

Abstract

This study interrogated U.S Foreign Policy in the Middle East: An Assessment of Donald Trump Administration, 2017-2021. The study was anchored on realist theory as theoretical framework. The study argued that the core concern of Donald Trump was to enhance the prosperity of Americans by disengaging in deep engagements with Middle East crisis. This perspective will facilitate in looking inwards to problems of America domestically which informed his position of Americans first policy. Trump's character impacted in lack of grand strategy in dealing with broader issues of foreign policy in the Middle East. The study posits that the regimes declaration of Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel complicated the peace process in the Middle East as whole. Its romance with authoritarian regimes, its withdrawal from the JCPOA, lack of political reform as long term foreign policy of the U.S in Middle East region complicates the volatile area which increased regional competition for power and worsened instability. All these diminished U.S standing in global affairs as a partner to be trusted in world affairs. It recommends among others for President Donald Trump to moderate his style of governance in the area of foreign policy this second term in office especially when dealing with middle east crises and its peculiar challenges, and he urgently need to repair the damage done to the image of the U.S hegemony by his previous administration internationally.

Keywords: USA, Foreign Policy, Middle East Crises, Donald Trump's Regime, 2017-2021

1. Introduction

The Middle East has been a region where great power rivalry has played out in great measure in shaping events in the region due to geostrategic significance it possesses in world politics. It has equally been a longstanding major source of concern for American leaders due to its eternal religious and cultural relevance, a strategically pivotal location, huge oil reserves, interlocked and intractable conflicts, and the persistence of major security threats such as terrorism and the risk of nuclear proliferation. These factors have overwhelming significance in the making of U.S foreign policy towards Middle East. Mueller, Becca, Jeffrey and Stephen¹ pointed that U.S foreign policy goals in the Middle East revolves around some key objectives of free flow of oil and cultivating harmonious relationships with key allies and providing protection to them against external threats and thus aiding U.S. military to carry out their operations. As these authors pointed out, these interests continue, though the regional dynamics changes making U.S to design different strategies to secure these interests since the era of cold war. Having access to the Gulf states oil and at a reasonable lower price are very paramount to the U.S and has influenced her relationships with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman etc. As Georgious² pointed out, the Gulf states alone account for 65% of proven world oil reserves, and 35% of the advanced countries oil consumption comes from the Middle East region and U.S 58% of oil consumption comes from the Middle East region³. The United States foreign policy in the Middle East is influenced by her national interests as enunciated by former President Jimmy Carter⁴. He stated that:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force (State of the Union Address, Jan. 23, 1980)

However, the administration of the past maintained continuity in dealing with Middle East issues especially in Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Take for example, the Obama administration has always maintained the idea of two-state solution in Israel-Palestine political impasse. It is believed that the solution of the Middle East crisis is something that must be solved with the U.S taking the lead in the resolution. Over many decades, the United States has built up international influence by using its unrivaled diplomatic, military, economic, and ideological power to shape world affairs. American leaders combined this power with a foreign policy vision based upon a robust defense of democratic and global security, manage relations with other major economies, and garner political support critical for U.S. foreign policy objectives. These efforts enabled the United States to become a global power with the unique ability to shape and guide international affairs. In some quarters, they contend that the U.S influence under Donald Trump diminished to a low ebb due to the impulsive behaviour of Donald Trump and his transactional view of foreign policy.⁵ The U.S Senate Report(2020,p.10) hinted that the Donald Trump's bullying attitude towards U.S allies isolated U.S in important international issues where U.S needs cooperation coupled with its withdrawal from

***By Helen Ekwutosi PARKINSON, PhD (Int'l Relations), PhD (Int'l Law and Human Rights), Associate Member, Institute of Chartered Mediators and Conciliator (ICMC), and**

***Abaku Christian AMIEBOYE, PhD (in view) (Int'l Relations), Fellow, Chartered Institute of Human Resource Management (FCIHRM), Chartered Global HR Analyst (CGHRA), Chartered Human Resource Consultant (CHRC).**

¹Mueller,K..P, Becca W, Jeffrey, M, and Stephen (2017) U.S. Strategic Interests in the Middle East and Implications for the Army. Rand Publications

²Nwodo, C.B. (2016) *US Foreign Policy and National Interests in the Middle East: Continuities and Changes* in George G.W. Bush and Barack Obama. Being a dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri in partial fulfillment for the award of Masters degree in Political Science.

³Mueller,K..P, Becca W, Jeffrey, M, and Stephen,W. (2017) *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Middle East and Implications for the Army*. Rand Publications

⁴ President Jimmy Carter, (State of the Union Address, Jan. 23, 1980)

⁵Gauvin,G.A.J.F, *Trump's Foreign Policy for the Middle East: An Ace or A Deuce?*. Retrieved January 3 2022; Beck, M, US Middle East Policy Shift: Trump's Administrative Divergency. *RUND Journal of Public Administration*, 6(4), pp, 296-311; United States Senate, The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security. A Minority Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. Retrieved 27 December, 2021.

