NEO-REALISM AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ARAB WORLD

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**Neo-realism and American foreign policy in the Arab World**   
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**Introduction**

Starting with a simplification of a complex theoretical paradigm, Neo-realism holds that the nature of the international system is characterized by its ordering principle which is anarchy that has more than one definition. Some use the term “Anarchy” to refer to a society without a publicly enforced government. And when used in this sense, anarchy may or may not be intended to imply political disorder or lawlessness within a society. Many anarchists complain that vulgar error has taken ‘anarchy’ to be synonymous with civil war and chaos.

Neo-realism nonetheless is characterized by the distribution of capabilities (measured by the number of great powers within the international system). The anarchic ordering principle of the international structure is decentralized meaning there is no formal central authority despite the fact that some perceive the USA as playing the role of police in world affairs. Every sovereign state is formally but actually equal in this system however, some are more equal than others. These states act according to the logic of self-help, meaning states seek their own interest and try their best not to subordinate their interests to the benefits of other states.

States are assumed at a minimum to want to ensure their own survival as this is a prerequisite to pursue other goals. This driving force of survival is the primary factor influencing their behavior and in turn instigates states to develop military capabilities for defense and intervention and as a means to increase their relative power. Because states can never be certain of other states’ future intentions, there is a lack of mutual trust between states which requires them to be on guard against relative losses of power which could enable other states to threaten their survival. This lack of trust, based on uncertainty, as perceived by Neo-realist is called the security dilemma.

States are deemed similar in terms of needs but not in capabilities for achieving them. The positional placement of states in terms of abilities determines the distribution of capabilities. The structural distribution of capabilities then limits cooperation among states through fears of relative gains made by other states, and the possibility of dependence on other states.

The desire and relative abilities of each state to maximize relative power, constrain each other, resulting in a ‘balance of power, which shapes international and regional relations. There are two ways in which states balance power: internal balancing and external balancing. Internal balancing occurs as states grow their own capabilities by increasing economic growth and/or increasing military spending. External balancing occurs as states enter into alliances to benefit from the muscle of more powerful states or alliances.

Neo-realists contend that there are essentially three possible systems according to changes in the distribution of capabilities, defined by the number of great powers within the international system. A unipolar system contains only one great power, a bipolar system contains two great powers, and a multipolar system contains more than two great powers. Neo-realists conclude that a bipolar system is more stable (less prone to great power war and systemic change) than a multipolar system because balancing can only occur through internal balancing as there are no extra great powers with which to form alliances. Because there is only internal balancing in a bipolar system, rather than external balancing, there is less opportunity for miscalculations and therefore less chance of great power war.

**Power of the Realists and Neo-realists**

According to the orthodox view, Realism is concerned with the world as it actually is rather than how it is ought to be. In other words, it is an empirical rather than a normative paradigm (Morgenthau, 1956: 4). Realism is also pessimistic and emphasizes the recurrent patterns of power politics as manifested by reoccurring conflicts, rivalries and wars (Jackson and Sorensen, 2007: 60). In this gloomy world, concepts such as the balance of power and the security dilemma become the main realist analytical tools (Buzan, 1997: 53). Realists of all strands also consider the state as the principal actor in international affairs. Special attention is afforded to great powers as they have the most leverage on the international stage (Mearsheimer, 2001: 17-18). Furthermore, it is the national interest that animates state behavior as they are essentially rational egoists, guided by the dictates of raison d’état (Brown, 2005: 30). Finally, Realist’s maintain that the distribution of power or capabilities largely determines international outcomes (Frankel, 1996: xiv-xv).

There are however four key differences between classical realism and neo-realism[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn1" \o ") . First, classical realist locate the roots of international conflict and war in an imperfect human nature while neo-realists maintain that its deep causes are found in the anarchic international system. Second, the state is ontologically superior to the system in classical realism, in contrast to neo-realism, allowing more space for agency in the former approach (Hobson, 2000: 17). Third, classical realists differentiate between status-quo powers and revisionist powers while neo-realism regards states as unitary actors (Schweller, 1996: 155). Fourth, neo-realists attempt to construct a more rigorous and scientific approach to the study of international politics, heavily influenced by the behaviorist revolution of the 1960’s while classical realism confine its analyses to subjective valuations of international relations (Georg and Sorensen, 2007: 75).

