 2023 siege declaration of a "complete siege" with "no electricity, no food, no fuel" (Amnesty International, 2024a; Al Jazeera, 2024). The report analysed 102 dehumanizing statements by Israeli officials and 22 airstrikes killing 334 civilians, arguing these demonstrate genocidal intent (Amnesty International, 2024). HRW echoed this, noting patterns of extermination and forcible transfer as crimes against humanity (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Table 3: Devastating Toll in Gaza by Israeli Forces

Area	Killed	Wounded	Total Affected	Notes	Source
Palestinians (Gaza)	66,288	169,165	235,453	Includes ~40,000 civilians; 30 per 1,000	Al Jazeera (2025); Anadolu
				Gaza residents killed overall.	Agency (2025)

Decision by International Court of Justice (ICJ)

In January 2024, the ICJ issued provisional measures in South Africa's genocide case against Israel, ordering prevention of genocidal acts and ensuring humanitarian aid (International Court of Justice, 2024). By July 2025, three rulings found Israel in non-compliance, including failure to halt life-destroying conditions (International Court of Justice, 2025). The ICJ's July 2024 advisory opinion declared Israel's occupation unlawful, implicating settlement policies as war crimes (International Court of Justice, 2024).



A session of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Great Hall of Justice at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands, with the full bench of 15 judges presiding over a public hearing.

Decision by International Criminal Court (ICC)

On May 20, 2024, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan sought arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Gallant for war crimes (starvation as a method of warfare) and crimes against humanity (extermination, persecution) (International Criminal Court, 2024). Warrants were issued in November 2024, alongside one for Hamas leader Mohammed Deif (Security Council Report, 2024). By October 2025, the ICC had received over 100 submissions on Israeli crimes, including from Palestinian NGOs (Justice for All, 2025).

American Influencers on Israel Using U.S. Support

Here are concise, paraphrased statements attributed to prominent American influencers politicians, celebrities, and commentators who have publicly criticized Israel's reliance on U.S. aid, arms, and diplomatic cover in conflicts like the Gaza war. These are drawn from their verified quotes and positions, emphasizing sentiments of U.S. resources being exploited for Israeli military actions.

Jeffrey Sachs (Economist)



"The United States is complicit in Israel's genocide in Gaza through its endless supply of weapons. America must stop funding this horror to achieve real peace with Palestine." (Sachs, 2024)

Tucker Carlson (Commentator)



"Israel is dragging America into unnecessary wars, like with Iran, using our alliance and resources it's time to put America first and stop being complicit in their conflicts." (Carlson, 2025)

Mehdi Hasan (Journalist)



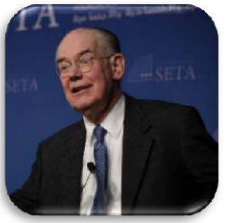
"Israel's wars rely on American complicity our billions in aid and vetoes at the UN turn the U.S. into an enabler of occupation, not a beacon of justice for Palestinians." (Hasan, 2024, in MSNBC commentary on Gaza aid)

Charlie Kirk (Commentator)



"I'm as pro-Israel as anyone, but rushing into another quagmire isn't the answer. I pray for peace without destabilizing Iran and sparking another Muslim refugee crisis".

John Mearsheimer



"The Israel lobby has trapped America in endless Middle East wars, forcing us to subsidize Israel's security at the expense of our own interests and global standing."(Mearsheimer, 2024, in updated lectures on "The Israel Lobby").

Nick Fuentes



"No to Ben Shapiro. No to the neocons. No to dual citizens. No to Benjamin Netanyahu. No to cancel culture. No to genocide and ethnic cleansing. No to the Christ-hating Talmud. No to Greater Israel. No to our Jewish oligarchy. AMERICA FIRST. AMERICA FOREVER us" (Direct response to Ben Shapiro's post.)

Mark Ruffalo (Hollywood Actor and Activist)



"The U.S. is complicit in Israel's war crimes because we're shipping them weapons non-stop, stop the arms embargo now, before more American dollar's fund more Palestinian suffering." (Ruffalo, 2024, in open letter for ceasefire).

Susan Sarandon (Hollywood Actress)



"Hollywood and America are being used as props in Israel's propaganda machine, but we won't stay silent while our tax money pays for their siege on Gaza." (Sarandon, 2023, amid backlash for pro-Palestine rallies).

The inclusion of diverse American perspectives ranging from academics like John Mearsheimer to cultural figures like Mark Ruffalo highlights a historic fracture in U.S. domestic consensus regarding the "blank check" of military aid. As billion-dollar weapons shipments continue alongside mounting evidence of disproportionate attacks and indiscriminate killings, these influencers argue that the U.S. has transitioned from a neutral mediator to an active enabler, a shift that is now being tested by the legal weight of the ICC warrants and the ICJ's ongoing genocide proceedings. If United States can go and kidnap Venezuelan president, then the question is asked why US and west is not helping ICC and ICJ in implementing the arrest orders of Benjamin Netanyahu. Trumps illegal action of kidnapping has set the precedent for Russia, China and North Korea to take the similar actions. The Question is where this is going to end.

CHAPTER 13

Trump Plan and Gaza Peace Blueprint



President Donald Trump at the GCC–U.S. Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, May 21, 2017, seated between Turkish and Jordanian delegations with flags of several Muslim-majority nations in the background.

The Israel-Hamas conflict, now entering its third year, has seen intensified Israeli military operations in Gaza City, with forces establishing operational control over significant portions of the western Netzarim Corridor and issuing evacuation orders to civilians, described as their 'last chance' to move south (Reuters, 2025). At least 45 Palestinians have been killed in recent airstrikes across the enclave, contributing to a total death toll exceeding 66,000 since October 2023, with nearly half of these recent casualties occurring outside central Gaza City areas (Al Jazeera, 2025a; Al Jazeera, 2025). Humanitarian challenges persist, including reports of Israeli naval vessels intimidating a Freedom Flotilla aid convoy approaching Gaza's coast, jamming communications and prompting security concerns (Reuters, 2025). Qatari mediators have expressed optimism for 'momentum' in ceasefire negotiations, as Hamas reviews a U.S.-proposed framework in ongoing Doha talks involving Egyptian and Turkish representatives (Al Jazeera, 2025). Daily casualties average around 100 due to military operations and aid-related shootings, exacerbating famine risks (UNRWA, 2025). Buffer zones and corridors

now cover approximately 75% of Gaza's territory, severely limiting habitable land (Security Council Report, 2025; OHCHR, 2025).

Trump Meetings on Gaza

On 29 September 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House for a joint press conference, where they announced a comprehensive 20-point peace proposal for Gaza (BBC, 2025; New York Times, 2025). Trump hailed the plan as a potential 'great day in civilization,' securing Netanyahu's public endorsement despite domestic political risks to his coalition from far-right critics (CNN, 2025; Axios, 2025). The discussions focused on immediate hostage releases and phased Israeli withdrawals, with Trump issuing a stern ultimatum: Hamas has 'three or four days' to accept, or Israel will resume full-scale operations (NBC News, 2025). Subsequent indirect talks in Doha involve Qatari and Egyptian intermediaries pressuring Hamas, with Arab states providing cautious backing amid concerns over implementation.

Trump's 20-Point Gaza Peace Plan

Unveiled on 29 September 2025, the plan proposes a ceasefire, reconstruction, and transitional governance for Gaza, featuring phased Israeli withdrawals under international supervision. It has received endorsements from European and select Middle Eastern leaders but drawn sharp rebukes from Palestinian groups as a 'surrender' that entrenches Israeli security dominance (Al Jazeera, 2025; Times of Israel, 2025). The full 20 points, as detailed in the White House release, are as follows (BBC, 2025):

1. **Deradicalization Zone**: Gaza will become a terror-free zone posing no threat to its neighbours.
2. **Redevelopment Focus**: Gaza will be rebuilt for the benefit of its residents, addressing years of hardship.
3. **Immediate War End**: Upon agreement, hostilities cease immediately; Israeli forces withdraw to agreed lines, halting operations.
4. **Hostage Release Timeline**: All hostages (living or deceased) returned within 72 hours of acceptance.
5. **Prisoner Exchange**: Israel releases 250 Palestinians serving life sentences and 1,700 detainees (including women and children); reciprocal exchange of remains at a 15:1 ratio.
6. **Amnesty for Hamas**: Committed peace-seeking Hamas members receive amnesty and decommission weapons; safe passage offered for those exiting Gaza.
7. **Aid Influx**: Unrestricted humanitarian aid enters immediately, including rehabilitation of water, power, and sewage infrastructure.
8. **Aid Distribution**: Delivered without hindrance via UN and Red Crescent; Rafah crossing reopens under January 2025 protocols.
9. **Temporary Governance**: A technocratic Palestinian committee, advised by international experts and overseen by a 'Board of Peace' (chaired by Trump, including figures like Tony Blair), until Palestinian Authority reforms.

10. **Economic Plan**: Trump-led group of experts develops a redevelopment blueprint with global investments.
11. **Special Economic Zone**: Gaza designated as a free-trade zone with tariff incentives, negotiated with international partners.
12. **No Forced Displacement**: No compulsory relocations; freedom of movement to leave or return, with incentives to rebuild in place.
13. **Hamas Exclusion**: Hamas barred from governance; all military assets dismantled under monitoring, with a weapons buy-back programme.
14. **Regional Guarantees**: Arab partners enforce compliance; 'New Gaza' protected from external threats.
15. **Stabilization Force**: Deployment of a U.S.-backed International Stabilisation Force (ISF) to train Palestinian police and secure borders.
16. **No Israeli Occupation**: IDF withdraws per schedule as ISF assumes control; temporary security buffer retained.
17. **Fallback if Rejected**: Plan advances in compliant areas with expanded aid, irrespective of Hamas participation.
18. **Interfaith Dialogue**: Initiatives to foster tolerance and coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis.
19. **Path to Statehood**: Reforms pave the way for Palestinian self-determination and statehood goals.
20. **U.S.-Facilitated Talks**: Ongoing U.S.-brokered dialogue between Israel and Palestinians for enduring peace.

The Arabs Silence against Palestinian Genocide



2017 Arab Islamic American Summit group photo in Riyadh: President Trump stands beside Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, surrounded by leaders from over 50 Muslim-majority nations.

The role of Arab countries in the Israeli Palestinian conflict has been shaped by a combination of historical solidarity with the Palestinian cause, regional political shifts, and the strategic calculus of individual states. Arab nations have long positioned themselves as defenders of Palestinian rights and advocates for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, yet their responses especially following the events of October 7, 2023, have varied widely in terms of diplomatic engagement, humanitarian support, and political pressure.

Historically, Arab countries supported Palestine through both political alignment and armed conflict, particularly in the 1948 Arab Israeli War, the Six-Day War of 1967, and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The Arab League, founded in 1945, was instrumental in coordinating a collective Arab stance in support of Palestine. However, over time, internal divisions and shifting alliances diluted the cohesiveness of this bloc. For instance, Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties with Israel in 1979 and 1994, respectively, fundamentally altering regional dynamics.

Following the normalization agreements signed under the Abraham Accords (2020) between Israel and several Arab states including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, Arab solidarity with

Palestine appeared to be weakening. However, the massive escalation of violence starting October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel forced many Arab states to recalibrate their positions.

In the wake of the Gaza war, several Arab states, including Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan, emerged as key mediators. Qatar played a critical role in negotiating temporary ceasefires and hostage release deals between Hamas and Israel, using its open channels with the Palestinian factions (Brookings, 2024). Egypt, due to its geographical and historical significance, facilitated aid access through the Rafah border crossing and hosted multiple rounds of international peace talks (Carnegie Middle East Centre, 2024). Jordan, while vocal in condemning Israeli military actions, also had to manage internal pressures due to its large Palestinian population. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, both of which had pursued diplomatic normalization with Israel in recent years, adopted a more cautious stance. While both condemned the Israeli military operations in Gaza and called for restraint, they also maintained discreet security cooperation with Israel. Saudi Arabia notably paused normalization talks but did not sever all informal ties, reflecting its balancing act between regional leadership and U.S. alignment (Middle East Institute, 2024).

On the humanitarian front, countries such as Kuwait, Algeria, and Lebanon provided financial aid and medical supplies to Gaza. However, none committed to accepting refugees from Gaza, citing security and demographic concerns. This response was criticised by some observers as indicative of a fragmented Arab response lacking in coordinated action (Chatham House, 2024). While Arab public opinion across the region has

largely remained pro-Palestinian with mass protests in Amman, Cairo, and Rabat; governments have often taken a more restrained approach. Think tanks such as the Arab Centre Washington DC argue that Arab regimes are navigating a complex matrix of internal stability, foreign alliances, and geopolitical rivalries, which limits the scope of their support for Palestine beyond rhetorical condemnation and humanitarian gestures (Arab Centre, 2024).

In my view this force established by Saudia Arabia and led by a Pakistani general Raheel Sharif could have been assigned in the region not to fight but to support innocent civilians by providing food and shelter thus saving lives. United Nations would have also supported this noble initiative to keep peace in Gaza.

CHAPTER 14

Is Israel Involved in assassination campaign?



Israel has carried out numerous targeted assassinations over several decades, often utilizing high-tech methods such as remote-controlled explosives, drones, and precision airstrikes. These operations, frequently attributed to the Mossad or the IDF, typically target high-ranking officials in groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iranian military leadership as part of a long-standing "targeted prevention" policy.

JFK's Assassination an Israeli Plot?