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action(JCPOA in 2018. This creates uncertainty in the resolution of Middle East problem. This study is an attempt to assess the United States Middle East foreign policy under Donald Trump's administration. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part is the introductory background. It situates the theoretical tool of the study. The part two is the conceptualization of foreign policy with attention on U.S policies in the Middle East. The part three is the assessment of Donald Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East and conclusions will be drawn.

2. Theoretical Framework

This work rests on realist theory of international relations as a guide to understanding the behaviour of states in the conduct of foreign policy. The Realist theory originated from the works of classical realists such as Thucydides (460-411 BCE) who wrote 'The History of the Peloponnesian War'; Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), ('The Prince'); Thomas Hobbes (1588-1683), ('The Leviathan'); Otto Von Bismarck (1815-1895) a Prussian statesman, Sun Tzu, the Chinese general and the author of The Art of War (544-496 B.C). Kautilya (4th Century B.C) Minister to the Mauryan emperor of India, who wrote in Arthashastra, 'a king shall always endeavor to augment his power'⁶. The realists share both theological and biological doctrines about an apparent weakness and individualism inherent in human nature. For them, the starting point for any explanation and analysis of any conflict situation in society is the individual level. The Realist theory according to Ogonor⁷, highlights the nature of man and traces the root causes of conflict to a flaw in human nature which is to the self, engaging in the pursuit of personalized interest defined as power. The realist school of thought has distinct trends. The first is structuralists or the Neo-realists. There are scholars such as Robert J. Art, Robert Jevis, Kenneth A. Waltz, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer and Robert Gilpin etc. The view of the structuralists argues 'the sad fact is that international politics has always been a ruthless and dangerous business and it is likely to remain that way'. Neo-realists believe that state behavior is not determined by man's unchangeable competitive, power-hungry nature rather, states seek more power in its external relations due to motivation for security: 'they must obtain national security by being more powerful, influential and with a stronger military than other states'⁸. With this, states could secure her interests anywhere it founds them. The anarchic structure of international politics implies that states live in a self-help scenario, though there may be collaboration among states and alliances are formed among states for express purpose of advancing and projecting their national interests, national security and power position in an anarchic world. There are numerous other scholars who had adopted the realist model in the analysis of power relation in the interaction of political units in relation to conflict situation. Notable among them are: Randall Schweller, Thomas J. Christensen, William Wohlfortji, Aaron Friedberg, Norrin Ripsman, Tom Dyson, etc. This group belongs to the Neo-classical school. Scholars like Barry Buzan, Martin Wight, and Hedley Bull, are called Liberal Realists.⁹ Political Realism believes that 'competitive process' between actors, primarily defined as interests, is the natural cause of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competitive resources. Nduba¹⁰ describes the realist or political realism as 'the power -political school'. He further opines that: 'the realist accepts the distribution of power as critical elements in the interaction between the units of international society.' We agree with third line of thinking since acquisition of capabilities (economic, political, military power) are the driving force for attaining national interests of states.¹¹ Very often, the power argument in the interaction of the units of the international system is too powerful as to close (ignore) the debate.' Kenneth Waltz¹² in his analysis of anarchy, territoriality and power concluded that 'the struggle for power and control over territory leads to anarchy (conflict) in any political system.' In his analysis of what he calls 'reality of conflict', Carr¹³ has argued that: 'the world is torn apart by the particular interests of different groups.' In such a conflictual environment, he contends that: 'order is based on power, not on morality.' In his thesis on 'power politics' in his 'Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace'¹⁴, Hans J. Morgenthau, the leading exponent and apostle of the realist school in the twentieth century, noting the importance of power said: 'all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics are, power is always the end point.' According to him, 'the struggle for power is universal in time and space, that regardless of social, economic and political conditions; states have always met each other in the contest of power'. Morgenthau further argues that realism is a departure from idealism', a theory he accuses of believing in a moral and rational political order based on universally valid abstract principles. Morgenthau faults the idealists for believing that human nature is malleable and good. Realism, as presented by Morgenthau, and other realists after him argue that the imperfection in the world, namely conflicts, wars, have their roots in the forces that are inherent in human nature; that human nature is selfish, individualistic and conflictual and that states will always pursue their national interests defined as power, which will come into conflict with those others leading to the inevitability of conflict in society. The most important actor in international politics is the nation-state. The assumptions of the realist theory are as follows:

- (1) National interests of states are what dictate nation's behavior in world politics and states can go to war to preserve them.
- (2) Sovereignty of nation-states are not negotiable.
- (3) International politics is anarchic and the country that has power dictates the tone of the game.
- (4) It believes in high politics as a means in international relations.