Ronald Reagan once said: We will never negotiate with terrorists[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn2" \o "). According to realist theory, foreign policy of most states lacks morality and should be approached with pragmatic considerations of power as related to national interests, rather than the pursuit of idealistic goals[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn3" \o "). In his most recent book “Global Security in the Twenty-First Century: The Quest for Power and the Search for Peace”, Sean Kay stated there are clear indicators that, in his second term, President Barack Obama is trying to shift American foreign policy toward a more “realist-leaning” direction. He has, so far, resisted the pull to intervene in Syria; his administration has begun significant ground-force reductions in Europe and has embraced the so-called “pivot” toward Asia. His choices of John Kerry and Chuck Hagel to lead the State Department and Pentagon, respectively, suggest a desire to ensure that the voices of restraint are at the table when major policies are discussed. He points out that the realist school of international relations dominated U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. It was no surprise that President Ronald Reagan took a realist approach toward Syria, the Arab World and the Middle East at large[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn4" \o "). Reagan saw conflict in the Levant as increasing the region’s vulnerability to the overarching threat of the Soviet Union as part of the Cold War[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn5" \o "). Despite the including of some Arab states on the U.S. State Department list of sponsors of terrorism in 1979, these states were geopolitically too powerful to be hurt by the U.S.A., which sought to restrain Soviet expansionism in the Middle East[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn6" \o "). Rather than isolating or bullying these states, even as their role in international terrorism became more pronounced during the 1980s, the Reagan administration remained engaged with these Arab regimes and recognizing their leaders[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn7" \o ").

Though the Cold War framework was no longer predominant when George H.W. Bush became the 41st president in 1988, the framework continued to influence foreign policy until 1991. Syria for example was considered as an essential player and remained a critical partner for the U.S.A. for maintaining a balance of power in the Middle East. Due to the stature of Damascus in the Arab world, it became necessary for Syria to be included in the U.S.-Arab coalition assembled to expel Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991. U.S.A. Secretary of State James Baker recognized the necessity of working with Syria and courted the regime, traveling to meet Assad despite domestic criticism about allowing strategic concerns to override ideological ones[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn8" \o "). Robert G. Rabil, author of “Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East”, notes that during the first Gulf War, “When American vital interests [were] at stake, the United States [had] no compunction either to push aside or to overlook any reservations standing in the way of achieving its goals”[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn9" \o "). This is consistent with realist theory, which predicts that states act in response to their vital needs, not in response to international norms or institutions. After Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait, President Bush did not order the overthrow of Saddam Hussein or attempt to redesign the Middle East[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn10" \o "). According to realists, the world is a dangerous place with “competing states rationally pursuing interests”[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn11" \o "). The State Department’s coordinator for counterterrorism, Philip Wilcox, defended the Clinton approach: “Diplomacy is not always a pleasant business, and you do not always deal with people of perfect virtue, but the United States has interests and responsibilities in the world, and we are willing to engage with many different kinds of states to protect our own interests”[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn12" \o "). For the United States, it was realistic to overlook the nature of the Syrian regime when it was in the U.S.A. national interest to seek its help.

**Power of the Neo-Conservatives**

In January 2002, President Bush delivered his State of the Union address, later known as the “Axis of Evil” speech, referring to Iraq, Iran and North Korea. He said the United States will “prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies”[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn13" \o ").

Later, in April 2002, President Bush said, “Syria has spoken out against al-Qaeda[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn14" \o "). We expect it to act against all our foes, as well. It’s time for … Syria to decide which side of the war against terror it is on”[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn15" \o "). Thus, any state in the Middle East having a conflict with America’s principal ally, Israel, became a target of the Bush administration in the eyes of the Arab world.

