MEMORANDUM FOR NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR OF THE UNITED STATES

SUBJECT: FRAMING MIDDLE EAST POLICY

1. **Issue:** The purpose of this memorandum is to develop innovative strategies for U.S. engagement in a multipolar Middle East.

2. **Strategic Analysis:** The shape of our challenge is to reassess and rebuild our influence in the Middle East in the face of a multipolar landscape by navigating strategic competition, establishing stability, and managing alliances. Competition in the region includes Russia, China, and Iran; they counter U.S. interests in effective and strategic ways. China’s growing influence is reflected in its successful brokering of the Saudi Arabia-Iran deal in March 2023. Relatedly, Iran and Russia’s funding of terrorist groups undermine regional stability and advance their own strategic interests. Conflict, mass killings, terrorism, and socio-economic causes, such as poverty, also contribute to the instability in the region. Alliance management should be utilized to maintain our interests, primarily navigated through Israel and, secondarily, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

3. **Relevant National Interests:** The U.S. has historically played a key role in the Middle East and holds several interests in the region that can be summarized into four aspects.
   a. **Economic:** Protecting American economic holdings, maintaining the free flow of key resources out of the region, and promoting favorable trade agreements with countries in the Middle East.
   b. **Human Rights:** The U.S. promotes human rights in accordance with the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
   c. **Radicalization and Terrorism:** The U.S. seeks to prevent radicalization and terrorist activities through addressing root causes, rather than reacting to emerging threats.
   d. **Transnationalism:** The U.S. seeks to address a variety of transnational interests to include climate change, non-proliferation, migration, global health, artificial intelligence, and the drug trade. It seeks to leverage its allies and partners within the region to assist in these goals.

These objectives aim to enhance both global and regional security and development with the overarching goal of fostering stability both regionally and internationally.

4. **Strategic Options:**
   a. **Empowering regional allies by championing cooperation:** Increasing regional economic interdependence and cultural exchange among the Middle East and with the U.S. The benefit of this approach is that socioeconomic development addresses the root causes of extremism and instability, including lack of access to resources and opportunities. However, reducing military presence can receive international pushback and further destabilize the political climates of Middle Eastern countries.
b. **Maintaining regional U.S. goals:** Focus on joint military operations within the region to promote stability. Maintaining diplomatic, military, and economic ties with nations that subscribe to the rules-based international order led by the U.S. This strategy actively balances Iranian interest with a robust Saudi presence in the Middle East. In contrast, this strategy does not address the developing competition with other great powers in the region. It also does not address combating anti–American sentiment in the Middle East.

c. **Increasing direct involvement:** Bolster U.S. military presence in the region to combat VEOs, disrupt destabilization efforts by regional powers, and deter global competitors. This option provides the U.S. more direct influence over regional stability. However, increasing military intervention has a history of inflaming VEOs and further destabilizing the region.

5. **Recommendation:** Restructure our relationships with regional actors through a shift in economic and diplomatic strategies to prioritize long-term regional stability.

6. **Implementation:** To implement this long-term strategy, we recommend prioritizing economic interdependence and cultural exchange both among Middle Eastern nations and with the U.S.

   a. **Economic Interdependence:** The U.S. will promote effective governance and expansions in healthcare, education, and infrastructure programs through institutions like USAID and continued support for UN agencies. The U.S. will use its influence in international financial institutions to encourage extension and forgiveness of loans and discourage structural adjustment. In states that suffer from particularly high levels of corruption and mismanagement, such as Yemen, the U.S. should increase funding for UN programs to transfer aid directly to civil servants with the ultimate goal of transitioning responsibility to strengthened local governments.

   b. **Strengthen Private Sector:** The U.S. will work with NGOs to provide microfinance loans to small businesses. Additionally, the U.S. will work within the Arab League, United Nations, and other existing regional structures to create bureaucratic networks to ease conduct of business across borders.

   c. **Cultural Exchange “American Corner”:** The U.S. will establish culture corners through the State Department in countries including Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Egypt. These programs would build mutual understanding through education on American values and culture. Outreach initiatives through the program would connect to local NGOs, promoting civil societies ties between the U.S. and these countries with the ultimate goal of increased cooperation and stability in the region through soft power.

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Middle East: Framing a Coherent Policy Toward Key Players
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