⁶Rourke, J. T., *International Politics on the World Stage*. New York. McGraw-Hill. Services; Ogonor, M.CU, *The UN, NATO and the Post Cold War management of International Peace: Theory and practice*. Owerri: Rostan Publishers.

⁷Ogonor, M.CU. (2000), *The UN, NATO and the Post Cold War management of International Peace: Theory and practice*. Owerri: Rostan Publishers.

⁸Mamadu, R. (2006) *National Interest of States in a Changing World in Nigerian Foreign Policy*: Victory Publications

⁹Mamadu, R. (2006) *National Interest of States in a Changing World in Nigerian Foreign Policy*: Victory Publications

¹⁰Nduba, E. (1998), *International Politics in the Post Cad War Era*. Akwa, Anambra State: Meks Publisher

¹¹Nduba, E. (1998), *International Politics in the Post Cad War Era*. Akwa, Anambra State: Meks Publishers

¹²Ogonor, M.CU. (2000), *The UN, NATO and the Post Cold War management of International Peace: Theory and practice*. Owerri: Rostan Publishers.

¹³Nduba, E. (1998), *International Politics in the Post Cad War Era*. Akwa, Anambra State: Meks Publishers

¹⁴Morgenthau, H.J.(1978) *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 5th Edition. New York. Alfred A. Knopf

(5) It is predicated on the idea that the best approach to peace is to achieve balance of power.

The applications of realist theory explain how Trump's view of what is U.S national interests based on making the U.S. a strong, free and prosperous State, and to ensure that the American worker's jobs and personal security is the President's prime concern. To him, the deep and extensive involvement in global affairs drains the tax payers' money against using it for Americans.

3. Concept of Foreign Policy

The concept of foreign policy is difficult to define. This is more so as in social sciences where concepts hardly have a unified meaning among scholars owing to their perspectives. There is considerable debate about how we should define foreign policy, and all decisions about how we should define the term 'foreign policy' have benefits and tradeoffs. It becomes clear that what we see as foreign policy are influenced by our view because there is a blurring of the boundary between domestic and foreign policy of nations. The evolution of the conduct of foreign policy dates back to the period of Alexander I of Russia, who gave less attention to internal political reform and focused on his external reforms and devoted himself to foreign policy, with the aim of consolidating his reign. He felt that he was called to be a mediator, like his grandmother, who had been called the 'Arbiter of Europe'. As soon as he came to power, Alexander revived an alliance with England that had been broken by Paul I. However, he maintained good relations with France in the hope of 'moderating' Bonaparte by restraining his spirit of conquest. A feeling of chivalry attached Alexander to the king of Prussia, Frederick William III, and to Queen Louisa, and a treaty of friendship was signed with Prussia. As events later showed, he cultivated good relationship with Austria. His ideology informed him that these alliances would lead to an European federation¹⁵. Hill¹⁶ sees foreign policy as the *sum of external relations* conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations. However, by conceptualizing foreign policy as the *sum of external actions*, this definition focuses only on explaining broad trends in foreign policies and not individual actions and decisions. On the other hand, White¹⁷ defined foreign policy as a 'government *activity* conducted with relationships between state and other actors, particularly other states, in the international system. White admits, this definition does not include other forms of collective actors like the European Union (EU) that also conduct foreign policy activities. Brecher contends that what we should study are foreign policy *decisions* and not just measureable behavior¹⁸.

A nation's foreign policy reflects or is seen as an extension of the domestic policy. It is the most essential aspect of a sovereign nations' tools for external relations. This is because, nation-states by their nature must interact with other state actors at the global arena in different forms and motives as no one can survive in isolation of others. This presupposes the importance of foreign policy. As a working definition, Holsti¹⁹ cited in Nte²⁰ sees foreign policy as actions of a state towards external environment and conditions under which their actions are formulated. As Nte²¹ argued further, foreign policy is a dynamic spectrum of planned activities by sovereign actors(states) designed to shape the attainment of national interests in its interactions with external actors. According to him, the foreign policy of a state is determined by domestic realities. This can also be an avenue of exploring a state's objectives towards others. Central to foreign policy is that it is directed towards the external environment. That is those external to the polity. This as Heimann pointed out²² defines foreign policy as the discrete official actions of the authoritative decision-makers of the nation-states, their governments, or agents of their governments which are intended to influence the behaviour of international actors who are external to their polity. A look at this definition, it shows a whole lot of things concerning foreign policy. To begin with, it becomes clear that foreign policy is made by the decision-makers of the state or their agents who represents the state. Again, its target is actors that are external to their environment. The purpose which is to influence the behaviour of actors at the global arena and also suggests the modality for achieving it. The truth about foreign policy is that, international relations is a dynamic process that have forces that propels it, and as such, it has to change in the direction of the wheel of global trends. For this reason, this informs the assertion of Nte²³ that foreign policy as consisting of decisions and actions which involve to appreciable extent the relations between one state and another. Egbo²⁴, it is a dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and support and the changing external circumstances. It is the thinking of Egbo that in the formulation of foreign policy, a nation-state must consider and assess the changing pattern of the political and economic system both at the domestic and international system.