In May 2002, John Bolton, then undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, advanced the portrayal of some Arab states as a “rogue states” in a speech entitled “Beyond the Axis of Evil”[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn16" \o "). This marked a shift from the moderate realist theory behind U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East to an idealistic one based on neo-conservatism, a combination of an extreme form of realism and altered democratic-peace theory.

Stephen Zunes, author of “Tinderbox: U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism”, has declared that “the neo-conservative unilateralist world view now dominates the Middle East policies of both Republicans and Democrats”[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn17" \o "). Like realists, neo-conservatives agree the world is a dangerous place, but rather than an arena for amoral competition, they perceive it in terms of a “struggle between good and evil”[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn18" \o "). While neo-conservatism is new to the academic arena of international relations, a 2008 article in Security Studies argues that neo-conservatism constitutes a coherent and “explanatory theory of international politics”. It asserts that “evil regimes have to be opposed, and that the notion that stability follows engagement is a myth”.

During the George W. Bush administration, “opposition through isolation”, rather than engagement, became the central tenet of the U.S. approach towards the Arab World. According to Elliott Abrams, former deputy national security adviser for global democracy strategy from 2005 until January 2009, the Bush administration was effective in the temporary isolation of some Arab states but gained nothing strategic for the United States: “In the narrowest sense, the efforts to isolate them succeeded. But if you go more deeply than that you would say, ‘Well, that’s well-taken, but what did that achieve?” William Rugh, former U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, describes the administration’s approach to the Arab world as one of “isolation and monologue”, as opposed to “engagement and dialogue”[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn19" \o ").

The call for toppling the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq is the most visible manifestation of idealistic influences in neo-conservative policies during the Bush administration. Regime change is perceived as the ultimate neo-conservative goal for the Arab world, as elaborated by Charles Krauthammer, a leading neo-conservative thinker and columnist. He suggests that once democracy, a driving value, is established in Iraq and Afghanistan, other Arab countries should be targeted for democratization. Krauthammer describes Israel as an obstacle in any rapprochement in the region stretching from the Mediterranean to the Iranian border”. He calls “U.S. support for Israel a cynical ‘realism’ and suggests that the United States pursue democracy in the Middle East as an end in itself[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn20" \o ").

While liberals call for engagement as a path toward democratizing hostile regimes, democratic-peace theory identifies peaceful regime change as a path toward democratization. The pursuit of democracy has long been a goal of democratic-peace theory, based on the idea that democracies do not go to war with one another and that the spread of democracy increases peace in the international arena. This principle is visible in President Bush’s 2007 State of the Union address: “They want to kill Americans, kill democracy in the Middle East and gain the weapons to kill on an even more damaging scale”[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn21" \o "). The neo-conservatives in the Bush administration exploited democratic-peace theory to justify their actions against Iraq and potentially against other Arab nations.

Former U.S. ambassador to Syria Theodore Kattouf claims that the Bush administration “did not hesitate to let people know, through leaks and the like, that perhaps all Arab states were next”. Martha Kessler comments: “I don’t think you can understand what has been done with regard to the Arab world in the last several years outside of the context of a belief among many in the U.S.A. administration that Arab regimes have to go”. This threat of regime overthrow underlies all relations between the United States and the Arab world. When the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah escalated in June 2006, Elliott Abrams reportedly “encouraged Israel to expand the war into Syria”[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn22" \o ").

When Syria appeared eager to resume peace talks with Israel, the United States pressured Turkey not to mediate such negotiations and “weighed in on the debate in Israel against resuming talks with Syria”. Philip Giraldi, suggests that prominent neo-conservatives such as Bolton and Krauthammer reasoned that Israeli air strikes in Syria on September 6, 2007, were targeting an active site involved in a nuclear-weapons program. However, when pressured to give concrete evidence for their claim, they failed to do so.

The degree to which neo-conservative theory has influenced and determined foreign policy towards the Arab world is debated in the United States. While the degree of its influence remains undetermined, it cannot be denied that neo-conservatism played a major role in U.S. policy towards the Arab world.

