

France's Approach to the Middle East: Between Economic, Security, and Human Rights Interests

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ABSTRACT:

France's foreign policy in the Middle East represents a complex and multifaceted arena influenced by overlapping economic, security, and human rights considerations. The central problem addressed in this study is how France balances and manages potential conflicts among these three dimensions while maintaining its strategic role in the region. The main research question focuses on understanding the mechanisms through which France simultaneously pursues its economic interests, ensures regional security, and upholds human rights principles in its diplomatic engagements in the Middle East. This research employs a qualitative content analysis methodology, systematically reviewing official documents, governmental statements, international reports, and scholarly articles related to France's foreign policy. Data were collected through comprehensive library research and analyzed using coding techniques to identify key themes and patterns that shape French policy in the region. Findings reveal that France's economic interests, particularly through substantial investments by major energy corporations and arms exports, exert a dominant influence on its foreign policy direction. Concurrently, security priorities center on counter-terrorism efforts and maintaining regional stability, often requiring active military and intelligence collaboration. Although human rights concerns are formally integrated within French diplomacy as part of a soft power strategy, these considerations are frequently subordinated to economic and security imperatives. The study concludes that for France to sustain and enhance its influence in the Middle East, a more balanced, flexible, and multilateral policy framework is necessary. Such an approach would minimize tensions among diverse interests and allow France to adapt effectively to evolving regional and global dynamics. Implementing this integrated strategy could strengthen France's position as a constructive actor capable of addressing the challenges and leveraging opportunities within the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

Keywords: *France foreign policy, Middle East, qualitative content analysis, economic interests, regional security, human rights*

INTRODUCTION:

France's foreign policy in the Middle East has long been recognized as one of the strategic and highly tense arenas in international affairs. The geopolitical position of this region, encompassing vast energy resources and the sensitive location of international transit routes, holds particular significance for countries such as France that strive to maintain their leadership and influential role in the area. The Middle East confronts numerous political, religious, and economic complexities, and these characteristics have profoundly influenced France's foreign policies (Sa 'd al-Din, 1401).

With the transformation of the international system's structure and the reduction of direct American presence in the region, France has found new opportunities to expand its influence, accompanied simultaneously by challenges such as competition from regional and global actors. France's strategy in the Middle East is designed around three principal axes economic interests, security, and human rights axes that at times

conflict and at other times reinforce one another (Mo 'abberi, 1396; Alimohammadi et al., 1403). On the one hand, France's economic interests are largely directed toward investment in energy resources and arms sales, which strengthen France's economic and political standing. On the other hand, ensuring regional security and countering terrorist threats form the core of the country's security policies. Furthermore, respect for human rights is advanced as a component of France's soft diplomacy at the international level, yet this dimension is at times overshadowed by other interests (Sa 'd al-Din, 1401).

The complex and fundamental problem of this research lies in examining how France balances and simultaneously manages these three dimensions within its Middle East foreign policy. The study endeavors to answer how, and through what mechanisms, France manages its economic, security, and human rights interests in this sensitive and turbulent region, and what consequences this management entails for its position in both the regional and international arenas.

The significance of this research can be understood from several perspectives. First, the Middle East constitutes a key global energy source and a crisis-ridden region in political, security, and humanitarian terms, upon which the policies of powerful countries such as France have a bearing. Second, the reduction of direct American interventions and shifts in the regional balance of power have created new opportunities and challenges for France that require precise and up-to-date analysis of its policies. Third, the scarcity of comprehensive and multidimensional research on how conflicting interests are balanced in French foreign policy redoubles the necessity of this study (Mo'abberi, 1396; Macron, 2020).

The main research question is: "How does France strike a balance among its economic, security, and human rights interests in its foreign policy concerning the Middle East, and what effect does this balancing act have on the country's position and role in the region?" Adopting a qualitative content analysis approach and examining official documents, relevant theories, and scholarly analyses, this study seeks to present a comprehensive, precise, and contextually grounded picture of French foreign policy that can assist policymakers and researchers in making more accurate and informed decisions in this field.