President John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy wave to crowds in Dallas, seconds before the fatal shots (November

John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, by Lee Harvey Oswald, according to the official Warren Commission report. The event has spawned numerous conspiracy theories implicating entities such as

the CIA, the Mafia, anti-Castro Cubans, and the Soviet Union, but none have been substantiated by credible evidence. The U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1979 concluded that Kennedy was "probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy," but could not identify the conspirators or rule out individual action by Oswald. Declassified documents released as recently as March 2025 under the JFK Act have provided insights into CIA operations but have not uncovered evidence of foreign state involvement, including from Israel.

According to the conspiracy theory, Israel (or one of its intelligence services, Mossad) conspired or helped in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 because he opposed the nuclear program of Israel at Dimona. This is a historically old fringe claim that has not been substantiated by any official investigations, declassified documents, or mainstream history. It traces back to the circumstantial explanations of the documented pressure on Israeli leaders by Kennedy to do an inspection (e.g. his May 18, 1963, letter to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion that U.S.-Israel relations would be hurt without transparency) and the consequent loosening of the chains of scrutiny with President Lyndon Baines Johnson (Cohen, 1998; Hersh, 1991). Advocates, such as Mordechai Vanunu (2004 statements), Laurent Guyenot (several works) and the book Final Judgment by Michael Collins Piper (1994) are advocating this motive and frequently couched in larger antisemitic frames of Jewish or Israeli deep state domination.



U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene suggested a link in a June 2025 social media post, stating: "There was once a great President that the American people loved. He opposed Israel's nuclear program. And then he was assassinated," implying JFK without direct accusation. She raised it amid criticism of U.S. policy toward Israel/Iran, questioning implications for figures like herself and Donald Trump (Politico, 2025; The Times of Israel, 2025).



Former Rep. Paul Findley (served 1961–1983) noted in a 1992 article that media avoided mentioning Mossad in JFK discussions, amid broader coverage of Oliver Stone's film *JFK* (Findley, 1992, in Washington Report on Middle East Affairs). Findley, critical of pro-Israel lobbying, did not explicitly endorse the theory but highlighted its absence from discourse.

Charlie Kirk assassination



Charlie Kirk speaking at Donald Trump's campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on October 5, 2024.

On September 10, 2025, Charlie Kirk, a prominent American right-wing political activist and co-founder of Turning Point USA, was assassinated during a speaking event at Utah Valley University (UVU) in Orem, Utah, as part of his "American Comeback Tour" .While engaging with an audience member on the topic of mass shootings, Kirk was fatally shot in the neck from a rooftop approximately 142 yards away, dying later at a nearby hospital (New York Times, 2025). The attack, described as a "political assassination" by Utah Governor Spencer Cox, occurred in front of about 3,000 attendees in the university's outdoor courtyard (CNN, 2025; AP

News, 2025). Verified videos showed a figure fleeing the roof of the Losee Centre.

"Tucker Carlson claimed Kirk privately disliked Netanyahu, describing him as resentful that Netanyahu was "using the United States to prosecute his wars for the benefit of his country," and that this was "shameful and embarrassing and bad for the United States." He also stated some pro-Israel donors "tormented Charlie Kirk until the day he died" due to his associations (e.g., platforming Carlson)." Generally, Mossad gets blame for assassination, having said that the Secret agencies of almost every country are always involved in these kinds of activities in some shape or form.

As can be seen above, many of the high-profile American influencers are of the view that Mossad has penetrated CIA and their operatives work to carry out Israeli operations to assassinate those who don't toe their lines. American public is now woken up and has started asking questions to many senators who are funded by AIPAC whether they are working against the interest of US.

CHAPTER 15

U.S. Invasions of Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen



U.S. troops patrol an oil-rich region in eastern Syria, 2021because some strategic interests come with their own flagpole.

The United States' involvement in the Middle East has long been characterised by a complex web of proxy conflicts, counterterrorism operations, and diplomatic balancing acts, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. These engagements reflect broader strategic imperatives, including containing Iranian influence, combating Islamist extremism, and securing vital maritime routes. However, they have also perpetuated instability, strained alliances, and drawn the U.S. into protracted quagmires. This chapter examines key facets of these entanglements, highlighting the tensions between U.S.-backed forces and their adversaries, as well as the logistical and diplomatic dimensions that underscore America's enduring regional footprint.

Syrian Civil War Proxies

The Syrian Civil War, erupting in 2011, has evolved into a multifaceted proxy conflict where the U.S. has primarily partnered with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to counter the Islamic State (ISIS) and limit Iranian entrenchment. Formed in 2015 as a multi-ethnic coalition dominated by the People's Protection Units (YPG), the SDF has been the



Jolani and Trump, 2025 because in geopolitics, yesterday's terrorist is tomorrow's 'moderate opposition' if the timing's right.

U.S.'s most effective ground partner, receiving hundreds of millions in annual aid, including weapons, training, and stipends. By 2017, U.S. special forces were embedded with SDF units during operations like the Battle of Raqqa, providing air support that helped liberate the city from ISIS. As of late 2024, approximately 900 U.S. troops remain in northeastern Syria, supporting the SDF's control over a third of the country's territory, including key oil fields (NPR, 2024). This partnership starkly contrasts with the Iranian Russian axis propping up Bashar al-Assad's regime. Iran has supplied technical expertise, arms, and Shia militias, while Russia provides airstrikes and diplomatic cover at the UN. The fall of Assad in December 2024, following a rebel offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), has left the SDF in a precarious position, facing threats from Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) forces and potential HTS encroachments (FDD, 2025). U.S. mediation facilitated a March 2025 ceasefire in Manbij and an integration deal between the SDF and Syria's transitional government, averting immediate collapse but highlighting the fragility of American leverage (Responsible Statecraft, 2025). Critics argue that Washington's SDF focus has alienated Turkey, viewing the YPG as a PKK extension, complicating anti-ISIS efforts (CFR, 2024).

Invasion of Iraq and U.S. Troop Withdrawals (2021)



An American soldier stands watch in a Syrian town, with a U.S. flag flying proudly on the armoured convoy vehicles behind

Iraq exemplifies the U.S.'s oscillating commitments, from full-scale invasion in 2003 to a 2021 combat mission end, amid persistent ISIS threats. The 2021 withdrawal shifted U.S. forces to advisory roles, reducing numbers from 5,000 to 2,500 by 2023, focusing on training Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) against ISIS remnants. This transition, announced by President Biden in July 2021, responded to Iraqi parliamentary demands post-Soleimani strike but retained a presence to prevent resurgence (Just Security, 2022).

By 2025, phased drawdowns from bases like Ain al-Asad and Camp Victory have consolidated operations in Erbil, with troop levels dropping to under 500, prioritising Syrian counter-ISIS support (Shafaq News, 2025; USA Today, 2025). Experts warn that full withdrawal risks ISIS revival, citing porous borders and militia rivalries; the Pentagon's inspector general noted in 2020 that absent U.S. presence, ISIS could resurge rapidly (The Hill, 2020). Recent operations, including U.S. airstrikes, have contained threats, but Iranian-backed Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) complicate unity, with attacks on U.S. bases intensifying post-October 2023 (Forbes, 2025). The U.S.-Iraq Higher Military Commission oversees this fragile balance,' blending sovereignty assertions with ongoing aid to avert a 2014-style caliphate revival (New Lines Institute, 2025).

Yemen's Forgotten Front

Yemen's civil war, since 2014, has positioned the U.S. as an enabler of the Saudi-led coalition against Iran-backed Houthis, supplying arms and intelligence that prolonged the conflict. From 2015-2019, U.S. sales included precision-guided munitions, fuelling over 25,000 airstrikes that caused 19,000 civilian casualties (CFR, 2025). A 2021 Biden pause on offensive support aimed to curb humanitarian fallout, but defensive aid resumed amid Houthi Red Sea attacks post-October 2023.

Houthi drone and missile campaigns, using Iranian-supplied tech like the 358 surface-to-air missiles, have targeted shipping, sunk two vessels and seized one by mid-2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024). U.S. interceptions, via Aegis-equipped destroyers, downed over 100 threats in 2024, including 11 drones in a March 2025 barrage (Times of Israel, 2024). This 'forgotten front' has shrunk Yemen's economy by half, exacerbating famine, with U.S. strikes under Operation Poseidon Archer targeting Houthi sites since January 2024 (MEI, 2025).

Black Hawk Down in Somalia (2017)



A Seahawk touches down on the rain-slicked flight deck of a U.S. carrier at sunset, rotor wash scattering droplets into the golden light.

Urban warfare's perils echo the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu immortalised in *Black Hawk Down* in the 2017 Raqqa offensive, where SDF-U.S. forces faced ISIS ambushes amid collapsed infrastructure (Smithsonian, 2018). Two U.S. Black Hawks were downed by RPGs, killing crews and evoking Somalia's chaos, with 11 U.S. deaths overall (The Aviationist, 2015). Logistical strains, including supply line vulnerabilities, mirrored 1993's 18-hour firefight (Bowden, 1999).

The January 2020 Soleimani strike epitomised precision targeting: a MQ-9 Reaper drone hit his convoy at Baghdad International Airport at 12:32 a.m., using real-time intelligence from tracked flights from Damascus (NYT, 2020). Ordered by Trump post-embassy siege, it killed Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, escalating tensions but deterring immediate attacks (AJIL, 2020; CNN, 2020).In 2024, Red Sea task forces like Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG), under Combined Task Force 153, deployed U.S. carriers like USS Dwight D. Eisenhower to intercept Houthi threats, escorting vessels and striking launch sites (Naval News, 2024). By mid-2024, OPG had downed 20 missiles and 17 drones, involving 20+ nations but limited Gulf buy-in (The Hill, 2023; AP, 2023).

In my view, U.S. involvement is a difficult balancing act often come at the cost of long-term instability and strained alliances. It's striking how these

"forgotten fronts" and proxy wars create a cycle of intervention that makes it nearly impossible to leave without causing even more chaos. As this turmoil can be seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia and Syria where the level of poverty has risen, GDP has gone down and cost of living crisis is evolving every day. On the other hand, the arm dealers and manufacturers are making money by selling arms to various war lords and tribes. At the same time the export of oil is in the control of American approved companies at their prescribed rates. So, America imposes these wars to bring democracy in such countries whereas the ordinary people neither they reap the fruit of western style democracy nor have peaceful and comfortable day to day life; all they see is kidnapping, killing and poverty. Before the 2011 NATO intervention and civil war, Libya under Muammar Gaddafi implemented robust social welfare policies, providing universal free education and healthcare funded largely by oil revenues. Education was compulsory and free at primary and secondary levels, with significant expansions leading to adult literacy rates rising from around 25% pre-1969 to approximately 83–89% by the late 2000s, and youth literacy nearing 99.9%; universities and vocational training also grew dramatically, achieving some of the highest enrolment rates in North Africa.

Healthcare was similarly accessible to all citizens at no cost through a state-run system, resulting in notable improvements such as life expectancy reaching about 74–75 years, low infant mortality compared to regional averages, and widespread access to hospitals, clinics, and immunization programs. These policies contributed to Libya ranking highest on the Human Development Index (HDI) in Africa in 2010 (around 0.770–0.773), reflecting substantial gains in health, education, and living standards despite underlying governance challenges.

CHAPTER 16

U.S. left Afghanistan in Lurch



President Barack Obama meets with Afghan President Hamid Karzai during a trilateral summit at the White House, May 2013, flanked by U.S. and Afghan flags.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 concluded a 20-year military engagement, often termed the "Forever War," which began with the 2001 invasion following the 9/11 attacks. The withdrawal, culminating in the chaotic fall of Kabul and the Taliban's return to power, marked a pivotal shift in U.S. strategy from direct intervention to a combination of over-the-horizon counterterrorism, economic sanctions, and regional diplomacy. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of U.S.-Afghanistan relations post-withdrawal, exploring the Doha Accords, the Kabul collapse, counterterrorism efforts, economic leverage, proxy dynamics, and regional realignments. Each section delves into the complexities, strategic calculations, and consequences of U.S. policies, supported by detailed evidence and historical context.

Doha Accords (2020), Kabul Fall (2021), and Bagram Airbase Handover

The Doha Accords, signed on 29 February 2020 between the U.S. and the Taliban, were a cornerstone of the U.S. exit strategy under President Donald Trump. The agreement committed the U.S. to withdraw all forces by May 2021 in exchange for Taliban assurances to prevent terrorist groups like al-Qaeda from using Afghanistan as a base against the U.S. and its allies (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Notably, the Afghan government was excluded from negotiations, a decision that eroded its legitimacy and emboldened the Taliban's military campaign (CFR, 2021).



Chaos at Kabul International Airport, August 2021: desperate Afghan civilians surge across the tarmac toward a U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III during the final days of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The accords also required intra-Afghan talks, which faltered due to Taliban intransigence and Afghan government disarray (BBC, 2020).

Kabul Fall an utter Disgrace for US

By early 2021, President Joe Biden inherited the agreement amid a deteriorating security situation. Despite recommendations from military advisors to maintain a residual force, Biden extended the withdrawal deadline to 31 August 2021, citing domestic fatigue with the war (NYT,

2021). The rapid Taliban offensive in summer 2021 overwhelmed the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), which collapsed due to corruption, low morale, and dependency on U.S. support (SIGAR, 2021). On 15 August 2021, Kabul fell, with President Ashraf Ghani fleeing to the UAE, leaving a power vacuum that the Taliban swiftly filled (BBC, 2021).

Handover of Bagram Airbase

The handover of Bagram Airbase, the U.S.'s primary military hub, on 2 July 2021, epitomized the withdrawal's disarray. Departing U.S. forces left without fully coordinating with Afghan counterparts, leading to looting of equipment worth billions, including vehicles, weapons, and aircraft (AP, 2021). The base, once housing 40,000 personnel, was abandoned overnight, symbolizing the abrupt end of U.S. military dominance. The withdrawal's mismanagement drew bipartisan criticism, with reports highlighting inadequate planning for evacuating allies and securing strategic assets (Washington Post, 2021).