**Realists are Back**

Critics of both the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations complained that the United States engaged too much with the Arab world, while critics of George W. Bush’s administration complained that the United States did not engage enough. This second position was reinforced in the 2006 Iraqi Study Group (ISG) Report co-chaired by George H.W. Bush’s secretary of state, James Baker, who defended cooperating with Syria during the first Persian Gulf War[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn23" \o ").

It is worth noting in this respect that the British newspaper The Independent ran an editorial claiming the above mentioned report as a “realism’s revenge over the neo conservative fantasy that democracy could be created through the barrel of a gun in one of the most complex regions on earth”. In March 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced she would meet with Arab diplomats to discuss the stabilization of Iraq, prompting Foreign Policy in Focus to suggest that pragmatic realists within the State Department had gained a dominant voice over neo-conservative elements of the Bush administration. Rice’s meeting with Arab officials in May 2007 during the Expanded Iraq Neighbors Ministerial Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, was the first high-level diplomatic understanding between the United States and Arabs since 2005. Subsequently, Rice met with Arab officials for more clarifications on the margins of another meeting of the same conference in Ankara in November 2007.

While the White House insisted Rice’s meeting with Arab officials did not constitute a “change in policy”, some foreign-policy specialists disagreed[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn24" \o "). The long-term impact of the Iraq War on the political stability of the Middle East is uncertain; however, there is little doubt that it has been far more difficult and costly than any neo conservative advocates of unilateral military action expected. Based on the U.S.A. public’s dissatisfaction with the Iraq War, another such war, this time with Arab states, would be almost impossible to justify. The departure of several leading neo-conservative figures in the Bush administration, primarily from senior leadership in the Department of Defense, and a refocused Department of State opened up opportunities for the pragmatic influence of realism on U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab world.

Since the attacks of 9/11, the U.S. military has been heavily relied upon to safeguard U.S. national security. The American political leadership has applied slogans such as the “war on terror”[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn25" \o ") in order to legitimize the use of military power for the fulfillment of U.S. foreign-policy objectives. By declaring to shift from this strategy, then-Senator Barack Obama promised that, if elected, his administration would utilize all elements of national power and not just rely upon military solutions.

One of the first agenda items for the Obama administration in which the role of diplomacy may outweigh that of the military is U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab world. It seems that the Obama administration is engaged in guarded but genuine diplomacy with Arabs.

Situated between the current predicament of Iraq and the perennial hotspots of Israel-Palestine, Lebanon and Iran, though divided the Arabs are in a position to either advance or hinder U.S. goals in the Middle East. However, the United States has not executed a foreign policy towards the new changes in the Arab world that benefits from this opportunity. America has been unable to develop and maintain a consistent position towards the Arab Spring. Instead, divergent impulses have guided the American policy with regard to this emerging phenomenon.

**Regionalism in a Changing Arab World**

What has become so clear in the Middle East is the paradox that while countries in the region have numerous shared political, economic, environmental, and security issues, the region still remains one of the least integrated in the world and witnessing troubled coexistence. The main reason for this, experts generally concurred, was the lack of common vision to parallel the power of the West. States in the Arab world are currently facing serious security challenges and lack the means for stability. This may be lingering for a long time before the prospects for interstate cooperation may improve.

It is still an open question whether emerging political orders in the future will reflect the consensus and common vision to parallel the strength of the West. Analysts expressed skepticism as to whether this would necessarily result in greater regional collaboration. The main reason for this skepticism is the lack of strong regional institutions that can act as appropriate venues through which such cooperation can be coordinated. This reality may change over time, but in the short term, as these countries are still struggling for political stability, the regional institutions that do exist will most likely remain largely ineffective. There are three dynamics that have historically characterized the Middle East and that have also represented obstacles to regional cooperation: the unresolved Arab-Israeli dispute, the disparity between countries rich in oil and those that are not, and the domineering role of the United States in the Middle East. As long as these three factors remain, regional cooperation will be difficult to achieve[[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn26" \o ").