What seems to me as a comprehensive definition of foreign policy is offered by Beck²⁵ when he sees it as:

¹⁵Encyclopaedia Britannica (2010)

¹⁶ Rourke, J.T. (2009) *International Politics on the World Stage*. New York. McGraw-Hill. Services.

¹⁷Nwodo, C.B. (2016) US Foreign Policy and National Interests in the Middle East: Continuities and Changes in George G.W. Bush and Barack Obama. Being a dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri in partial fulfillment for the award of Masters degree in Political Science.

¹⁸Beck, M. (2019) US Middle East Policy Shift: Trump's Administrative Divergency. *RUND Journal of Public Administration*, 6(4), pp, 296-311.

¹⁹Holsti, K.J. (1967), 'International Politics', New Jersey; Prentice Hall, in Olusola Ojo and Amadu Sesay (1988) *Concepts in International Relations*. JAD Publishers, Lagos Nigeria

²⁰Nte, T.U. (2016) *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: The Wheel of International Relations*. Port Harcourt. Shapea Publishers.

²¹Nte, T.U. (2016) *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: The Wheel of International Relations*. Port Harcourt. Shapea Publishers.

²²Ukiwo, U. (n.d) A Lecture Note on International Relations and Foreign Policy. Department of Political and Administrative Studies. Faculty of Social Sciences. University of Port Harcourt.

²³Nte, T.U. (2016) *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: The Wheel of International Relations*. Port Harcourt. Shapea Publishers.

²⁴Egbo, S. (2012). *International Relations in A New World Environment: The Trends and Strategies*. Enugu. John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd.

²⁵Beck, M. (2019) 'US Middle East Policy Shift: Trump's Administrative Divergency'. *RUND Journal of Public Administration*, 6(4), pp, 296-311.

Foreign policy is both broad trends of behavior and the particular actions taken by a state or other collective actor directed towards other states or collective actors within the international system. Foreign policy actions can be undertaken using a variety of different instruments ranging from adopting declarations, making speeches, negotiating treaties, giving other states economic aid, diplomatic activity such as summits, and the use of military force.

Ugwu²⁶ cited in Hassan and Aremu²⁷ in her work, *New Horizon in Nigeria World Affairs*, she stated thus: 'Foreign policy deals with relationship between sovereign actors in the international system. It could be understood as a range of intended actions as well as a set of strategies adopted by sovereign actors with the international system'. According to her, foreign policy takes place within three realms, the psychological, the domestic and the external. The psychological realm in her explanation denotes the mental processes of the decision maker (s) and all other subjective factors that one way or the other form the conception of foreign policy issues. The domestic realm encompasses the world and its array of actors' factors, variables and forces that are outside the mind of the decision maker (s) but are within the territorial boundaries of a nation state. The external realm is the international system into which foreign policy is directed and according to her, it is unquestionable.

From the above, it can be deduced that, foreign policy of U.S and its national interest are inseparable theoretical constructs in her relations with outside world. The foundation of a state's foreign policy is her national interest which in turn directs the cause of foreign. Spiegel²⁸ wrote an essay in the book '*Eagle Adrift: Eagle in the Middle East.*' With the collapse of the bi-polar world order, some of the global tensions ended while others strengthened, this was especially true for 'Africa and the Persian Gulf in the post-Cold War world. The Middle East plays a strategic role in United States foreign policy making for three reasons: oil, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction which Spiegel claims 'the most serious worldwide danger in the post- Cold War era and the threat of nuclear weapons from 'Islamic extremists'²⁹ to United States allies in the region. Hence, the concept of national interest has continued to play a significant role in the foreign policies of sovereign states. A state's foreign policy does not operate in a vacuum. This main instrument in the conduct of foreign policy is invariably the promotion and pursuits of national interest. Since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 ended the thirty years wars, and recognized modern state system, nation-states have been the bases of European political life. Ogonor³⁰, in his attempt to make this clear, argues that foreign policy is a national policy, however externally induced at times. Its formulation and content must therefore assume a national character that is derived from national interest. Foreign policy is said to be a system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities with the international environment. According to Chaturvedi³¹ Dictionary of political science, defined foreign policy thus: 'As the policy of a nation towards other nations. It may generally be said to involve four factors: Principles underlying foreign policy; Problems faced by the nation; the particular way of making foreign policy including the role of foreign policy makers; the products of foreign policy'.