Taliban Second Term



Taliban leaders, including spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid (centre), attend a formal press conference in Kabul following their return to power in August 2021.

Post-withdrawal, the U.S. adopted an over-the-horizon counterterrorism strategy, relying on drones, regional bases, and intelligence to target threats without a ground presence. The most significant operation was the 31 July 2022 drone strike in Kabul's Sherpur neighbourhood, killing al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Launched from a Gulf base, likely Al Udeid in Qatar, the MQ-9 Reaper used Hellfire R9X missiles, designed to minimize civilian casualties, after months of tracking Zawahiri's movements (CNN, 2022). The strike underscored U.S. capabilities but exposed Taliban duplicity, as Zawahiri's presence in a Haqqani network safehouse violated Doha commitments (CFR, 2022).

ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) poses a more immediate threat, with an estimated 4,000 fighters by 2025 (Crisis Group, 2025). Its 26 August 2021 Kabul airport attack, killing 13 U.S. service members and over 170 civilians, highlighted its potency (Reuters, 2021). Subsequent attacks, including a 2024 Moscow concert hall bombing claimed by ISIS-K, underscore its regional ambitions (Al Jazeera, 2024). U.S. counterterrorism faces challenges: the loss of on-ground intelligence networks, reliance on distant bases, and limited cooperation from the Taliban, which struggles to suppress ISIS-K due to factionalism (CSIS, 2023). Over-the-horizon

operations, while precise, are resource-intensive, requiring coordination across multiple countries and raising sovereignty concerns (Foreign Policy, 2022).

US Freezes Assets ($7 Billion) of Afghanistan

The U.S. has wielded economic tools to influence the Taliban, most notably by freezing $7 billion in Afghan central bank assets held in the U.S. in February 2022. Half was allocated to a Swiss-based Afghan Fund for humanitarian aid, while the remainder faces legal disputes from 9/11 victims' families (NYT, 2022). The freeze crippled Afghanistan's economy, exacerbating a crisis where 97% of the population lives below the poverty line and 24 million require aid (UNDP, 2024; OCHA, 2025). Taliban restrictions on NGOs, including bans on women workers, have hindered aid distribution, with only 23% of 2024's $3.2 billion UN appeal funded.

Proxy Influences

The U.S. vigilantly monitors al-Qaeda and ISIS-K, suspecting Taliban complicity or incapacity. Al-Qaeda's core, though weakened, maintains 200-300 fighters in eastern Afghanistan, with leaders like Saif al-Adel reportedly sheltered in Iran (UNSC, 2025). The Taliban's ties to al-Qaeda, particularly through the Haqqani network, persist, with UN reports noting training camps in 2024 (Crisis Group, 2025). ISIS-K, exploiting Taliban infighting, recruits disaffected fighters and conducts high-profile attacks, including on Chinese and Russian targets (Reuters, 2024).

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) complicates U.S. efforts, maintaining deep ties with the Taliban, particularly the Haqqani network, which controls key ministries (CFR, 2024b). Pakistan's dual role hosting

U.S. drone bases while supporting Taliban factions creates friction. The U.S. has pressed Pakistan to curb militancy along the Durand Line, where groups like Terik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operate, but Islamabad's strategic interest in a pliant Afghanistan limits cooperation. The 2023 U.S.-Pakistan counterterrorism dialogue yielded commitments, but Pakistan's selective enforcement persists (State Department, 2023).

Evacuation Chaos (13,000 Flights)



Afghan evacuees, many clutching what little they could carry, board a U.S. Air Force transport aircraft during the frantic evacuation from Kabul in August 2021 as American forces oversee the desperate exodus.

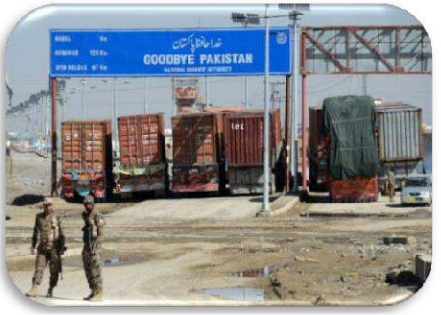
The August 2021 evacuation, Operation Allies Refuge, was a logistical feat and failure. Over 13,000 flights from Hamid Karzai International Airport evacuated 122,000 people, including 6,000 Americans, in 17 days (U.S. Department of Defence, 2021). However, overcrowding, inadequate vetting, and an ISIS-K suicide bombing on 26 August exposed planning flaws. The U.S. left behind thousands of Afghan allies, with estimates of 80,000 Special Immigrant Visa applicants stranded by 2022 (Washington Post, 2021; SIGAR, 2022).

U.S. poppy eradication efforts, costing $8 billion from 2001-2020, failed to curb Afghanistan's opium trade, which supplies 80% of global heroin (SIGAR, 2021; UNODC, 2025). The Taliban's 2022 opium ban reduced

cultivation by 95% in Helmand, but smuggling persists, funding insurgency and corruption (Al Jazeera, 2023). The UN sanctions regime, established under Resolution 1988, targets Taliban and al-Qaeda figures but faces enforcement challenges, with China and Russia blocking updates to listings (UNSC, 2025). Regional non-compliance, particularly from Pakistan and Iran, undermines effectiveness (ICG, 2024).

U.S. Pressure on Pakistan for Afghan Border Control

The U.S. has intensified pressure on Pakistan to secure the 2,600-km Durand Line, were militant crossings fuel instability. A 2023 counterterrorism dialogue secured $200 million for border fencing and surveillance, but Pakistan's selective crackdowns targeting TTP but sparing Afghan Taliban limit progress (State Department, 2023).



U.S. soldiers stand watch at the Torkham border crossing as a line of container trucks waits to enter Afghanistan, beneath a weathered sign reading 'GOODBYE PAKISTAN.

U.S. leverage is constrained by Pakistan's nuclear status and Chinese ties, with Beijing investing $60 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (CFR, 2024). The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 stands as one of the most contentious episodes in recent American foreign policy, exposing deep flaws in strategic planning, intelligence assessment, and execution. The rapid collapse of the Afghan government and security forces despite two decades and hundreds of billions in U.S. investment revealed the limits of nation-building efforts reliant on corrupt, dependent institutions, while the chaotic evacuation and abandonment of allies at Kabul airport underscored a profound failure in moral and operational accountability.

allowing the U-2 to capture images of missile sites and infrastructure from its high altitude, though this led to Soviet threats against Pakistan after the Powers incident.

SEATO and CENTO were Cold War-era military alliances formed in 1955 in response to fears over communist expansionism. SEATO included the US, France, UK, New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan aiming to protect Southeast Asia.

US has relationship with Pakistan of "A Bad Mother-in-Law" type. Never happy and asks do more. Pakistan stuck its neck out by helping in the early 1960s by providing its Peshawar airbase to its U2 reconnaissance planes against Russia which understandably made it our enemy.

In the 1980s Pakistan again went out of the way to start proxy war in Afghanistan against Russia. Pakistan involved its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to create an atmosphere of a "holy war" (Afghan Jihad) which involved Islamic Seminaries in Pakistan. The "mujahedeen" joined this "holy war" from all over the world whether East or West. This eventually disintegrated former Soviet Union and brought the Cold War to a contemporary halt. Many central Asian states predominantly were Muslims and declared independence.



President Ronald Reagan hosts Afghan mujahideen representatives in the Oval Office on February 2, 1983, to discuss Soviet aggression and atrocities in Afghanistan, reflecting U.S. backing for the resistance during the Soviet Afghan War.

CIA-ISI relationship become sour and United States called ISI a rouge agency and many amendments like Presler amendment were introduced to harm Pakistan. These relationships were never well mended. Although current regime in Pakistan is in good books of President Trump.

The 9/11 incident changed the world, and Pakistan became the focus of word again. Although Pakistan against its people wishes provided its airbases to US against Afghanistan and CIA agents were everywhere in Pakistan. But US wanted like a Bad Mother-in-Law to do more. US was stuck deep in Afghanistan without any exit Strategy where US flocked miserably without ISI's help. That reminds me former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lieutenant General Hameed Gul famous saying



Hamid Gul, Directo ISI (far left) with William Webster, Director CIA, Clair George, Deputy Director for Operations, and Milt Bearden, CIA station chief in 1987 NWFP.

"When history is written, it will be stated that the ISI defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with the help of America. Then there will be another sentence: the ISI, with the help of America, defeated America".

This quote encapsulates his view of the complex relationship between the intelligence agencies and their roles in the Afghanistan conflicts.

The Bin Laden Raid (2011)



U.S. Navy SEALs storm Laden's Abbottabad compound in daring nighttime raid (May 2, 2011).

The U.S. raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on 2 May 2011, codenamed Operation Neptune Spear, was a defining moment in U.S.-Pakistan relations. Executed by U.S. Navy SEALs using stealth Black Hawk helicopters, the operation killed the al-Qaeda leader without prior notification to Pakistan, revealing deep bilateral mistrust (CNN, 2011). The CIA, leveraging intelligence from tracking Bin Laden's courier, confirmed his presence in a fortified compound near Pakistan's Military Academy, raising suspicions of Pakistani complicity (NYT, 2011). The raid's success yielded critical al-Qaeda documents but triggered a severe diplomatic crisis. Pakistan's government condemned the operation as a violation of sovereignty, suspending military cooperation and closing NATO supply routes to Afghanistan for seven months, costing the U.S. $1.2 billion in logistics rerouting (BBC, 2011; CFR, 2012). Public outrage in Pakistan fuelled anti-American sentiment, while U.S. lawmakers, including Senator John Kerry, questioned whether Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had sheltered Bin Laden (Guardian, 2011). The U.S. withheld $800 million in military aid, and Pakistan expelled American trainers, marking a low point in relations (Reuters, 2011).

Drone Warfare Legacy



An MQ-9 Reaper unmanned combat aerial vehicle banks over the mountains of Afghanistan, armed with Hellfire missiles during a mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

From 2004 to 2018, the U.S. conducted over 400 drone strikes in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), targeting al-Qaeda, Taliban, and Haqqani network operatives using MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper drones. These strikes killed approximately 2,000–3,000 militants but also caused 200–900 civilian deaths, according to independent estimates, sparking intense controversy (New America, 2018; BIJ, 2018). Pakistan's government publicly denounced the strikes as violations of sovereignty, yet WikiLeaks cables revealed private acquiescence by Pakistani officials, highlighting a duplicitous stance (Guardian, 2010). High-profile strikes, such as the 2013 killing of Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud, disrupted peace talks between Islamabad and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), prompting sharp criticism from Pakistan's interior ministry (Dawn, 2013). Civilian casualty disputes, exacerbated by a lack of transparency, fuelled anti-U.S. protests and bolstered militant recruitment (CFR, 2014). By 2018, strikes declined due to improved Pakistani military operations in FATA and U.S. troop drawdowns in Afghanistan, but the legacy of distrust continues to shape bilateral ties.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Tensions



Pakistani military leadership and officials pose in front of the Ghauri (Hatf-V) medium-range ballistic missile during a training launch, circa 2008. The nuclear-capable missile, with a range of 1,300–1,500 km, remains a key component of Pakistan's strategic deterrent.

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, estimated at 170 warheads by 2025, is a persistent source of tension with the U.S., particularly due to its development of tactical nuclear weapons aimed at countering India's conventional military superiority (SIPRI, 2025). These low-yield weapons, deployable via short-range missiles like the Nasr, raise U.S. fears of escalation in a potential India-Pakistan conflict, given their lower threshold for use (Arms Control Association, 2023). Pakistan's refusal to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the legacy of A.Q. Khan's proliferation network, which supplied nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea, heighten U.S. concerns about security and oversight (NTI, 2024). The $62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship of China's Belt and Road Initiative, further complicates matters, with U.S. officials suspecting Chinese assistance in advancing Pakistan's nuclear-capable missile systems, such as the Shaheen-III (CSIS, 2024). In 2023, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Chinese entities linked to Pakistan's military, citing proliferation risks, though Pakistan insists CPEC is purely economic (U.S. Treasury, 2023). These tensions underscore the strategic divergence between U.S. non-proliferation goals and Pakistan's security priorities.

Proxy Counterinsurgency



Taliban deputy political leader Sirajuddin Haqqani (right) in conversation with a Pakistani official during a visit to Islamabad, 2024.

Between 2002 and 2021, the U.S. provided Pakistan with $33 billion in aid, including $14.6 billion in Coalition Support Funds (CSF) to reimburse counterterrorism efforts and facilitate NATO supply routes through Pakistan to Afghanistan (SIGAR, 2021). The Torkham and Chaman border crossings handled 80% of U.S. logistics, making Pakistan indispensable to the Afghan war effort (CFR, 2021). However, U.S. officials repeatedly accused Pakistan's ISI of providing safe havens to the Haqqani network, a Taliban faction responsible for attacks like the 2011 assault on the U.S. embassy in Kabul, which killed 16 people (NYT, 2011). The U.S. designated the Haqqani network a terrorist organization in 2012, imposing sanctions on its leaders, but Pakistan's selective counterinsurgency targeting TTP while tolerating Haqqani and Afghan Taliban elements frustrated Washington. In 2018, President Trump suspended $2 billion in aid, accusing Pakistan of offering "nothing but lies and deceit," though partial restoration in 2020 supported U.S.-Taliban talks (Reuters, 2018; State Department, 2020). This duality reflects Pakistan's strategic calculus to maintain influence in Afghanistan while securing U.S. funds.

