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THE CONFLICT OF INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE ROLE OF THE USA, RUSSIA AND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

With its vast energy reserves, strategic location, and complex socio-political landscape, the Middle East has been a central arena of global power struggle for centuries, attracting the attention of international powers. Today, the region is witnessing significant geopolitical competition between the United States, Russia, and China, each vying for influence and seeking to shape the future of the Middle East according to their strategic interests. The roles and interests of these three countries in the Middle East are manifested in the following directions.

KEYWORDS

Middle East, energy reserves, strategic location, complex socio-political landscape, geopolitical competition, seeking to form according to its strategic interests.

INTRODUCTION

United States: Long-Term Impact and Strategic Interests.

The United States has historically maintained a dominant role in the Middle East for economic, military, and ideological motivations. During the Cold War, the US sought to counter Soviet influence by forming strong alliances with key regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Egypt. These alliances are based on a mutual interest in securing access to the

region's vast oil reserves, which are vital to the global economy and the industrialized nations of the West.

In the decades following World War II, the United States adopted a policy of containment aimed at preventing the spread of communism in the Middle East. The policy was evident in US support for anti-Soviet regimes and groups such as the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. However, the end of the Cold War did not reduce US involvement in the region. The

1991 Gulf War was a major military intervention in which the United States led a coalition to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, reinforcing its commitment to regional security and stability.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks marked a turning point in US involvement in the Middle East. The subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were justified by the US as necessary measures to fight terrorism and promote democracy. However, these interventions have been widely criticized for destabilizing the region and leading to protracted conflicts. The US presence in Iraq, in particular, has become a focus of regional conflict, fueling sectarian violence and the eventual emergence of ISIS.

Despite these challenges, the United States continues to maintain a significant military presence in the Middle East, with bases in countries such as Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. These military installations are not only important for projecting power in the region but also serve as a deterrent against potential adversaries such as Iran. In addition, the United States has consistently supported Israel, providing it with military aid and diplomatic support, especially in conflicts with neighboring Arab states and Palestinian groups.

However, the US has been criticized for its role in perpetuating the conflict and for its double standards, particularly in its relations with authoritarian regimes in the region. The 2011 Arab Spring, which saw popular uprisings across the Middle East, further complicated US relations with regional governments, as the US was often torn between supporting democratic movements and maintaining stability in the region.

Russia: recovery and strategic calculations.

Russia's involvement in the Middle East has been marked by a strategic resurgence under President

Vladimir Putin, who has sought to restore Russian influence in global affairs, partly in response to what he sees as Western aggression. Russia's most significant intervention in the region has been military support for the Assad regime in Syria since 2015. The intervention marked a turning point in Syria's civil war, allowing the Assad government to recapture key areas from rebel forces and troops. Significantly changed the balance of power in the region.

Russia's intervention in Syria was motivated by several strategic interests. First, Syria is Russia's last ally in the Arab world, and the naval facility in Tartus is Russia's only military base in the Mediterranean.

Securing this base is critical to Russia's ability to project power in the Middle East and beyond. Second, by supporting Assad, Russia aims to establish itself as an indispensable power broker capable of negotiating with all parties in the region, including Iran, Turkey, Israel and various rebel groups.

Russia has also sought to expand its influence in the wider Middle East through arms sales, energy deals, and diplomatic ties. Countries such as Egypt, Libya and Iran are turning to Russia for military equipment and political support, often as an alternative to Western suppliers. This allowed Russia to deepen its ties with key regional players and challenge US dominance in the region.

Moreover, Russia's approach to the Middle East is characterized by a pragmatic, flexible strategy that contrasts with the more ideological policy of the United States. Moscow is willing to cooperate with a wide range of actors, including Hamas and Hezbollah, which are considered enemies by the West, allowing it to maintain a wide network of influence across the region.

China: Economic Cooperation and Strategic Ambitions.

China's involvement in the Middle East is relatively recent compared to the United States and Russia but has been growing steadily as part of China's broader global strategy. The Middle East is critical to China's energy security, as the region provides a significant portion of China's oil imports. In 2019, China imported nearly 50 percent of its crude oil from the Middle East, making the region's stability and security critical to China's economic interests.

China's main mode of involvement in the Middle East has been through economic initiatives, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to create a vast network of trade routes linking Asia, Africa and Europe. The Middle East is central to this initiative, with China investing in infrastructure projects, energy development and trade partnerships across the region. China, for example, has signed multibillion-dollar deals with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE, covering a range of sectors from oil production to telecommunications.

Unlike the US and Russia, China has avoided direct military intervention in the Middle East, preferring to use economic and diplomatic means to expand its influence. This approach has allowed China to maintain good relations with a wide range of countries in the region, including mutually hostile countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. This balancing act positioned China as a neutral actor primarily interested in economic cooperation rather than political or military dominance in the region.

However, China's rise in the Middle East is not without challenges. As China becomes more involved in the region, pressure to take sides in regional conflicts and protect its investments in a volatile and frequently changing environment may increase. China's close ties

with Iran have also raised concerns among the United States and its allies, which could lead to a rift in Sino-American relations.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Middle East remains the center of geopolitical competition between global powers, with the United States, Russia, and China each pursuing their interests in different ways—military, diplomatic, and economic. The US, with its long-standing military presence and alliances, seeks to maintain its influence amid changing regional dynamics. Russia has reasserted its role as a major power broker through its strategic interventions and pragmatic diplomacy. China is steadily expanding its influence as part of its broader global strategy, focusing on economic activity. As these powers continue to vie for influence, the future of the Middle East will likely be shaped by the interplay and competition between them.

The region's complex web of alliances, conflicts, and economic dependencies means that the balance of power is constantly shifting and has far-reaching implications for global stability.

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