Interstate cooperation does not, however, only pertain to intergovernmental collaboration. Transnational movements are also important conduits for cross-border cooperation, including everything from civil society organizations to terrorist organizations. These movements have all gained traction through developments in technology and social media, which facilitate communication among its members and help with outreach efforts. Civil society organizations, in particular, were instrumental in generating popular support and power, and will be essential elements in the creation of new political systems.

The most likely regional order to emerge in the near future will be fractious, but these sub-regional alignments will probably persist. This kind of cooperation exists among different areas of the Middle East, such as the Maghreb (North Africa), the Gulf countries (with their Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC) and the Mashreq (the Levantine states). The challenge, then, for increased regional cooperation, is the establishment of effective institutions that transcend the sub-regional level. However the role of the American foreign policy in the Middle East is so central and it could sway the course of security developments and cooperation either way.

**The League of Arab States: How Successful?**

If we are to focus on a critical evaluation of the League of Arab States’ future role in a reconfigured Middle East, past experiences dismiss the league as a relevant organization that is able to achieve the goals it sets out to accomplish. It is worth noting that in at least one sense, this is not true: the League of Arab States has acted as a scapegoat for regional complaints in the past. States and Organizations have deferred to the league for particular decisions, and then deflected criticism onto the league itself, blaming it for inactivity. With shifting political dynamics within member states, however, this particular utility of the league may diminish as governments that emerge become more accountable to citizens.

Concerning the organization’s relative inactivity on interventions, one of the most important reasons for this in the past is the member states’ preference for international interventions (such as an intervention that by the United Nations or the United States) as opposed to intervention carried out by the league itself. It is much more palatable, politically speaking, for all involved to have the full support of the international community. This was identified as one of the factors limiting the League of Arab States’ potential for the planning and execution of cooperation and field coordination[[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn27" \o ").

**Change, Development, and Regional Norms**

The Arab world is, by many measures in addition to political instability, the least economically integrated region in the world. Intraregional trade in the Arab world is somewhere between 5 and 8 percent of total trade, and the region’s global share of nonoil exports is less than 1 percent. This is a particularly problematic phenomenon given that the region’s population is doubling every twenty-five years, making the Arab world the region with the biggest proportion of its population under the age of thirty. This means that youth employment is one of the most critical issues facing the Middle East.

Economic relations among countries in the Arab world have traditionally remained at the sub-regional or bilateral levels. Sub-regional efforts such as the GCC have been more successful than broader regional efforts, and the majority of interstate economic relationships have been bilateral, in the form of labor exporting and remittances. Some of the factors contributing to the deficiency of economic integration among Arab states, including their disparate and nonintegrated macroeconomic policies and a disproportionate dependence on foreign (i.e., extra-regional) markets for exports, such as oil. Adding to the problem is inadequate transportation networks and infrastructure between countries in the region.

There have been attempts to institutionalize regional trade and economic relationships, but these initiatives have, for the most part, failed. Experts identified the Pan-Arab Free Trade Agreement (PAFTA), the Agadir Agreement, the GCC Customs Union, the North African Union, and the Arab Maghreb Union as examples of such initiatives whose failures have been a result of long-standing political obstacles.

**U.S.A. Role in the New Arab World**

The role of the United States in the Middle East has long been a controversial one. According to experts, U.S.A. foreign policy in the Middle East has been almost wholly determined by the pursuit and protection of four primary interests: reliable and consistent access to energy supplies; combating the emergence of a regional hegemonic power, such as Iran; the close relationship between the United States and Israel; and the more recent U.S. interest in countering terrorist movements and operations.