Accordingly, different from those of domestic policy, foreign policies depend ultimately on the types of tools: military, economic and diplomatic. Among the oldest instruments of foreign policy are war and threat of war. This explains why German General Von Clausewitz once called war a 'continuation of politics by other means. Sessat³² is of the view that foreign policy is the totality of the communication between state and its external environment. By communication, he means the way a state enjoys assistance and co-operation of other states in the international system, since many national interests of a state cannot be achieved within the territorial confines of such a state. However, there are external determinants which include those events outside a state's milieu that affects its foreign policy. Ikedinachi, Muiyiwa and Chiedoie³³, foreign policy is 'a set of explicit objectives with regards to the world beyond the border of a given social unit and a set of strategies and tactics designed to achieve those objectives. It implies the perception of a need to influence the behavior of other states and international organization (The aim is to ensure that such states or international organizations maintain the existing pattern of behavior, if the influencing state perceive such as contributing to the achievement of its own objectives. It may also be to change the present pattern by initiating a new set of policies, or by altering or halting the implementation of existing ones. Pickles³⁴ in a piece on French Foreign Policy supports Legg's and Morrison's position. She argues that foreign policy implies 'a stated set of attitudes towards the international environment, an implicit or explicit plan about a country's relationship with outside world', 'a conscious image of what is or ought to be the country's place in the world, or general guiding principles or attitudes determining or influencing decisions on specific issues. Morgenthau³⁵ pointed that the goal of foreign policy is to secure the national interests. National interests reasoned that when we talk of national interest, we invoke the basic motivations which undergird the diplomacy of respective nations in the international system³⁶. Following this, national interest is the perennial standard by which political actions must be judged'. In this sense, one can argue that it the reason, how and why nations do what they do

²⁶ Ugwu Joy (2005), *New Horizons for Nigeria in World Affairs*, Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, Nigeria

²⁷ Hassan, A. S and Aremu, F. A. (2013. ed) *Introduction to International Relations*. Ibadan College Press & Publishers Limited

²⁸ Spiegel, S.L (1997) 'Eagle in the Middle East'. In *Eagle Adrift*. Ed. Robert, J.L. New York. Addison Wesley Longman. Inc

²⁹ Spiegel, S.L (1997) 'Eagle in the Middle East'. In *Eagle Adrift*. Ed. Robert, J.L. New York. Addison Wesley Longman. Inc

³⁰ Ogonor, M.C.U. (2000), *The UN, NATO and the Post Cold War management of International Peace: Theory and practice*. Owerri: Rostan Publishers.

³¹ Chaturvedi A. K (2006): *Academic's Dictionary of Political Science*, Nigeria Ltd. Epp Books

³² Hassan, A. S and Aremu, F. A. (2013. ed) *Introduction to International Relations*. Ibadan College Press & Publishers Limited

³³ Ikedinachi A.W, Muiyiwa A.S. and Chiedoie F.C. (2015), 'A Critical Evaluation of Nigeria's Foreign Policy' at 53, *Journal of Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* (IISTE) Vol. 5:2

³⁴ Nte, T. U. (2016) *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: The Wheel of International Relations*. Port Harcourt. Shapea Publishers.

³⁵ Morgenthau, H.J. (1978) *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 5th Edition. New York. Alfred, A. Knopf

³⁶ Okon, E. (2013) 'National Interests'. In Hassan, A. S and Aremu, F.A.ed, (2013). *Introduction to International Relations*. Ibadan. College Press & Publishers Ltd

when they engage in external relationship. For Hans J. Morgenthau, it is any foreign policy which operates under the standard of the national interest. National Interest also ascribes to a French expression *raison d'état* 'reason of state' which consists of a country's goals whether economic, military, or cultural. The concept is an important one in international relations as validated by the assumptions of the Realist school in which they opine that nations' actions, inactions, reactions and interactions in the international arena is done primarily to advance her national interests. According to Nwodo³⁷ stated that Fawaz looked at different ways the United States approaches foreign policy in the Middle East. Fawaz pointed that:

Questions of security became a central focus in the United States foreign policy debate. United States has many interests in the stability, and protection of the Middle thus making this issue vital in understanding United States foreign policy to Islam. He listed key United States foreign policy concerns in the Middle East are the Israeli-Israeli conflict, vulnerability of access to Persian Gulf oil, the vulnerability of pro-U. S Middle Eastern regimes to an Islamist assault, the collapse of Soviet communism, the prorogation of terrorism, and potential proliferation of nuclear weapons.

According to Rourke³⁸, Goldstein and Pevehouse, Nte, Eze and Palmer and Perkins categorized the determinants of foreign policy to be the state of the economy, political structure, idiosyncrasy of the leaders etc.³⁹ It is proper to borrow from the work of Kesley and Raymond who looked at the determinants of foreign policy from the typology of levels of analysis. In this their analysis, they looked at the world in a pyramidal structure in which systemic influences, the state influences and the individual influences are keys in the understanding of foreign policy determinants where issues of the systemic structure, state and individual influences play crucial roles in the formulation of foreign policy of nations. It is important to say that the psychological make-up of Donald Trump was very crucial in his foreign policy stance during his regime.