Kerry-Lugar Bill ($7.5 Billion Aid)

The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009, known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Bill, authorized $7.5 billion in civilian aid over five years to

strengthen Pakistan's democratic institutions and counter extremism (Congress.gov, 2009). However, conditions requiring certification of Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts provoked backlash from Pakistan's military, which viewed them as an affront to sovereignty, straining bilateral ties (Dawn, 2009).



Secretary of State John Kerry

The 2008 Mumbai attacks, orchestrated by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and killing 166 people, further eroded trust. India and the U.S. alleged ISI complicity, citing intercepted communications, but Pakistan's prosecution of LeT leader Hafiz Saeed was widely criticized as superficial, with his 2020 conviction overturned by 2022 (NYT, 2008; BBC, 2017). Pakistan's placement on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list from 2018 to 2022 for weak anti-money laundering and terrorism financing controls reflected U.S.-led pressure. Pakistan's reforms, including convictions of LeT operatives, secured its removal, but scepticism persists over enforcement (FATF, 2022; Reuters, 2022). These episodes highlight Pakistan's navigation of domestic and international pressures.

U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Countering Pakistan-China Axis



The U.S.-India strategic partnership has emerged as a counterbalance to the Pakistan-China axis, reshaping South Asian dynamics. The 2008 U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, granting India access to nuclear technology despite its non-NPT status, underscored U.S. favouritism, isolating Pakistan (CFR, 2024). The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), involving the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia, has strengthened through joint exercises like Malabar 2024, aiming to counter China's regional influence and indirectly pressuring Pakistan due to its CPEC ties (State Department, 2024). India's pre-2021 investments in Afghanistan, totalling in $3 billion, and its Chabahar port project in Iran, backed by the U.S. to bypass Pakistan's Karachi port, enhance India's regional leverage (MEA India, 2025). Pakistan perceives this as strategic encirclement, deepening its military and economic ties with China, including co-production of JF-17 fighters and missile technology collaboration (CSIS, 2024). The U.S.-India alignment thus exacerbates tensions with Pakistan, complicating regional stability.

Pakistan Nobel Peace Prize Nominations for Trump



President Donald J. Trump stands alongside Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Egypt 2025.

Pakistan's decision to nominate U.S. President Donald Trump for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize stands out as one of the more unexpected developments in the two countries' chronically uneasy relationship. On June 20, 2025, Islamabad formally submitted the nomination, crediting Trump with "decisive diplomatic intervention and pivotal leadership" that allegedly prevented a full-scale war between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan earlier that year (Government of Pakistan, 2025). The Pakistani statement praised Trump's "robust diplomatic engagement with both Islamabad and New Delhi" during a seven-day border crisis in April–May 2025 that saw artillery duels, drone incursions, and limited airstrikes, claiming his personal phone calls and threats to withhold U.S. security assistance forced both sides into a ceasefire (Reuters, June 20, 2025; Dawn, June 21, 2025). While Indian officials dismissed the nomination as "desperate Pakistani propaganda" and insisted the ceasefire resulted from their own military pressure (The Times of India, June 22, 2025), the move nonetheless underscores Islamabad's continuing willingness to publicly flatter Washington's leadership even one as polarizing as Trump whenever it perceives a chance to reset or extract concessions from a historically transactional alliance.

Pakistan's Mining Industry: Potential and US Interest



Pakistan's Army Chief General Asim Munir points to samples of rare earth minerals and gemstones in a wooden display box while showing them to US President Donald Trump during a White House meeting in September 2025, as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (second from left) looks on a diplomatic gesture highlighting Pakistan's untapped mineral wealth to strengthen bilateral ties and attract US investment.

Pakistan possesses significant untapped mineral resources, making its mining sector a high-potential area for economic growth. The country is endowed with vast deposits of copper, gold, coal, salt, chromite, gemstones, and emerging critical minerals such as lithium, rare earth elements (REEs), cobalt, and nickel. Estimates of the total mineral wealth range from $6 trillion to $8 trillion, yet the sector currently contributes less than 3% to GDP due to underdevelopment.

Key resources include:

- Coal: Among the world's largest reserves, approximately 186 billion tons, primarily in Sindh's Thar coalfield.
- Copper and Gold: Reko Diq in Baluchistan is one of the largest undeveloped deposits globally, with estimated recoverable reserves of over 13 million tonnes of copper and 18 million ounces of gold over a 37-year mine life.
- Salt: The second-largest reserves worldwide, including the Khewra Salt Mine.
- Other Minerals: Chromite, gypsum, marble, iron ore, and gemstones (e.g., aquamarine, tourmaline, emeralds).

The flagship Reko Diq project, operated by Canada's Barrick Gold (50% ownership, shared with Pakistani federal and provincial governments), is projected to start production in 2028, potentially generating billions in exports and positioning Pakistan as a major copper supplier.

Despite this potential, challenges persist, including regulatory fragmentation (post-18th Amendment provincial autonomy), security issues in mineral-rich areas like Baluchistan (e.g., insurgency), inadequate infrastructure, outdated technology, and limited foreign investment historically. Recent reforms, such as the National Minerals Harmonization Framework (2025) and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), aim to streamline licensing, reduce red tape, and attract FDI.

US Interest in Pakistan's Mining Sector

The United States has shown growing interest in Pakistan's mining industry, driven by the global race for critical minerals essential for clean energy transitions, electric vehicles, and technology. This aligns with efforts to diversify supply chains away from dominant producers like China. A landmark development occurred in December 2025, when the US Export-Import Bank (EXIM) approved $1.25 billion in financing for the Reko Diq project. This funding supports the purchase of



A visiting US Congressional delegation poses for a group photo with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir and senior military officials during delegation-level talks on bilateral defence ties and counterterrorism cooperation in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, on April 13, 2025.

up to $2 billion in US mining equipment and services, expected to create 6,000 jobs in the US and 7,500 in Baluchistan. US officials described Reko Diq as a "model" for bilateral mining cooperation, emphasizing mutual benefits in employment, prosperity, and critical mineral access.

Earlier in 2025, the US Department of State highlighted opportunities for American companies in Pakistan's mineral exploration and the Reko Diq operations, including equipment supply and services. This interest reflects broader geopolitical strategy, with discussions during high-level visits (e.g., involving critical minerals in US-Pakistan talks) and alignment with global supply chain security. While primary operations at Reko Diq involve Barrick Gold, a Canadian firm, US involvement focuses on financing, technology exports, and potential downstream partnerships. Challenges like security in Baluchistan remain, but the investment signals confidence in Pakistan's reforms and the project's transformative potential.

CHAPTER 18

May 2025 – India's Humiliating Defeat by Pakistan



Trump said eight planes shot down in India-Pakistan clash. I settled the war in 24 hours with tariff threats.

On the 6th and 7th of May, Pakistan and India engaged in a brief but intense military conflict that lasted until the 10th of May. Though the duration was short, the scale and intensity of the fighting were unprecedented, marking a significant moment in recent history a conflict that generations have not witnessed in the last 50 years and one that will likely shape the future narratives of warfare for decades to come. While analyzing the war itself may provide valuable insights in the weeks ahead, the true focus of this chapter lies in understanding the aftermath and the strategies both nations will employ to position themselves for future success. As with many conflicts, both sides have declared victory, making it challenging to reach a definitive conclusion. However, it is the diplomacy that follows such conflicts that often proves more critical, and it will be those who navigate this diplomatic terrain with skill who are likely to emerge as the true victors.

Pakistan Establishes Air Superiority

India's air force appears to have lost at least two fighter jets, including one of its most advanced models, during attacks on sites in Pakistan and Pakistani-administered Kashmir, according to a review of visual evidence (Washington Post).



Pakistani Air Force JF-17 Thunder fighter jet (serial 09-112) in flight during a routine training exercise over Punjab province, 2023.

The Post based its findings on analysis by Trevor Ball, a former explosive ordnance disposal technician for the U.S. Army; Etienne Marcuz, an associate fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research; and a French airpower expert with military experience who shared his analysis on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. The loss of multiple fighter jets would represent the worst setback in battle for India's air force in recent memory; in 2019, during the last round of fighting between the nuclear-armed neighbours, India acknowledged one of its jets was shot down by Pakistan (Washington Post).



Recovered tail section of an Indian Air Force Dassault Rafale bearing the distinctive IAF roundel and partial markings, lying in a village near Akhnoor, Jammu & Kashmir.

A high-ranking French intelligence official informed CNN that a Rafale fighter jet operated by the Indian Air Force was shot down by Pakistan, marking the first confirmed loss of one of these advanced French-made warplanes in combat. This comes after Pakistan claimed to have downed five Indian Air Force jets in retaliation for Indian airstrikes, including three Rafales. As of now, Indian officials have not yet responded to this claim (CNN, 2025). The French official further stated that French authorities were investigating whether more than one Rafale jet was shot down during the overnight strikes. CNN also reported that pictures showing parts of an aircraft wreckage taken from Indian-administered Kashmir displayed a label indicating a French manufacturer, but experts have said that it remains unclear whether the wreckage is from a Rafale jet (Vandoorne, 2025). In response to inquiries, Dassault Aviation, the French company that manufactures the Rafale, has not provided any comments on the incident. The Rafale, a 10-ton, twin-engine multirole fighter, is equipped with a 30mm cannon for air combat and ground support, as well as air-to-air missiles, laser-guided bombs, and cruise missiles. Before this escalation, India had purchased 36 Rafale jets from Dassault Aviation for its Air Force (CNN, 2025). At the time of reporting,

the French military has refrained from commenting officially on the situation (CNN, 2025).

After the Pakistan-India clash, shares of the Chinese company (AVIC Chengdu), which manufactures the JF-17 and J-10C, rose by 62%, while shares of the French company (Dassault Aviation), which produces the Rafale, dropped by 10%.

US Steps in to Prevent Indian Defeat, Protect Western Interests

In the context of the current India-Pakistan conflict, it's important to recognize that global powers, particularly the United States, often play a significant role in influencing the outcomes of such wars, given the broader geopolitical





Market reaction to Operation Sindoor – Avic Chengdu (JF-17 manufacturer) stock surges while Dassault Aviation stock falls sharply, 6–12 May 2025. A rare instance of combat outcomes directly moving defence aerospace share prices.

implications. While the United States has historically maintained a strategic relationship with India, particularly for counterbalancing

China's influence in the region, the possibility that the US intervened to prevent India from suffering a defeat cannot be ruled out.

The reasons behind such diplomatic intervention can be multifaceted. A significant loss for India could have had a destabilising effect on the region, potentially leading to further escalation and undermining the stability of South Asia, a region that is strategically important for both global security and economic interests. Furthermore, India is an important ally for the US in the region, and any major military setback could weaken its position as a counterweight to China, Russia, and other regional actors. Given that India is a key partner in the broader Western security architecture, especially in the Indo-Pacific, a loss on the battlefield could have far-reaching consequences not only for India but for the Western alliances that rely on it. This could include the loss of strategic influence in the region, disruption to trade routes, and a potential shift in regional alliances. The West, particularly the US, would likely seek to avoid a situation that could tilt the regional balance of power in a way that undermines its interests.

Can America Be Trusted?

The question of whether Pakistan can trust the United States, given its growing military relationship with India, is a critical issue in South Asian geopolitics. The US has significantly deepened its strategic partnership with India in recent years, providing advanced defence technologies and military aid, including fighter jets, missile systems, and logistical support. This strengthening of ties is largely driven by the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, aimed at countering China's influence. For India, this partnership is seen as a boost to its military capabilities, making it a

reliable partner in the region. However, for Pakistan, this growing alliance between the US and India is perceived as a direct threat. Pakistan views the US support as tipping the balance of power in favour of India, potentially undermining its own security, especially given India's conventional superiority. From Pakistan's perspective, the increasing US military aid to India raises concerns over a strategic imbalance in the region and the potential for escalation. Additionally, Pakistan questions the reliability of the US as a partner, given that historical ties have often been strained, particularly when US policies shift in for India. As a result, Pakistan remains wary of its relationship with the US, questioning whether America can be trusted when it comes to ensuring regional stability and security.

Testing Weapons or Diplomacy?

The question of whether the United States has allowed India to start a proxy war between China and the United States, to test the quality of its weapons, is highly speculative and significant in broader geopolitical landscape. The U.S. has consistently maintained its strategic relationship with both India and China, though these relationships have different dimensions. India's growing military partnership with the United States is primarily aimed at counterbalancing China's rising influence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. While the U.S. has been supportive of India through defence agreements and military aid.

On the other hand, Pakistan's military dependence on China is a crucial aspect of its defence strategy. Approximately 80% of Pakistan's military equipment is sourced from China, including modern fighter jets, missiles, tanks, and naval vessels. This dependency on China provides Pakistan

with an alternative source of military hardware, especially since Pakistan has faced arms embargoes or restrictions from Western countries due to political disagreements, including its nuclear program. The China-Pakistan military relationship gives Pakistan the necessary tools to counterbalance India's superior conventional military forces, which are supported by U.S. military aid and advanced technology. The JF-17 Thunder fighter jet, for example, is a joint development between China and Pakistan, reflecting the deep military ties between the two countries.

War Losses

Indian shares fell losing about $83 billion in market value, as intensified military action between India and its neighbouring Pakistan rattled investors. (Reuters). Washington Post has confirmed the downing of two Indian jets during recent clashes, further escalating India's challenges, with multiple aircraft lost in the ongoing conflict. The Rafale fighter jet is valued at approximately $240 million each (Arab News). Pakistan has also claimed to have targeted India's S-400 defence system in Adampur, which is worth approximately $1.5 billion.