In the past, securing these interests was accomplished simply by developing close relationships with individual Arab states. They helped the United States often at the expense of the public interest. This phenomenon, which persisted throughout the last thirty years or so, has instilled a decidedly negative image of the United States in the minds of the region’s population. Most would like to see a reduction of U.S. interventionism and interference in their domestic political systems. Although U.S.A. foreign policy in the Arab world will continue to be concerned with the previously mentioned national interests, there is recognition among policy-makers in Washington that the old approach is outdated. The extent to which specific policies and aid efforts will evolve in parallel with changing realities in the region, however, is constrained by domestic economic circumstances in the United States, along with the infeasibility of maintaining its four primary interests in the Middle East through such policies and efforts[[28]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn28" \o ").

The Obama administration has, since 2008, had ambitious goals for the region, but experts noted the lack of progress in accomplishing those goals. As far as economic initiatives are concerned, the administration’s combined disbursements for Enterprise Fund initiatives for Egypt and Tunisia equal only $20 million. Likewise, the Partnership for a New Beginning in North Africa, the Partnership for Economic Opportunity, and the Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative all promise relatively low levels of funding to the region. The Middle East is not unique in this regard: in light of domestic economic problems in the United States, Washington is unlikely to provide large amounts of foreign aid to any region in the world.

A parallel development likely to affect the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world is the administration’s strategic turn to East Asia. This shift coincides with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and the decrease of military operations in Afghanistan. The United States also sees the lack of stable institutions and regional organizations in the Middle East and North Africa as an obstacle to justifying aid efforts. The United States can assist with maintenance funds to bolster operations of existing institutions, but there is little if any possibility of Washington disbursing large amounts of money for the creation of such institutions from a distance.

Neo-realists and neo-conservatives have competed for dominant positions in determining U.S. foreign policy. Yet liberalism continues to offer alternative prescriptions for achieving resolution to conflicts in the Middle East. According to political scientists, liberalism argues that states cooperate more than they compete “because it is in their common interest to do so, and prosperity and stability in the international system are the direct result of that cooperation”. The expansion of political and economic interdependence establishes incentives for this cooperation by averting military confrontation and encouraging negotiations and diplomacy as a means to resolve conflicts[[29]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn29" \o ").

While most neo-realists consider regime types largely irrelevant to national interests, democratic-peace theorists agree with neoconservatives that the transformation of autocratic regimes into liberal democracies is a worthy goal. The two theories vary regarding the mechanisms for making that transformation. Neo-conservatives manipulated democratic-peace theory to advocate realist policy by using America’s military power to overthrow dictators, whereas neo-liberals prefer to engage autocratic regimes and bring about political, economic and social liberalization through establishing interdependence in the global economy.

The neo-liberal approach appears to be favored by members of the European Union (EU). In 2004, shortly after the United States announced an embargo on weapons exports to some Arab states, British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s spokesman announced a shift from Britain’s previous position: While Britain has similar objectives and concerns to the U.S.A., Britain’s approach to some Arab states is based on a policy of critical and constructive engagement that permitted Britain to encourage and support reform in some Arab states[[30]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn30" \o ").

A spokesman for the EU foreign-affairs commissioner echoed a similar statement: “While the European Union shares America’s aspirations for the Arabs, the U.S.A. do not share the same tactical approach. According to Volker Perthes, author of Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change; Arab states has yielded little on demands for reform; there has been some cautious economic liberalization, but dissent is still being suppressed, and corruption has, according to all available accounts, increased tremendously[[31]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn31" \o ").

Arabs have been unable to implement a number of domestic reforms due to entrenched interests within the state bureaucracy. Therefore, Arab leaders sought to use “international economic agreements, particularly an association agreement with the EU, as a lever for impelling greater transparency and stimulating policy reform”[[32]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn32" \o ").

Arab’s willingness to cooperate with the international community will depend on whether its ruling elite see the return of Israeli-occupied territory as a possibility. As long as it does not, the current Arab leaders will choose non-cooperation and rhetorical confrontation, even at the cost of continued isolation. Based on a neo-realist long-term strategy, the United States may consider positive diplomacy engagement as a means to regional stability and security.