4. Donald Trump's Middle East Policy: An Assessment.

In the Presidential campaign promises of Donald Trump before his election in 2016, one of the issues he promised to resolve was the Middle East crisis. This promise raised hope of an end to the crisis in the region especially the Israel-Palestine conflict since the Middle East crisis revolves around considerably on the crisis between the two warring enemies (Israel-Palestine). But from the foreign policy thrust of Donald Trump, he had turned a deaf ear in resolving the Israel-Palestine crisis when in 2017, he moved U.S Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and thus complicating the peace process concerning the resolution of the conflict⁴⁰. Contrary to the previous regime's treatment of Israel as a close ally, Trump's administration went further to appease Netanyahu. As pointed by Aljazeera studies.net⁴¹, the Republican Party platform described such support 'an expression of Americanism' and reject the false notion that Israel is an occupier.' It also insists that Israel 'stands out among the nations as a beacon of democracy and humanity,' that 'support for Israel is an expression of Americanism,' and that there should be 'no daylight between America and Israel.' This issue drew criticism as it is against international law⁴². This complicates the Middle East crisis since the framework which Donald Trump brought on board is the type that the Capital of Palestine will be in East Jerusalem in Abu Dis. This was not acceptable to Palestinians and the Arabs in general. This action infuriated Mohammed Abbas to lambaste Trump for doing what he sees as 'the slap of the century.' The implications of this were that it damaged the confidence the international community has on the U.S as actor to be trusted in addressing the Middle East problem. U.S, he warned, could no longer play any role in the search for peace. Abbas also lambasted Israel as a colonial creation and damaged his reputation as a pragmatic and moderate partner for peace. The prospect for the two-state solution was shut down and Arabs got hurt the more. In what follows, the Trump's regime also informed Palestinians in Washington that their Embassy in Washington will be shut down. This is not an easy situation for the Palestinians. As Jack⁴³ had stated, the U.S President cancelled all the funding designated for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and went ahead to reduce the ratio of refugees grant to Palestinians as well as reduction of more than \$200 million in bilateral aid to West Bank and Gaza Strip. This act was a great departure to the traditional U.S foreign policy in the Middle East.

On January 28, 2020, Donald Trump formally unveiled the Peace Plan in an attempt to resolve the Israel-Palestine impasse. From the terms of the plan, the Palestinian leadership rejected the plan because it made few concessions on Israel and harsh obligation on Palestine people. Egypt urged U.S to review the plan and Jordan emphasized its commitment on the 1967 peace plan which Donald Trump's plan did not mention. Whatever benefits the Palestine will get is contingent on U.S and Israel agreeing to it and the acceptance on the Palestinians that no legal action against the U.S and Israel will be taken against them, and demilitarization from Palestine and other conditions must have been implemented. Donald Trump policies in the Middle East which have made peace a delusion is his behaviour of not encouraging a democratic reform and serious support to his allies that has autocratic regimes as shown in his Muslim travel ban. His hard-line support to Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Israel and general tolerance for the autocrats like Egypt's Abdel- Fatah al-Sisi heated the politics of Middle East.

³⁷Nwodo, C.B. (2016) *US Foreign Policy and National Interests in the Middle East: Continuities and Changes* in George G.W.Bush and Barack Obama. Being a dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri in partial fulfillment for the award of Masters degree in Political Science.

³⁸ Rourke, J.T. (2009) *International Politics on the World Stage*. New York. McGraw-Hill. Services.

³⁹ Goldstein, J. S. And Pevehouse, J. C. (2012). *International Relations*. New York, Tenth Edition Pearson; Nte, T.U. (2016) *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: The Wheel of International Relations*. Port Harcourt. Shapea Publishers; Eze, E.C (2003) *The Web of World Politics*. Enugu. Panaf Publishers; Palmer Norman and Perkins Howard (2004), *International Relations: The World Community in Transition*, A.I.T.B.S. Publishers and Distributors

⁴⁰ Jack, T. (2018) *Trump's Middle East Policy*. Centre for Security Studies. ETH Zurich.

⁴¹ Aljazeera studies.net (2018) *Trump's Middle East Policy: The Ironies of Hawkishness*. Retrieved 29 December, 2021.

⁴² Gauvin, G.A.J.F. (2017) *Trump's Foreign Policy for the Middle East: An Ace or A Deuce?*. Retrieved January 3 2022.

⁴³ Jack, T. (2018) *Trump's Middle East Policy*. Centre for Security Studies. ETH Zurich.