The Bombay Stock Exchange

Table 4: Billions for Defence

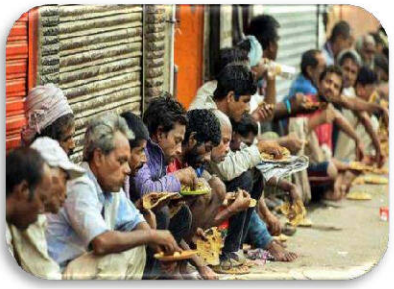
Item	Cost

Rafale Fighter Jet	$240 million each
S-400 Défense System	$1.5 billion

The 2025 four-day escalation between India and Pakistan led to Pakistan's military expenditure reaching approximately $1.5 billion, contributing to a combined hourly cost of $1 billion for both nations, with Pakistan facing additional pressures on its smaller economy through trade disruptions and a 10-15% decline in foreign investment inflows in the subsequent months (Arab News, 2025; International Banker, 2025). Overall opportunity costs from the enduring rivalry, as estimated by the Strategic Foresight Group, have deprived Pakistan of up to 2-3% annual GDP growth potential over decades, totalling millions in foregone economic benefits when including diverted military spending (which consumes 2.5-3% of Pakistan's GDP annually) and lost trade opportunities valued at $37 billion cumulatively (Strategic Foresight Group, 2004; Scroll.in, 2016).

Fighting Poverty, Not Each Other

The ongoing tensions and conflicts between India and Pakistan, though often centred around territorial disputes, divert critical resources from the much-needed battle against poverty in both nations. Despite significant progress in their respective



Somewhere in Mumbai, a line of men eats in silence.

economic landscapes, both India and Pakistan continue to grapple with widespread poverty. The "war over poverty" theme serves as a reminder of how military spending and conflict perpetuate underdevelopment and hinder social progress. Redirecting resources from defence spending to poverty alleviation programs could be a gamechanger for both countries, fostering long-term peace and prosperity. India, with its vast population of over 1.4 billion people, has made substantial strides in economic growth, yet poverty remains widespread, particularly in rural areas. According to the World Bank (2020), around 28% of India's population lives below the national poverty line, which is defined as those living on less than $1.90 a day. This translates to approximately 375 million people living in poverty. Similarly, Pakistan faces a significant poverty challenge, with a substantial portion of its population living below the poverty line. According to the World Bank (2021), about 24.3% of Pakistan's population lives in poverty, which equates to approximately 53 million people.

A primary lesson India and Pakistan must learn is the economic cost of their military rivalry. Both nations allocate substantial portions of their budgets to defence, resources that could be directed to fight poverty. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India and Pakistan are among the top military spenders in the world, even though a significant portion of their populations live in poverty (SIPRI, 2020). By reallocating even, a fraction of their military budgets toward social welfare, education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation programs, both countries could significantly improve their human development indicators and social infrastructure. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights that conflict-prone areas are often the hardest hit in terms of development, with long-lasting impacts on education, healthcare, and employment (UNDP, 2021).

The intense but brief May 2025 India Pakistan air battles and their diplomatic aftermath within the multipolar neorealist framework and PESTEL Architecture presented in Chapter 1. Politically, the conflict including the downing of several Indian aircraft, among them French Rafales serves as a stark illustration of proxy-adjacent escalation in a nuclear-armed dyad, further complicated by opposing great-power alignments: the deepening U.S. India partnership through the Quad versus Pakistan's strategic embrace of China. Economically, immediate trade suspensions and heightened vulnerabilities along the China Pakistan Economic Corridor highlight the growing role of weaponized interdependence in South Asian security calculations. Socially, surges of nationalism in both countries, combined with cautious hedging by smaller regional actors such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, reflect the broader fragmentation of influence in a multipolar world. Technologically, the deployment of advanced platforms and the latent cyber dimensions of the crisis reveal how the global technological race increasingly bleeds into regional flashpoints. Environmentally, enduring disputes over Indus waters and emerging competition for Central Asian resources add a layer of latent peril. In the legal and multilateral sphere, the rapid resort to back-channel diplomacy and Track-II dialogues after the crisis demonstrates the fragile yet indispensable role of confidence-building measures in managing nuclear risks. Through the PESTEL lens, South Asia stands revealed as a critical microcosm of the New Cold War, where localised crises can swiftly engage great-power interests and nuclear thresholds, making selective multilateral engagement not merely desirable but essential for preventing catastrophe. As said above around 28% of India's population lives below the national poverty line in India. Similarly, about 24.3% of Pakistan's population lives in poverty. I suggest that both countries need to come out of war mindset, particularly India needs to move away from Hindutva ideology, promote peace and live with its neighbours in friendly fashion so that ordinary public could benefit from the billions of dollars which are being spent on arms instead of health, education and eradicating poverty.

CHAPTER 19

Broader South Asian Dynamics



The broader South Asian dynamics encompassing India and Central Asia represent a critical arena for U.S. strategic interests, where countering China's expanding influence intersects with energy security, counterterrorism, and regional connectivity. As of October 2025, the U.S. has deepened ties with India through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and advanced defence deals, while leveraging the C51 framework to foster economic integration in Central Asia, bypassing Russian-dominated routes. These efforts are complicated by spillover effects from Afghanistan's instability, which threaten the stability of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan through refugee flows, extremism, and economic disruptions. This chapter examines these interconnections, highlighting U.S. initiatives amid evolving geopolitical tensions.

Quad Summits, Intel Sharing on China



U.S. Navy and Marine Corps amphibious assault ships, hovering LCACs, and a helicopter airshow.

The U.S.-India partnership has emerged as a cornerstone of Indo-Pacific strategy, with the Quad comprising the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia serving as a key mechanism to counterbalance China's assertiveness. The 2024 Quad Leaders' Summit in Wilmington, Delaware, on September 21, focused on maritime security, critical technologies, and climate resilience, announcing initiatives like the Quad Cancer Moonshot for cervical cancer elimination and enhanced coast guard interoperability through a Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025 (White House, 2024a). India, hosting the 2025 Quad Leaders' Summit in New Delhi, emphasized AI, semiconductors, and supply chain diversification, with the July 2025 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington condemning a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir and reaffirming opposition to coercive actions in the Indo-Pacific (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

Intelligence sharing on China has intensified, with Quad partners coordinating on maritime domain awareness via the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and sharing real-time data on Chinese naval activities in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean (CSIS, 2024). This collaboration, bolstered by joint exercises like Malabar 2024, enhances India's surveillance capabilities amid border tensions with China (E-International Relations, 2024). Complementing

these efforts, the U.S.-India defence ties advanced with the October 2024 signing of a $3.99 billion deal for 31 MQ-9B Predator drones, including 15 Sea Guardians for the Navy and 16 Sky Guardians split between the Army and Air Force, plus munitions like Hellfire missiles (The Hindu, 2024). Approved by India's Cabinet Committee on Security, the deal includes a maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility in India, marking a shift from earlier $3 billion negotiations and underscoring technology transfer commitments (India Today, 2024; Times of India, 2024a). By mid-2025, deliveries have commenced, bolstering India's long-endurance ISR missions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China (ORF, 2024).

Central Asian Engagements

The U.S. C51 framework, engaging Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has evolved as a diplomatic platform to promote economic connectivity and energy diversification, particularly routes circumventing Russia amid the Ukraine conflict. Launched in 2015, the format held its first presidential summit in September 2023 in New York, committing to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor) for trade and the USAID Power Central Asia program ($39 million) for clean energy integration (U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, 2023). By 2024-2025, focus shifted to critical minerals security, with the C51 Critical Minerals Dialogue launched to develop regional resources like Kazakhstan's uranium and copper, reducing reliance on Chinese processing (Atlantic Council, 2025).Energy routes bypassing



When the U.S. Secretary of State shows up to the Central Asia family

Russia is central, with U.S. support for the Trans-Caspian Trade Route linking Central Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan and Georgia, enhancing gas and oil exports from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan (CABAR.asia, 2023). The 2025 C51 commitments include methane mitigation, sustainable hydropower, and regional power grids, mobilizing private financing for energy transitions (U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, 2023). This counters Russia's influence, as Central Asian states seek alternatives post-2022 Ukraine invasion, with U.S. investments in TAPI and CASA-1000 pipelines facilitating southbound energy flows to Afghanistan and Pakistan (Geopolitical Monitor, 2018; CEPA, 2023). As of October 2025, these efforts have unlocked $140 million in undersea cable investments, indirectly supporting energy infrastructure (White House, 2024).

U.S. Involvement in Kazakhstan's 2022 Unrest Monitoring



Independence Square, Almaty, December 16, 2011, Thousands gather on Kazakhstan's 20th Independence Day, just hours before the Zhanaozen clashes would turn the celebration into tragedy.

U.S. engagement in Central Asia's micro-dynamics underscores its monitoring role during crises and support for energy diplomacy. During Kazakhstan's January 2022 unrest sparked by fuel price hikes and escalating into deadly protests with over 200 deaths and the U.S. closely monitored developments, appealing for calm and restraint while questioning the deployment of Russian-led CSTO troops (Al Jazeera, 2022). The State Department ramped up embassy security, considered evacuations, and urged accountability for human rights abuses, including torture allegations against security forces (Politico, 2022;

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2022). Senators like Bob Menendez called for reviewing U.S. security assistance to Kazakh forces, given reports of U.S.-trained units' involvement, emphasizing democratic reforms (U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2022). By 2025, this scrutiny informed C51 dialogues on governance, aiding Kazakhstan's recovery through economic aid. On Turkmenistan's gas pipelines, U.S. facilitation has advanced the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project, completed on the Turkmen side in 2024, with construction starting on the Serenata-Herat section in September 2024. Negotiations in 2024-2025, involving the Asian Development Bank, aim for 33 billion cubic meters annual exports, bypassing Russia via southern routes (TEIF, 2025). U.S. support through C51 includes USAID's Power Central Asia for TAPI integration, countering Chinese dominance in Turkmen exports (Ener data, 2025). A February 2025 swap deal with Turkey for 2 billion cubic meters via Iran marks diversification, with U.S. backing for Trans-Caspian extensions (Reuters, 2025; OSW, 2025).

US Strategies in South and Central Asia to evade Russia

Afghanistan's instability continues to generate spillover effects, straining Uzbekistan and Tajikistan's stability through extremism, migration, and economic pressures. In 2024-2025, over 1.3 million Afghan returns from Pakistan and Iran exacerbated poverty and displacement, with 23.7 million Afghans needing aid amid food insecurity and climate shocks (IOM, 2025; World Bank, 2024). Uzbekistan, pragmatically engaging the Taliban since 2021, hosted a historic August 2025 meeting of Central Asian special representatives on Afghanistan, focusing on trade restoration and counterterrorism (Zamin.uz, 2025). Tashkent's $3 billion trade goal with Kabul, including the Termez-Hairaton bridge and Afghan investor zones,

mitigates spillover by fostering economic ties, though ISIS-K threats persist (The Diplomat, 2025; National Interest, 2025).



Tajikistan, sharing a 1,344-km border, faces acute risks from Taliban-ISIS-K clashes and drug trafficking, with 2024 attacks recruiting Tajik militants (RFERL, 2024). Dushanbe's pragmatic electricity exports to Afghanistan and SCO dialogues aim to stabilize, but refugee inflows and radicalization threaten internal security (Clingendael, 2025; USIP, 2022). U.S. C51 support enhances border management, with IOM aiding returns and UNHCR addressing 2025 protection risks (UNHCR, 2025). Regional forums like Uzbekistan's 2023 neighbouring countries meeting underscore collective efforts to avert broader instability (The Diplomat, 2025).

U.S. strategies in South Asia and Central Asia weave a tapestry of counterbalance and connectivity, from Quad-driven intel sharing and the Predator deal with India to C51 energy routes evading Russia. Minute interventions, like monitoring Kazakhstan's 2022 unrest and backing Turkmen pipelines, highlight tactical depth, while Afghan spillovers demand vigilant regional diplomacy to safeguard Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As of October 2025, these dynamics pivot on adapting to China's rise and Afghanistan's volatility, positioning the U.S. as a pivotal architect of stability. But the question is: Is United States willing to come out of war mindset, selling arms and regime changes where it cannot get its way?

CHAPTER 20

Proxy Wars - Africa, Latin America, and Beyond

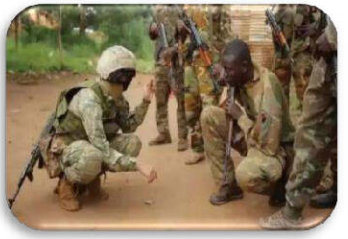


Government troops and tanks are seen in the eastern Congolese town of

In the post-Cold War era, proxy conflicts have reemerged as tools for great-power competition, amplifying tensions between the U.S., Russia, China, and Iran. These "multipliers" extend beyond direct confrontation, leveraging local instabilities to secure resources, influence, and strategic footholds. In Africa's Sahel, U.S. counterterrorism bases clash with Russian mercenaries and Chinese mining interests, while in Latin America, U.S. sanctions on Venezuela intersect with Iranian oil trades, sustaining authoritarian regimes. This chapter delves into these dynamics, highlighting how such engagements perpetuate cycles of instability, with minute details underscoring the human and logistical costs as of October 2025.