**Arabs Fear of the Neo-Conservatives**

The neo-conservative approach has resulted in putting the Arabs in a defensive posture. Observers assert that during the Bush administration, Arabs were convinced that they were targeted. As long as Arabs remained targeted by the United States for regime change, it was in the Arabs interest to keep the United States troubled in Iraq. The Bush administration later realized that it is in the U.S.A. national interest to elicit Arabs assistance in stabilizing Iraq.

Due to apparently disengaged U.S. foreign policy toward brokering a two-state solution between Palestine and Israel, Washington has had no influence on the process of Middle Eastern negotiations. Arabs already sought to negotiate a peace agreement with Israel through indirect talks mediated by the Arab League. This was done in order to prevent political instability resulting from an Arab-versus-Iranian clash. However, pressure from the United States on Arabs has resulted in stalemating the negotiations.

Engaging Arab regimes strictly on their progress toward internal democratization through measures inspired by democratic-peace theory poses risks. According to this theory, democracy is associated with peace; however, the process of achieving democracy is often associated with increased instability and conflict. Given the numerous communal identity groups within the Arab world, any uncalculated changes might result in the emergence of conflicts. A number of Arab specialists have noted that any regime replacing the current ones in the Arab world would, at best, be no improvement and might be far worse for U.S. interests in the region[[33]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn33" \o "). This was validated by the experience of pushing for democracy and liberal elections in Palestine and Libya only to witness the rise to power of the violent anti-America.

Foreign-policy analysts have raised the following question: Is it plausible that encouraging Arab regimes to democratize at a self-determined pace is more effective than pushing democratization from the outside? Seth Kaplan, a U.S. foreign-policy analyst, suggests that preserving security and the unity of the state rather than promoting Western-style personal freedoms and elections should be paramount when formulating policies to develop the country. Events in neighboring Iraq have demonstrated the difficulties of installing democratic institutions in a country ill-prepared for them. While some Arab regimes may not be preferred by the United States, it has “stabilizing elements” such as “social-welfare programs and a strong security apparatus” that have proven effective in controlling its diverse population, though at the cost of civil rights[[34]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world" \l "_ftn34" \o "). Nonetheless, the United States may consider asking some Arab states, as a gesture of confidence building, to liberalize its civil society, to foster credible state institutions responsive to the needs and desires of the Arab people, to allow freedom of expression and to free all political dissidents.

The Obama administration as it looks is considering support to the moderate-realist approach of opposing Arab actions that run counter to some U.S. national interests, such as Arab’s military support for Hamas and its perhaps unintentional provision of a safe haven for al-Qaeda.

A moderate-realist approach that moves beyond an all or nothing strategy, as well as decoupling the various conflicts in which Arabs exert influence. In Palestine, the United States should consider encouraging Arabs to stop being a spoiler in Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution, as well as solicit Arab assistance in reconciling the differences between Fatah and Hamas in exchange for U.S. support in this matter.

Based on Arab’s past performance and other U.S. foreign-policy engagements with other states in the global system, there is no assurance that such an approach may result in a desired outcome. However, the United States does not risk much in engaging Arabs to shift their strategic role in the Middle East from spoiler to facilitator of peace. The United States feels that it can always opt to disengage if Arabs engage in denial and deception.

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**الواقعية الجديدة والسياسة الأميركية في العالم العربي**