These countries especially Israel and Saudi Arabia want to contain Iran. U.S retreat from Middle East and its tendency to resort to regional forces to bear the burden of maintaining order opens up spaces for non-state actors to be on the increase. Because of Iran's support for Hezbollah intensifies the conflict between the Shiite and Sunni faction of the Islamic version of the two sides creates tension. The U.S withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 increased tension in Middle East while to most of its allies such as Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany, who believed that engagement, and trade could help promote domestic reform. The U.S position towards Iran changed with strong backing towards Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. The Trump regime placed sanction on Tehran. This intensified regional instability with a lot of implications. The U.S support to the Saudi Regime has made the Iran backing its allies and proxies in the region. The effect as Jack⁴⁴ pointed out is that:

Iran's Shia allies and proxies advanced its interests in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Sana'a, it was said, was the fourth Arab capital to have fallen into Tehran's orbit – after Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut. The result has been catastrophe for the people of Yemen – the poorest country in the Arab world – and they continue to bear the brunt of suffering caused by a Saudi-led blockade, airstrikes and the spread of malnutrition, famine and cholera that together threatened to become the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The U.S policy over the years have been to counter Shiite and Sunni extremism. But Donald Trump's policy choosing to align with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates has combined to destabilize the region⁴⁵. It is surprising how Trump who castigated Riyadh of free riding of U.S Security concerns now see the Middle East from the lenses of Saudi Arabia. U.S could not do anything when Saudi Arabia attacked Iran's Houthi ally in Yemen, and its flagrant abuse on human rights. When Canada criticized Saudi Arabia on its poor human rights record, U.S defended the Saudi Regime. The point is that any prospect for resolution of Middle East crisis must be an objective effort where the U.S must play the role of an unbiased umpire in the whole process. Under Donald Trump, his policies in the Middle East damaged whatever the respect and regard to its longstanding values built over the years. Considering the polarization of the region along the Shia-Sunni divide, any policy option adopted that tilts in the favour of one faction will escalate tension in another area. This policy emboldened non-state actors along sectarian division in the Middle East heightening instability. The U.S support to the Sunni's, also intensified the ties between Tehran and groups such as Hezbollah and the Houthis. It has reacted warily to overtures from Saudi Arabia and criticized US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Turkey and Qatar have also reacted increased cooperation with Tehran. The disengagement of U.S from Middle East crisis has one consequence. According to Mossalanejad⁴⁶ it resulted in scenario where:

Regional actors...taking a more active role and jostling for power, particular concern, a virulent competition for regional hegemony between Saudi Arabia and Iran is destabilizing the region. The declining role of external states particularly the US has helped usher in, and been amplified by, a more multipolar Middle East. Throughout the region political conflicts are being conducted under the auspices of sectarian concerns, with the potential to trigger civil wars with religious dimensions.

As the competition for hegemony in the region intensified, it has its own darker implications given the level of virtual network and technology in communications which non-state actors have deployed as a tool for getting a wider audience and recruitment. This is notably what ISIS and Al-Qaida have been doing. Mossalanejad⁴⁷ stated the fact that:

The reality in the Middle East is that powerful popularizing influence of communication and political interaction, driven by the expansion of technology and the mass move online on a scale never before known. Virtual reality such as new media and technology fusing with a rising young generation have been both triggering and enabling social change.

This process has played out in the crisis in Iran in December 2017. The young generation were instrumental in the whole process. In democratization process, this virtual means of communication could also be a catalyst for social change but evidence showed that it has been very worrisome in the negative sense where ISIS and Al-Qaida have been using it in negative terms altering the balance of power in the region. Analysts point to the fact that the religious and political competition between the Saudi Government and Tehran has split into religious civil war with serious ramifications for regional peace and security. There are tensions within the Sunni Islam camp, between the extreme form of Salafi Islam, represented by ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the rest of the Sunni schools of Islam. As Donnan and Tom⁴⁸ pointed, that Trump destabilized the region due to its relations with Iran. Trump took an unconstructive position on the executive order for comprehensive arrangement common action on 2018 January 12 show that the cooperation with international community has decreased. This made it cumbersome for the EU Government to influence the U.S foreign policy due to decreased international cooperation. The U.S Policy under Donald Trump is to ensure that Saudi regime confronts Iran under the umbrella of Middle East Strategic Alliance - an 'Arab NATO' organization and fostering the Middle East peace deal. But the problematic concern is that Saudi Arabia expectation of the peace deal may not correspond to U.S vision of peace process with reference to Israel-Palestine crisis. Since U.S relationship with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates gets better, other regional actors displeasure with the Washington deteriorate. For example, Miller and Skolosky stressed that U.S alignment with Riyadh, instead of weakening Iran, has made Iran's alliance with its allies and proxies more formidable such as Hezbollah and Houthi. On the other hand, close relationship which Trump cultivated with autocratic regimes in the Middle East created a problem in the region. According to Aljazera studies.net⁴⁹ pointed that:

⁴⁴ Jack, T. (2018) *Trump's Middle East Policy*. Centre for Security Studies. ETH Zurich.

⁴⁵ Jack, T. (2018) *Trump's Middle East Policy*. Centre for Security Studies. ETH Zurich.