African Sahel Instability

The Sahel region spanning Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad epitomizes proxy rivalries, where U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) bases support counterterrorism against Islamist groups like ISIS-Sahel and JNIM, while Russian Wagner Group mercenaries (now rebranded under Africa Corps) back juntas for resource access, and Chinese firms



U.S. Special Forces operator playing rock-paper-scissors with a Malian soldier during a training break because sometimes the most effective counter-insurgency tool is universal hand gestures and a little trash talk.

dominate mining amid escalating instability. AFRICOM maintains a limited footprint, with about 1,000 personnel across the continent, focusing on training and intelligence in Niger's Agadez drone base until the July 2023 coup prompted U.S. expulsion demands (USNI News, 2022). By 2025, AFRICOM has shifted to "over-the-horizon" operations from bases in Djibouti and Europe, providing $500 million annually in aid to regional partners, though effectiveness is questioned amid rising violence ISIS-Sahel doubled territorial control in Mali from 2022-2023 (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Russia's Wagner Group, deployed since 2018, has filled voids left by French Operation Barkhane's 2022 withdrawal, trading security for mining concessions in gold and uranium. In Mali, Wagner arrived in December 2021 with 1,000 fighters, securing $10 million monthly from the junta for anti-jihadist operations, though UN reports cite human rights abuses, including civilian killings and landmines (FPRI, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Wagner's June 2025 exit from Mali, claiming "mission completion" after killing thousands of militants, transitioned to the state-controlled Africa Corps, maintaining 500 personnel for influence in the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) (Al Jazeera, 2025). This rebranding followed Prigozhin's 2023 death, with Russia securing airbase access in exchange for propping up juntas (BBC, 2024). Wagner's operations in CAR and Sudan yielded $2.5 billion in gold and diamonds annually, funding Kremlin efforts (CFR, 2023; CTC West Point, 2022).

Chinese interests counter both, with state firms like Zijin Mining controlling 80% of Sahel lithium and gold via $10 billion investments, including Mali's Goulamina mine (ISW, 2025). Beijing's "non-interference" policy avoids military roles but secures resources for EV batteries; however, AES juntas' April 2025 crackdown on illegal Chinese artisanal mining, halting permits and expelling workers, signals sovereignty assertions (ISW, 2025). U.S. warnings of Chinese port militarization, like Djibouti's base near Camp Lemonnier, heighten tensions (Stars and Stripes, 2025). These proxies exacerbate instability: Sahel violence displaced 4 million by 2025, with Wagner/Africa Corps accused of atrocities prolonging conflict (VOA, 2023; CSIS, 2024).

U.S. Sanctions on Venezuela

U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, intensified since 2017 under E.O. 13808, aim to pressure Nicolás Maduro's regime for democratic backsliding, but Iranian oil trades have sustained PDVSA, echoing Cold War-era proxy support. By March 2025, the Trump administration reimposed full oil sanctions via General License 41B expiration, winding down Chevron's operations by May 27 and imposing 25% tariffs on imports from Venezuelan oil buyers like China and India (Congress.gov, 2025; White House, 2025). This followed Maduro's disputed July 2024 election, with Treasury designating 45



Nicolás Maduro and U.S. President Donald Trump.

officials for fraud, freezing $7 billion in assets (OFAC, 2025). Sanctions halved Venezuela's GDP since 2013, causing 7 million migrations, yet production rebounded to 900,000 b/d in Q1 2025 via Chevron exemptions now revoked (CGEP, 2025).

Iran, under parallel U.S. sanctions (E.O. 13846), has traded 1.5 million of sanctioned oil with Venezuela since 2020, swapping diluents for heavy crude to bypass export bans. In 2024-2025, Iran sent five tankers, including ghost fleet vessels like VIOLA, delivering 4 million barrels to Venezuela amid mutual fuel shortages (Reuters, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2025). This "oil-for-oil" lifeline, valued at $2 billion annually, evaded sanctions via ship-to-ship transfers and transponders off, funding Maduro's repression while Iran accesses markets (Foreign Policy, 2024). U.S. actions in August 2025 targeted Iran's shadow fleet, sanctioning 20 vessels and firms like Zhoushan Jinrun for handling 65 million barrels (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Venezuela's May 2025 exports held at 800,000 b/d despite snapback, with China absorbing 60% via teapot refineries (Chatham House, 2025). These trades bolster anti-U.S. alliances, with Russia and China filling gaps, complicating hemispheric stability (CGEP, 2025).

The abduction of the elected president of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro



Escorted off plane in handcuffs: First video shows Nicolás Maduro.

In the early hours of January 3, 2026, U.S. forces launched Operation Absolute Resolve, a large-scale military operation involving airstrikes on Venezuelan air defences, military infrastructure in northern Venezuela (including Greater Caracas), and a special force raid on Maduro's compound at Fort Tiuna in Caracas. The goal was to apprehend Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, who were captured unharmed and transported first to the USS Iwo Jima, then to New York City (New York Times, 2026).

President Donald Trump announced the success of the operation, framing it as a law-enforcement action (supported by military force) to address long-standing U.S. indictments against Maduro for narcoterrorism, drug trafficking, and related charges dating back to 2020. Maduro and Flores appeared in a Manhattan federal court on January 5, 2026, where they pleaded not guilty; Maduro described himself as a "prisoner of war" (Reuters, 2026; CBS News, 2026). The strikes resulted in significant casualties, including at least 23 Venezuelan military personnel, 32 Cuban military/security personnel, and several civilians, with limited U.S. injuries reported (Wikipedia, 2026).

The Power Vacuum: Mechanisms of Immediate Political Transition

Following Maduro's removal, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez (a key Maduro loyalist and U.S.-sanctioned figure) was sworn in as interim president on January 5, 2026, by the Venezuelan National Assembly and Supreme Court. She has denounced the U.S. action as an "illegitimate military aggression" and a "kidnapping," while initiating "exploratory" talks to restore diplomatic relations with the United States. The interim government has released several political prisoners (at least 18 reported, including some opposition figures) as a conciliatory gesture amid U.S. pressure (Al Jazeera, 2026; CSIS, 2026).

The U.S. administration has emphasized working with elements of the existing regime for stability, with Trump initially stating the U.S. would "run" Venezuela temporarily to oversee a "judicious transition" and refurbish its oil infrastructure (the country holds the world's largest proven reserves, over 300 billion barrels). Secretary of State Marco Rubio later clarified no formal U.S. governance role, focusing instead on enforcing oil quarantines and counter-narcotics efforts (Brookings, 2026; Foreign Affairs, 2026).

Ongoing Security and Humanitarian Situation

The situation remains volatile:

- Pro-regime armed militias (colectivos) have set up roadblocks, conducted searches, and targeted perceived U.S. supporters or collaborators.
- The U.S. State Department issued a Level 4 "Do Not Travel" advisory for Venezuela, urging immediate departure due to risks

of arbitrary detention, civil unrest, and paramilitary activity (U.S. Embassy in Venezuela, 2026).

- Reports indicate a tense calm in Caracas, with limited civilian movement, business closures, and concerns over potential repression or new waves of violence (The Guardian, 2026).

Trump has threatened further strikes if the interim government fails to cooperate fully, including on oil revenue sharing and drug interdiction. He has also posted provocative content on Truth Social, styling himself as "Acting President of Venezuela" in a mock Wikipedia image (January 12, 2026).

International condemnation and Broader Implications

Reactions are sharply divided:

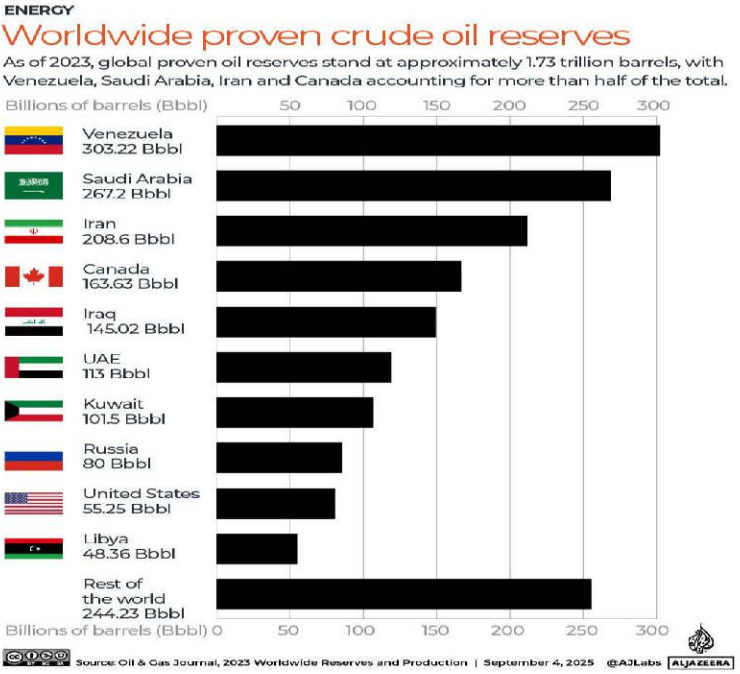
- Strong condemnations from Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, and the UN (including experts calling it a violation of international law and sovereignty) (UN News, 2026; Chatham House, 2026).
- Support from some right-leaning Latin American leaders (e.g., Argentina's Javier Milei, El Salvador's Nayib Bukele) who view it as a blow to "narco-Chavismo."
- The operation has evoked comparisons to past U.S. interventions (e.g., Panama 1989) and raised fears of regional instability, refugee flows, and precedents for future actions (NPR, 2026; International Crisis Group, 2026).

- As Tucker Carlson Said: I think it's like a pivot point in history and I don't fully understand what it means. It is a totally new way of conducting diplomacy slash foreign policy slash military action. This is a new thing because Trump didn't dress it up with a lot of lying about democracy or human rights. He's like, no, we want the oil. And like, this guy's bad and we're taking him out and we're going to run it. We're going to run it, essentially. We're going to have our very large United States oil companies go in and start making money for the country. No one alive has seen anything like that beforehand. And that's why I'm saying I think we're, for good or bad, fully in the empire stage of civilizational development. The republic stage is over.

Economically, Venezuelan bonds surged, and oil-related stocks reacted positively in anticipation of potential U.S. involvement in PDVSA refurbishment, though uncertainty persists (Reuters, 2026). Venezuela now stands at a critical juncture: the Maduro era has ended through external force, but the Chavista power structure largely remains. Whether this leads to a genuine democratic opening, prolonged U.S.-backed transition, or renewed conflict depends on negotiations, prisoner releases, elections, and the balance of internal forces in the coming months.

This dramatic shift stems from the unresolved 2024 presidential election crisis (widely seen as fraudulent) and escalating U.S. pressure via sanctions, naval blockades, and counter-drug operations.

Venezuela's Oil Resources



Venezuela possesses the world's largest proven oil reserves, estimated at approximately 303 billion barrels as of recent assessments, primarily consisting of extra-heavy crude oil located in the Orinoco Belt in the eastern part of the country (Al Jazeera, 2026); Congress.gov, 2026; AP News, 2026). This vast resource base represents about 17-20% of global proven reserves, dwarfing those of Saudi Arabia (around 259 billion barrels) and other major producers, though much of it is challenging to extract due to its high viscosity and Sulphur content, requiring advanced upgrading technologies (Visual Capitalist, 2026). Despite this potential, current production has plummeted to around 800,000-1 million barrels per day (bpd) less than 1% of global output down from peaks of over 3 million

ExxonMobil, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips to invest up to $100 billion in refurbishing "rotting" infrastructure, promising "total safety and security" in exchange for controlling oil sales and revenues to prevent funds from supporting adversarial regimes (Reuters, 2026; The Guardian, 2026; The New York Times, 2026). This includes an initial transfer of 30-50 million barrels of sanctioned oil to the U.S., valued at $2-3 billion, potentially replenishing the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and aiding domestic refineries suited to heavy crude (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; Time Magazine, 2026). However, industry scepticism persists due to political risks, legal hurdles from prior asset seizures, and the long timeline for returns, with some analysts labelling the plans "delusional" in a low-price environment averaging $55 per barrel (Bipartisan Policy Centre, 2026; The Atlantic, 2026; Holland & Knight, 2026). Broader U.S. interests extend to rare earth minerals critical for technology and defence, positioning Venezuela as a strategic alternative to Chinese dominance in supply chains (CNN Business, 2026).

Neo Colonial Plan to Carve up the world

The U.S. intervention has profoundly altered Latin American geopolitics, reviving echoes of the Monroe Doctrine by asserting U.S. primacy in the Western Hemisphere and potentially destabilizing regional alliances (Brookings Institution, 2026; Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; Foreign Affairs, 2026). This action risks creating a power vacuum in Venezuela, exacerbating migration flows, criminal networks, and illicit economies that spill into neighbouring Colombia, Brazil, and the Caribbean, while dividing Latin American responses support from right-leaning governments like Argentina and El Salvador contrasts with condemnations from Mexico, Brazil, and others viewing it as a

sovereignty violation (Geopolitical Futures, 2025; IISS, 2026; CSIS, 2026). Broader implications include heightened political risk for emerging markets, oil price volatility, and a shift toward U.S.-led economic integration to counter external influences, though rapid U.S. disengagement could prolong instability and hinder democratic transitions (BlackRock, 2026; Allianz Global Investors, 2026; Network Ideas, 2026).