بدءًا بتبسيط نموذج نظري معقد، تؤمن الواقعية الجديدة بأن طبيعة النظام العالمي متمثلة بالمبدأ الأساسي وهو الفوضوية التي تحمل أكثر من معنى واحد. يستخدم البعض تعبير "الفوضوية" للدلالة على مجتمع لا تتوفّر فيه حكومة فاعلة. وعند استخدام التعبير بهذا الإطار قد يكون أو لا يكون الهدف الإشارة إلى الفوضى السياسية أو غياب القانون في المجتمع.  
العديد من مؤيدي نظرية الفوضوية يشتكون بأن خطًأ كبيرًا جعل من كلمة "الفوضوية" مرادفًا للحرب الأهلية والفوضى.  
إلا أن الواقعية الجديدة تتميز بتوزيع القدرات. مبدأ الانتظام الفوضوي للهيكلية الدولية غير مركزي بمعنى أنه لا وجود لسلطة مركزية رسمية على الرغم من أن البعض يعتبر بأن الولايات المتحدة تؤدي دور الشرطي في الشؤون العالمية. إلاّ أن كل الدول ذات السيادة متساوية في هذا النظام  وبعضها أكثر تساويًا من البعض الآخر. هذه الدول تتصرّف وفق منطقة الخدمة الذاتية مما يعني أن الدول تبحث عن مصالحها الخاصة وتبذل قصارى جهدها لكي لا تُخضع مصالحها لمنافع دول أخرى.  
يفترض بالدول بأقل تقدير أن ترغب في ضمان بقائها بما أن هذا الأمر يشكّل شرطًا أساسيًا للسعي وراء أهدافها. هذه القوة الدافعة للبقاء هي العنصر الأساس المؤثّر في سلوكها وهي تدفع البلدان إلى تطوير قدرات عسكرية للدفاع والتدخّل كوسيلة لتعزيز قواها. بما أن الدول لا يمكن أن تتأكّد أبدًا من النوايا المستقبلية للدول الأخرى، ينشأ نوع من عدم الثقة بين الدول، الأمر الذي يستلزم أن يتوخّوا الحذر من فقدان القوة وهذا ما قد يمكّن دول أخرى من تهديد بقائها. حالة غياب الثقة المبنية على الشكوك كما تراها الواقعية الجديدة إسمها "المعضلة الأمنية".  
الدول متشابهة  في ما يتعلّق بالاحتياجات وليس في ما يتعلّق بالقدرات على تحقيق هذه الاحتياجات. وضعية الدول في ما يتعلّق بالقدرات تحدّد توزّع الإمكانات. التوزّع الهيكلي للإمكانات يحدّ من التعاون بين الدول من خلال المكاسب النسبية التي تحقّقها دول أخرى واحتمال الاعتماد على دول أخرى. رغبة كل دولة وقدراتها على زيادة قوّتها إلى أقصى حد وضبط بعضها البعض ينتج عنه "توازنًا في القوى" يطبع العلاقات الدولية والإقليمية. ثمة طريقتان لموازنة تلجأ إليهما الدول لتحقيق توازن القوى: التوازن الداخلي والتوازن الخارجي. ويتحقّق التوازن الداخلي حين تعزّز الدول قدراتها الخاصة عبر مضاعفة نموّها الاقتصادي و/أو زيادة الإنفاق العسكري. ويتحقّق التوازن الخارجي عندما تدخل الدول في تحالفات للاستفادة من قوة دول أو تحالفات أكثر قوة.  
يجادل الواقعيون الجدد ويشيرون إلى أنه يوجد مبدئياً 3 أنظمة ممكنة وفق التغيّرات في توزيع القدرات ويحدّد هذه الأنظمة عدد القوى العظمى في النظام الدولي. النظام الأحادي القطب يتضمّن قوّة عظمى واحدة فقط أما النظام الثنائي القطب يتألّف من قوّتين عظميين والنظام المتعدّد الأقطاب يتألّف من أكثر من قوتين عظميين. يتسنتج الواقعيون الجدد بأن النظام الثنائي القطب أكثر استقرارًا (أقل عرضة لحصول حروب بين القوتين العظميين والتغيير الشامل) من النظام المتعدّد الأقطاب لأن التوازن لا يمكن أن يتحقق إلا من خلال التوازن الداخلي بما أنه لا وجود لقوى عظمى إضافية يمكن التحالف معها. وبما أنه لا يوجد إلا التوازن الداخلي في النظام الثنائي القطب بدلاً من التوازن الخارجي يتضاءل إمكان حصول أخطاء في الحسابات وبالتالي تتراجع احتمالات وقوع حروب بين القوتين العظميين.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/neo-realism-and-american-foreign-policy-arab-world#sthash.sqeajcTk.dpuf