⁴⁶ Mossalanejad, Abbas, (2016), 'The Rise of ISIS and the Future of Iraq's Security', *Geopolitics Quarterly*, winter, 11, (4), pp, 18-37.

⁴⁷ Mossalanejad, A. (2018) The Middle East Security and Donald Trump's Grand Strategy. *Geopolitics Quarterly*, 13(4) pp, 20-52.

⁴⁸ Donnan, S and Tom, M. (2017), 'Trump administration hails US-China trade deal', *Financial Times*, May 12.

⁴⁹ Aljazera studies.net (2018) *Trump's Middle East Policy: The Ironies of Hawkishness*. Retrieved 29 December, 2021.

Trump's warm embrace of the Sisi's brutal military regime in Egypt, Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian rule in Turkey, and most of the repressive monarchies in the Gulf have belied efforts by previous administrations of both parties to convince the people of the region of U.S. concern for human rights and democratic governance. Support for the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen, which has taken thousands of civilian lives in a country which saw a mass popular pro-democracy uprising earlier in the decade, has underscored how U.S. support for such war crimes in the name of fighting 'terrorism' is not reserved just for Israel.

Against the traditional U.S. policy in the region, human right concerns and political reform has been a core objective of the White House policy towards countries in the region which the Trump's policies were at odds with. However, U.S. Senate Report⁵⁰ hinted that: 'some of these leaders have been welcomed to the White House, which enhances their legitimacy at home. State Department efforts to promote democracy and human rights are dismissed by foreign officials because they are completely at odds with President Trump's own behavior. Trump rapport with Kim Jong, rewarded leaders such as Erdogan and Orban with military support, Oval Office meetings, and lavish praise, despite their increasingly anti-democratic policies was a concern on the longstanding values and image of the United State as epitome of the free world. The Syrian civil war presents a delicate security challenge in the Middle East with the rise of Islamic State of Syria. The rise of this terrorist group with its alliances in other states make the conflict to revolve around sectarian lines and complicates the soured relations between the Shiite and Sunni Moslem groups. While U.S. policy was to defeat the Assad regime and bring down the group, it has to arm what they termed moderate rebels. This creates its own problem in Syria civil war. On the other hand, the relations between Turkey and U.S. was cordial until Turkey turned to Russia for arms purchase and attacked Turkish Kudistans fighting in Syria. Again, Washington's refusal to extradite Fethullah Gülen for his involvement in the coup against Erdogan was not a problem but the tension between them was due to Turkey's attack to Kurdish fighters, a strong ally to the U.S and the Washington's refusal to release Andrew Brunson strained their relations. This led to U.S. Government to place sanctions on Turkey's Ministers of Justice and the Interior and doubled tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminum imports. With this, their tension increased. The point is that Turkey is a major actor in Syria and its airbase provides a leeway for U.S. airstrikes but with the impasse between them, it heightened conflicts between the Kurdistan militias and Turkey and extended into other affiliated groups. The prospect of resolving the Middle East crisis is not feasible now or in the foreseeable future under Donald Trump because the inability of the regime to design a grand strategy in dealing with Middle East crisis especially in Syria. U.S. deployed troops to Syria to ensure it removed Bashir al-Assad and by 2018 April, it ordered the withdrawal of troops from Syria around the same period. This inconsistency of increasing military in Syria and their abrupt withdrawal questions if there is a grand strategy of foreign policy of U.S. in the Middle East by Donald Trump. There is a widespread disappointment in knowing who speaks for the U.S. in foreign policies. At a glance, the President will make controversial statements. It was hoped for Saudi Arabia and Russia to shoulder the responsibility of rebuilding the area that has been freed from the Islamic State. A burden that is not going to happen now or in the immediate future.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Donald Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East has been a source of instability and tension in the region while creating new challenges to already existing ones. It is a radical shift to the longstanding precedents of U.S. foreign policy for decades where core objectives are to exporting democracy and ensuring political reform in the Arab world, opposition to autocratic regimes in the Middle East, peaceful resolution of Israeli-Palestinian crisis and countering sectarian violence in the region. His foreign policy was characterized by inconsistency and lacking of a grand design which make it difficult to pin-down exactly what U.S. foreign policies were regarding the Middle East under Donald Trump's watch. His approach damaged U.S. reputation in many ways as an international partner that can be relied by its allies in global affairs. His foreign policy in the Middle East created openings Russia exploited to increase its influence in the region. There is an urgent need for President Donald Trump to moderate his style of governance in the area of foreign policy this second term in office, especially when dealing with middle east crises and its peculiar challenges, and to repair the damages done to the image of U.S. hegemony by his previous administration by upholding rule of law, respect for human rights and reposition the U.S. as a leader in global affairs, so as to win the trust of its strategic allies in multilateral institutions such as in the United Nations, NATO and other multilateral institutions.

⁵⁰United States Senate (2020) *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security. A Minority Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate*. Retrieved 27 December, 2021.