Geopolitical maps highlighting influences in Latin America involving Venezuela:

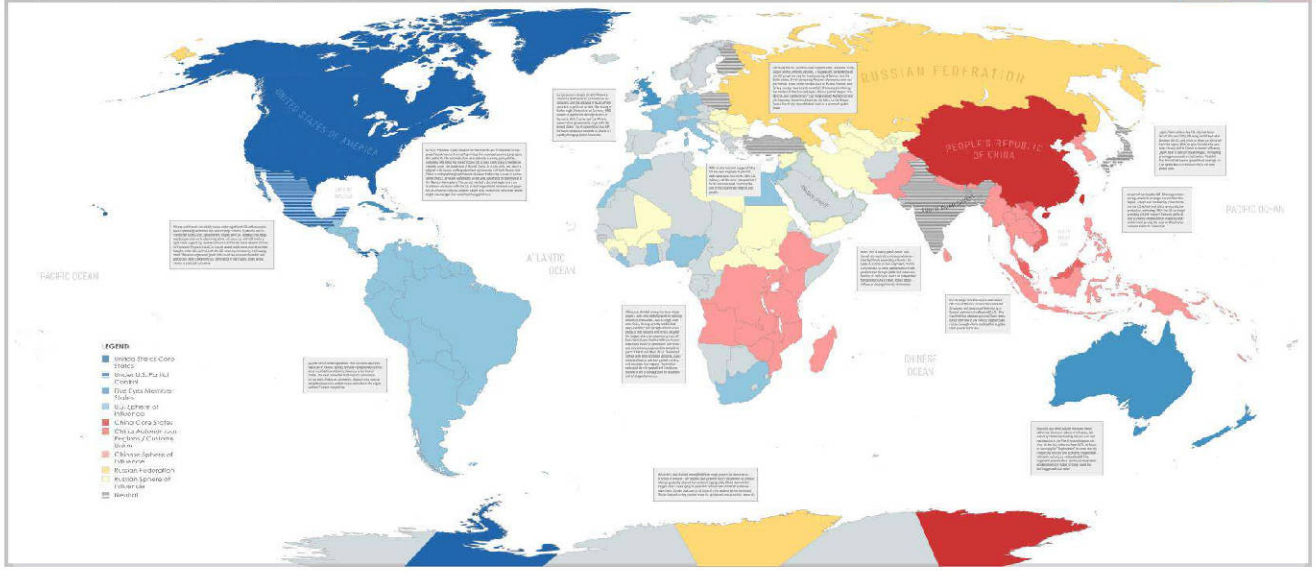


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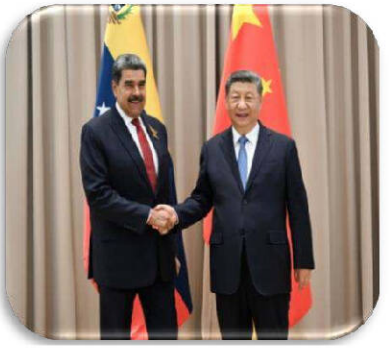
AMERICA · RUSSIA · CHINA

THE NEO-COLONIAL PLAN TO CARVE UP THE WORLD.

The world as we know it is changing. In the wake of President Trump's shift towards isolationism and nationalism, a new geopolitical order began to take shape, marked by a retreat from globalism and the rise of isolationist ideologies. This dramatic transformation culminated in the signing of the A.R.C. Treaty (America, Russia, China Treaty), a historic agreement that redrawn the global balance of power. Often referred to as "Yalta 2.0," the treaty marked the beginning of a new era, where old alliances fractured, and nations were forced to adapt to an increasingly fragmented world. The treaty enabled the carving up of territories, with America, Russia, and China dividing influence across Europe, Asia, Africa, and beyond. In this new world, leaders and nations' spheres of influence were solidified, and the legacy of global cooperation has given way to a harsh, pragmatic view of diplomatic dominance. In this new world, the balance of power is determined by consumer, but by force - "where might means right".



Influence of Russia and China in the Region



Xi Jinping Meets with Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Russia and China have exerted significant influence in Venezuela, providing economic lifelines, military support, and diplomatic backing that sustained the Maduro regime amid U.S. sanctions (Reuters, 2026; CSIS, 2026; The Diplomat, 2026). China, as the largest buyer of Venezuelan crude, has extended over $60 billion in loans-for-oil deals since 2007, funding infrastructure while gaining discounted energy supplies and military footholds, including radar systems (Al Jazeera, 2026; CNN, 2026). Russia has supplied arms, military advisors, and energy partnerships via Rosneft, viewing Venezuela as a strategic counterweight to U.S. dominance in the Americas (AEI, 2026; The Guardian, 2026). Post-intervention, this influence has waned, with both nations spreading disinformation to undermine U.S. actions, though their ties with the interim government persist transactionally (Washington Post, 2026; Bruegel, 2026).

U.S. insecurities stem from fears of Russia and China establishing enduring footholds in the Western Hemisphere, challenging American hegemony and threatening key chokepoints like the Panama Canal (Reuters, 2026; CSIS, 2026). The intervention signals a "keep away" message to Beijing, amid concerns over Chinese military-tech transfers and economic leverage that could mirror Taiwan scenarios (Carnegie Endowment, 2026; BBC, 2026). Broader worries include escalating global

risks, potential showdowns if Venezuela severs ties with Moscow and Beijing as demanded, and the erosion of international norms (The Atlantic, 2026; Stimson Centre, 2026; MS Now, 2026).

Economic Leverage: Venezuela and the US Economy



Active pumpjacks extracting crude oil from a sprawling subterranean field.

Venezuela's oil reserves have historically offered leverage in global markets, but the US military capture of Nicolás Maduro on 3 January 2026 during Operation Absolute Resolve dramatically shifted control toward American interests (United States of America v. Nicolás Maduro, 2026). President Trump subsequently urged US oil companies to invest up to $100 billion in rebuilding Venezuela's energy sector, with promises of security and rapid production increases (Fox Business, 2026; The New York Times, 2026). Analysts project potential output recovery to 1.3–1.4 million barrels per day within years if investments materialise and stability holds, enhancing US energy security and lowering fuel prices amid global oversupply (Reuters, 2026; JPMorgan cited in Reuters, 2026).

The "cartel" debate blends reality and strategy. Venezuela remains an OPEC member with coordinated quotas, but the "Cartel of the Suns" refers to alleged high-level military involvement in drug trafficking. The 2020 US indictment accused Maduro of narco-terrorism and leading this

network with groups like FARC (United States of America v. Nicolás Maduro, 2026). However, the 2026 superseding indictment (unsealed post-capture) largely abandoned claims of a formal "Cartel de los Soles" organization, reframing it as a broader "patronage system" and "culture of corruption" funded by drugs (The New York Times, 202). Critics view this evolution as evidence that the original allegations served as a pretext for regime change and oil access, rather than a proven cartel structure (Common Dreams, 2026; Le Monde, 2026). Nonetheless, DEA evidence supports systemic elite corruption tied to trafficking (Insight Crime, 2025).

Saudi Aramco: Operations and Potential Challenges from China/Russia



The Saudi Aramco refinery.

Saudi Aramco is overwhelmingly Saudi-controlled, with the government holding ~81.48% directly and the Public Investment Fund ~16%, totalling over 97% dominance (Saudi Aramco announcements, 2024). Foreign stakes (including US) arose via the 2019 IPO and 2024 secondary offering, but regulations cap foreign ownership at 49% with government veto power. Operations remain under Riyadh's management, bolstered by historical petrodollar ties providing indirect US influence.

China and Russia have pursued partnerships via multibillion-dollar refinery investments and Russia through pre-IPO discussions, but no evidence suggests demands for major shares or operational control in 2026

(various reports, 2023–2025). Escalation risks exist amid OPEC+ dynamics and diversification, yet Saudi sovereignty prioritizes continuity.

The United States as a Modern Empire: Inevitable Decline?



New York City skyline image (Empire State Building at golden hour).

The US operates as an informal empire through military bases, alliances, economic hegemony, and soft power post-WWII, distinct from territorial conquests like Rome or Britain (various historical analyses). Predictions of decline have intensified: some foresaw the "American Century" fading by 2025, with economic power shifting Eastward (e.g., China surpassing US output around 2026) due to debt, polarisation, overextension, and rivals (Global Trends 2025; McCoy, 2010/updated discussions). Recent events, including Venezuela intervention, underscore aggressive assertions amid perceived vulnerability (Atlantic Council, 2026). Historical empires fall from combined internal decay and external pressures; adaptive reforms might delay, but no empire endures indefinitely (Todd, various works). Injustice in resource exploitation perpetuates inequality, conflict, and potential anarchy. Unequal trade and economic colonialism foster instability in an anarchic global system, where "bully states" exacerbate poverty cycles (various global inequality studies). Systemic injustice undermines sustainable prosperity, as historical empire collapses illustrate how environmental/economic strains trigger breakdown. Equitable sharing and justice are prerequisites for harmony and growth, reducing exploitation-driven chaos.

Trade Not Aid: Sharing Resources Instead of Snatching

The **"trade does not aid"** philosophy argues that liberalising trade access for developing countries promotes self-sufficiency, job creation, and sustainable growth far more effectively than direct aid, which risks dependency, inefficiency, and waste (Economics Help, n.d.; Oxford Reference, n.d.). Aid often creates cultures of reliance and can be



Trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) during active trading hours.

politically tied or misallocated (Friedman, 1995).

In contrast, trade integrates nations into global markets, as seen in Southeast Asia's export-led success (e.g., China lifting millions from poverty via trade over aid) (Economics Help, n.d.). Empirical studies show mixed aid impacts on growth, often conditional on institutions, while trade fosters comparative advantage and independence (Burnside and Dollar, 2000; various meta-analyses). Fair resource sharing through trade avoids "snatching," ensuring enough for all via mutual benefit rather than exploitation. This interconnected analysis highlights how power,

resources, and justice shape global stability. Equitable approaches offer pathways beyond dominance and decline.

U.S. Diplomatic measures in Mali and Cuba to counter their governments



A U.S. Army soldier hands boxes of humanitarian aid from a CH-47 Chinook to local workers during earthquake relief operations, February 2023.

U.S. training in Mali, via International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Flintlock exercises, equipped 1,500 troops annually but inadvertently empowered coup leaders. Colonel Assimi Goïta, architect of the August 2020 and May 2021 coups, completed U.S. courses in 2016 and participated in 2019 Flintlock, focusing on counterterrorism tactics (Washington Post, 2020; Anti-Empire, 2020). IMET, costing $5 million yearly, emphasized human rights but failed to instil democratic norms, as coup plotters like Goïta used skills against civilian rule (Foreign Policy, 2020; USIP, 2021). Post-2020 coup, U.S. suspended aid, but pre-coup missions at Kati base trained 10,000 soldiers, contributing to the 2012 Tuareg rebellion fallout (Al Jazeera, 2021; Reuters, 2020). EU's EUTM Mali, training 15,000 since 2013, froze operations post-coup, highlighting superficial impacts (EEAS, n.d.; USIP, 2021).

Cuban medical diplomacy counters U.S. influence through 30,000 personnel in 60 countries, generating $8 billion annually while projecting solidarity (Feinsilver, 2010). In Venezuela, 25,000 Cuban doctors under

Barrio Adentro since 2003 provide primary care to 80% of the population, bartering services for oil amid sanctions (Science Open, 2023). U.S. 2025 visa restrictions on Cuban officials, labelling missions "forced labour" (90% wages retained by Havana), aim to dismantle this, but Caribbean leaders like Trinidad's Keith Rowley defend them for filling gaps in dialysis and COVID response (Reuters, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025a). Cuba's Henry Reeve Brigades treated 7 million during Ebola and COVID, earning G77+China presidency in 2023 for South-South cooperation (Think Global Health, n.d.; Peoples Dispatch, 2025). Critics note exploitation, with doctors under surveillance, yet impacts include training 70,000 global physicians via ELAM (HIR, 2024; PubMed, 2011). Proxy wars in the Sahel and Latin America multiply Cold War-era rivalries, with U.S. bases and sanctions clash against Russian allies, Chinese mines, Cuban and Iranian trades. These entanglements secure resources but negatively impact economic and political stability thus affecting the day-to-day life of vulnerable nations. Sahel displacements hit 4 million, Venezuela's economy contracted 75% since 2013 demanding reevaluated strategies prioritising governance over militarisation. As of October 2025, adaptive U.S. policies could mitigate escalation, fostering multilateralism to counter authoritarian alliances.

Part III:

Cyber Threats and Future strategies

CHAPTER 21

Technological and Cyber warfare



The technological and cyber domains have emerged as the "invisible battlespace" of modern great-power competition, where state-sponsored actors wage asymmetric warfare through espionage, disruption, and influence operations. These fronts, often operating below the threshold of kinetic conflict, leverage vulnerabilities in global supply chains, critical infrastructure, and digital platforms to achieve strategic objectives. The U.S. has faced persistent threats from adversaries like Russia and China, exemplified by sophisticated hacks and data exfiltration campaigns. This chapter examines U.S.-adversary cyber campaigns, the escalating AI arms race through export controls, and the enduring impacts of revelations like NSA's PRISM program and ongoing TikTok security reviews, underscoring the blurred lines between innovation, security, and sovereignty as of October 2025.

U.S.-Adversary Cyber Campaigns



U.S. Cyber Command's Joint Operations Centre at Fort Meade, Maryland: soldiers and officers monitor global networks in real time, 2020s.

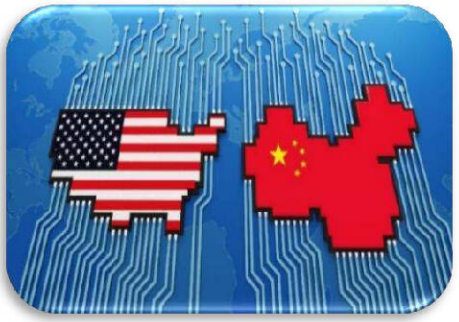
U.S.-adversary cyber campaigns have targeted both government and private sector networks, with the 2020 SolarWinds hack and 2021 Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack serving as stark illustrations of espionage and disruption tactics. The SolarWinds breach, discovered in December 2020, involved Russian state-sponsored actors attributed to APT29 (Cozy Bear), linked to Russia's SVR inserting malicious code (Sunburst backdoor) into updates of SolarWinds' Orion software, affecting versions 2019.4 through 2020.2.1 HF1 (TechTarget, 2025). Hackers gained initial access in September 2019, conducting a "dry run" in October before deploying the implant in February 2020, allowing up to 14 months of undetected access (NPR, 2021). Over 18,000 customers downloaded the tainted updates, but attackers focused on high-value targets, including U.S. agencies like the Departments of Treasury, Commerce, Energy, and Homeland Security, as well as firms like Microsoft, Intel, and FireEye (CSO Online, 2021; Online Hash Crack, 2025). The supply-chain compromise enabled lateral movement, data exfiltration, and further malware deployment, marking it as one of the most significant espionage operations in U.S. history (Taylor & Francis, 2021). FireEye's November 2020 detection triggered a global response, with CISA issuing Emergency Directive 21-01 on December 13, mandating vulnerability scans and update removals Impacts included

reconnaissance on critical infrastructure and potential economic sabotage, prompting Biden's April 2021 sanctions on Russian entities and a 2022 executive order on cybersecurity (NPR, 2021; Oxford Academic, 2022).

The Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack in May 2021 highlighted vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure, perpetrated by the Russia-based Darkside group using ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS). Hackers exploited a compromised VPN password lacking multifactor authentication to steal 100 gigabytes of data in two hours before encrypting systems, including billing and accounting (TechTarget, 2025; INSURICA, 2025). On May 7, Colonial proactively shut down its 5,500-mile pipeline supplying 45% of East Coast fuel causing shortages, panic buying, and a 4-cent/gallon price spike (CISA, 2023). The company paid a $4.4 million Bitcoin ransom on May 8 to expedite recovery, though operations resumed partially by May 12 (Wall Street Journal, 2025; MSSP Alert, 2024). The FBI confirmed Darkside's role on May 10, recovering $2.3 million in June via a private key seizure (Georgetown Environmental Law Review, n.d.). Biden declared a national emergency on May 9, suspending Jones Act waivers and fuel transport limits, while TSA issued binding cybersecurity directives for pipelines (CISA, 2023; HSDL, 2025). The incident, not state-sponsored but enabled by Russia's lax cybercrime enforcement, exposed OT/IT convergence risks and spurred the Joint Ransomware Task Force (CISA, 2023; WALLIX, 2023).

These campaigns underscore adversaries use of cyber tools for hybrid warfare, eroding trust in digital ecosystems and prompting U.S. investments in resilience, though attribution challenges persist (FPRI, 2022; VOA, 2023).

AI Arms Race: Export Bans on Dual-Use Tech to China and Russia



The AI arms race has intensified U.S. efforts to curb adversaries' access to dual-use technologies, with export bans targeting semiconductors and AI model weights to maintain strategic superiority. Initiated in October 2022, these controls restricted advanced chips (e.g., Nvidia A100/H100) to China and Russia, citing military applications in surveillance and autonomous weapons (US Import Data, 2025; Reuters, 2025). By December 2024, BIS added 140 entities to the Entity List, expanded the Foreign Direct Product Rule, and capped high-bandwidth memory exports, while January 2025's AI Diffusion Framework introduced tiered licensing: Tier 1 allies (e.g., 18 partners like Japan) receive exemptions; Tier 2 nations face quotas (26.9 million TPP annually); Tier 3 (China, Russia, Iran) bans apply (CSIS, 2025a; Sidley Austin, 2025). The Foundry Due Diligence Rule mandates advanced node (≤16nm) reporting, effective January 31, 2025 (Sidley Austin, 2025). These measures, building on 2023 expansions to UAE/Saudi Arabia, aim to prevent AI-enabled threats, with trackers embedded in high-risk shipments since 2024 (Reuters, 2025a; Carnegie, 2025).

Impacts are mixed: U.S. AI chip exports hit $57.5 billion in 2024, but bans spurred China's stockpiling and domestic innovation, like DeepSeek's January 2025 model rivalling U.S. benchmarks despite Huawei's limited 200,000-chip output (Brookings, 2025; AI Frontiers, 2025). Russia faces

similar curbs, with 2025 sanctions blocking AI for Ukraine operations (CFR, 2025). Critics argue overreach risks alienating Tier 2 markets to Chinese firms like Huawei, potentially eroding U.S. leadership (Semi analysis, 2025; Washington Post, 2025). A May 2025 U.S.-UAE AI chip deal exemplifies allied alignment, but smuggling via Malaysia (3GW datacentre capacity) persists.

NSA's PRISM Revelations Impact and TikTok Security Reviews



The NSA's PRISM program, exposed by Edward Snowden in June 2013, revealed mass surveillance via direct access to servers of nine tech giants (e.g., Google, Apple, Microsoft) under FISA Amendments Act Section 702, collecting emails, chats, and metadata since 2007 (Guardian, 2013). Snowden, a 29-year-old NSA contractor, leaked documents from Hawaii, sparking global outrage and his flight to Hong Kong (Guardian, 2013b; BBC, 2014). Impacts included eroded trust. U.S. cloud firms lost $35 billion by 2016 and a "Snowden effect": surged encryption adoption, Dark Mail's launch, and tech shifts from U.S. providers (EFF, 2023; Wikipedia, 2025d). Internationally, Merkel condemned NSA tapping, Brazil cancelled a U.S. visit, and EU leaders decried "nightmarish" GCHQ/NSA Temporary cable-tapping (BBC, 2014; Guardian, 2013c). Domestically, it fuelled Section 702 reforms, XKeyscore scrutiny, and debates on EO 12333 (EFF, 2023; Lyon, 2014). Snowden faces Espionage Act charges but gained Russian citizenship in 2022 (BBC, 2014; CRF, n.d.).

TikTok's security reviews, ongoing since 2020, culminated in the April 2024 Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act (PAFACAA), mandating ByteDance divest by January 19, 2025, or face a ban over CCP data access risks (Ohio University, 2025). Reviews cited algorithm manipulation for influence, with 27% of 2024 candidates using TikTok (RAND, 2024; FactCheck.org, 2025). ByteDance spent $27 million lobbying; TikTok sued, but the Supreme Court upheld PAFACA on January 17, 2025 (HKLaw, 2025; Forbes, 2025). Trump delayed enforcement via executive order on January 20, 2025, seeking diplomacy (Forbes, 2025; Britannica, 2024). Public support dropped to 34% by March 2025 (Pew, 2025), amid free speech concerns and potential extension to other Chinese apps (American University, 2025; CSIS, 2024). TikTok suspended U.S. services voluntarily on January 18, 2025. Cyber and technological fronts represent a shadowy escalation in U.S.-adversary rivalries, from SolarWinds' espionage to AI export chokepoints. Snowden's PRISM leaks and TikTok's ban saga highlight tensions between security and rights, demanding balanced reforms. As of October 2025, with Trump's TikTok reprieve and evolving bans, the U.S. must navigate innovation without isolation, lest it cede ground in this invisible battlespace.

U.S. Approach: Multilateralism or Isolationism


U.S. Secretary of State Marco

The U.S. grand strategy is at crossroads, between multilateral engagement and isolationist retrenchment. Multilateralism, as seen in frameworks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and C51, offers pathways to counter adversaries through alliances. The Quad's 2024 and 2025 summits, advancing maritime security and AI cooperation, exemplify collective deterrence against China's Indo-Pacific ambitions, with India's $3.99 billion Predator drone deal bolstering regional capabilities (White House, 2024; The Hindu, 2024). Similarly, C51's $140 million investment in Central Asia's energy routes reduces Russian influence, fostering autonomy via the Trans-Caspian corridor (U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, 2023). These efforts align with Biden's 2022 National Security Strategy, emphasizing alliances to shape global norms, as seen in export controls on AI chips to China and Russia, involving 18 allied nations by January 2025 (CSIS, 2025).

Conversely, isolationist pressures, amplified by Trump's 2025 return, risk unravelling these gains. His reimposition of Venezuelan oil sanctions and TikTok ban enforcement reflect a unilateral approach, alienating partners like Caribbean nations defending Cuban medical diplomacy (Reuters, 2025; White House, 2025). The 2018 aid suspension to Pakistan and withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) under Trump illustrate isolationism's costs, emboldening adversaries like Iran's oil trade with

Venezuela (CGEP, 2025). Isolationism also weakens multilateral forums; for instance, U.S. reluctance to fund UN humanitarian appeals only 23% of Afghanistan's $3.2 billion 2024 appeal was met undermines global stability (OCHA, 2025). A hybrid strategy, balancing selective multilateralism with strategic autonomy, could optimize U.S. influence, leveraging NATO, QUAD, and C51 while avoiding overreach in regions like the Sahel, where AFRICOM's expulsion from Niger post-2023 coup highlights limits (USNI News, 2022).

The choice is critical: multilateralism fosters burden-sharing but risks entanglements, while isolationism cedes space to adversaries. China's $62 billion CPEC and Russia's Wagner/Africa Corps operations in Mali exploit U.S. restraint, suggesting a balanced approach is needed to avoid



Delegates convene at a conference organized by the OSCE Mission to Moldova on security and cooperation in Europe, Chisinau, 2025 amid ongoing efforts to mediate the Transnistria conflict and reinforce Moldova's territorial integrity.

collision (ISW, 2025; CFR, 2023).

Track-II Dialogues and Confidence-Building Measures

Despite risks of collision, Track-II dialogues and confidence-building measures (CBMs) offer pathways to de-escalation. Track-II initiatives,

involving non-governmental experts, have shown promise in South Asia. The 2023 Uzbekistan-led conference on Afghanistan, involving Central Asian states, facilitated trade agreements like the Termez-Hairaton bridge, stabilizing cross-border dynamics (The Diplomat, 2025). Similar dialogues between U.S. and Chinese think tanks, such as the 2024 Brookings-Tsinghua talks, explored AI governance, proposing joint standards to mitigate arms race risks (Brookings, 2025). In the Sahel, Track-II engagements between U.S. and Russian academics in 2024 proposed neutral humanitarian corridors, though Wagner's exit and Africa Corps' rise limited impact (FPRI, 2022).

CBMs can build trust. The Quad's IPMDA, sharing maritime data with India, reduced miscalculations in the South China Sea, while C51's 2025 Critical Minerals Dialogue aligned Central Asian states with U.S. standards, easing resource tensions (CSIS, 2024a; Atlantic Council, 2025). Cyber CBMs, like the 2023 U.S.-China agreement on ransomware attribution, reduced non-state attacks, though state-sponsored hacks like SolarWinds persist (CFR, 2025). In Latin America, U.S. support for Colombia's 2024 peace talks with ELN rebels, offering $50 million for reintegration, models regional CBMs (USIP, 2024). Extending these to Venezuela via neutral mediators like Norway could ease sanctions-related tensions, though Maduro's intransigence remains a hurdle (Foreign Policy, 2024). Optimistic scenarios hinge on expanding these mechanisms. A U.S.-Russia Track-II channel on Sahel security, proposed in 2025 by CSIS, could limit proxy escalation, while Quad-led cyber norms with China could prevent AI-driven conflicts (CSIS, 2025b). However, success requires consistent U.S. commitment, avoiding isolationist reversals like Trump's TikTok delay, which risks undermining PAFACAA's enforcement (Forbes, 2025).

Technological and cyber warfare reveal the New Cold War's hidden frontlines, where innovation becomes a weapon and vulnerabilities invite catastrophe. The AI race and surveillance scandals demand ethical boundaries to preserve sovereignty. Embracing multilateral norms could transform this battlespace from peril to progress.

Conclusion

As we reach the end of this exploration into the New Cold War a multipolar mosaic of proxy conflicts, economic coercion, technological races, and existential perils the contours of our shared global predicament come into sharper focus. The world of late 2025 stands at a precarious threshold: neither the stable bipolarity of the original Cold War nor the fleeting unipolar dominance of the post-1991 era, but a volatile, anarchic multipolar system where the United States, China, Russia, and regional powers compete across interconnected domains without the restraining clarity of old ideologies. From Trump's sweeping tariffs and the rerouting of critical supply chains, to the brief but harrowing May 2025 air battles between India and Pakistan, the protracted shadow war in Ukraine, escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and proxy entanglements from the Sahel to Yemen, the events chronicled in these pages reveal a pattern: great-power rivalry now manifests less through direct confrontation and more through indirect, hybrid, and often deniable means.

The PESTEL Architecture introduced in Chapter 1 has served as the analytical scaffold for this journey, illuminating how these crises are not isolated but structurally linked within an anarchic multipolar order. Politically, proxy and hybrid warfare have become the preferred instruments of influence, allowing powers to test resolve while avoiding

nuclear thresholds. Economically, weaponised interdependence exemplified by export controls on advanced semiconductors, retaliatory mineral restrictions, and universal tariff regimes has transformed globalised networks into arenas of coercion and decoupling. Socially, middle powers and smaller states increasingly hedge, balancing rival patrons to preserve autonomy amid influence fragmentation.

Technologically and in cyberspace, the invisible battlespace of AI arms races, state-sponsored intrusions, and informational manipulation has emerged as the primary frontier. Environmentally, competition over rare earths, Arctic routes, and water resources adds a deepening layer of scarcity-driven peril. Finally, in the legal and multilateral domain, the erosion of arms-control treaties and the straining of institutions underscore both the risks of unilateralism and the fragile promise of confidence-building measures.

Viewed through this PESTEL chain, the New Cold War is revealed not as a simple replay of 20th-century bipolarity but as a far more complex and dangerous tapestry one in which miscalculations can cascade rapidly across domains and regions, carrying the potential for catastrophic escalation. Yet this same architecture highlights pathways forward. The interconnectedness it exposes is double-edged: while it amplifies peril, it also creates opportunities for de-escalation through selective multilateralism and non-official channels.

Track-II dialogues quiet, expert-led conversations between think tanks, academics, retired officials, and civil-society figures- offer hope. They have already proven effective in limited contexts: facilitating maritime data-sharing in the Indo-Pacific, exploring AI governance norms between U.S. and Chinese institutions, and stabilising cross-border dynamics in