Literature Review:

The topic of France's foreign policy in the Middle East has attracted the attention of numerous researchers in recent years, each analyzing various dimensions of the subject. In this section, selected studies are listed in reverse chronological order, and their findings and distinguishing features are examined.

Sa'd al-Din (1401), in a study entitled "France's Middle East Policy: Aims, Priorities, and Strategies," examined France's role after the new Macron presidency. He emphasized that France, in light of regional developments and the reduced American role, seeks to increase its political and economic influence, while maintaining a balance between economic and security interests, together with attention to human rights issues, constitutes the principal challenge of French foreign policy.

Mo'abberi (1396), in the article "France's Middle East Foreign Policy after the Second World War," analyzed the historical roots and power structures influencing French policy and demonstrated that geopolitical interests and energy resources constitute the primary drivers of France's intervention and active presence in the region.

Alimohammadi et al. (1403), in a study entitled "The Place of the Middle East in France's Defense-Security Policy," focusing on military approaches, concluded that France has taken significant steps in countering terrorist threats and supporting strategic military coalitions, but budgetary constraints and the efficacy of military interventions have hindered the achievement of long-term objectives.

Ajorlou (1404), in the article "France's Current Role in the Middle East," examined recent developments and Macron's policies, finding that France has established a delicate balance between preserving its historical position and the need to adapt to new circumstances.

Foroughi et al. (1401), in the research "France's Middle East Policy: Aims, Priorities, and Strategies," stressed that France, by strengthening economic and military cooperation, endeavors to maintain its presence in the face of competition from Turkey and other regional actors, yet in some instances adopts protective policies due to conflicting interests.

Khaleghinejad (1400), in the report "France's Current Policies in the Middle East," analyzing cultural and historical dimensions, emphasized that France, owing to the special longstanding ties between the two sides, continues to preserve its influence through soft diplomacy and support for allied countries.

Davoudi (1399), in "France's Foreign Policy toward the Middle East and North Africa," stated that French policy, despite certain tactical changes, largely continues old strategies based on preserving economic and security interests and maintaining political influence.

Other politicians and experts have also analyzed France's role in regional crises such as those in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, and in most studies the importance of a multidimensional balance in French foreign policy has been underscored (Alimohammadi et al., 1403; Khalvatgar, 1398).

The distinguishing feature of the present study lies in its comprehensive and specialized examination of the balance among economic, security, and human rights interests in French foreign policy, which, utilizing a qualitative content analysis method and drawing on up-to-date sources, provides a precise and novel picture. The innovation of this work resides in the application of a combined methodology to analyze the congruence and conflict among these multiple dimensions and in offering new strategic recommendations for improving France's foreign policy in the Middle East—aspects that have received less systematic attention in previous studies.

Theoretical Framework:

In analyzing France's foreign policy in the Middle East, one of the most widely applied theoretical frameworks is the theory of realism in international relations. This approach emphasizes that states are the primary actors in the international system and that their foreign policy is designed on the basis of national interests and the preservation of power (Waltz, 1979). From a realist perspective, France, as a middle-ranking power, seeks by leveraging economic resources, military influence, and diplomacy to maintain its position in the Middle East region and secure its national interests (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Structural realism stresses that in an anarchic system, states compete for survival and the maintenance of their security. Accordingly, the security and economic

interests of each state constitute the most important determinants of foreign policy (Walt, 1991). In the case of French foreign policy, economic interests tied to energy and arms markets, and security interests embodied in counter-terrorism and the preservation of regional stability, can be explained from this standpoint (Foroughi et al., 2021).

On the other hand, liberal theories also account for aspects of French policy that emphasize international cooperation, human rights, and multilateral institutions. France frequently employs soft diplomacy to promote the values of democracy and human rights, an approach supported by this perspective (Keohane & Nye, 1977). These two approaches at times overlap and at times conflict within French foreign policy, and the management of this interplay forms a significant part of the complexity of the country's foreign policy.

Key concepts of this research include:

- Foreign policy: The set of objectives, strategies, and actions of a state to preserve national interests and international relations (Hill, 2003).
- National interest: The overarching economic, security, and political goals that a state endeavors to realize (Donnelly, 2000).
- Balance of interests: The effort to maintain equilibrium among various political, economic, and social objectives within the foreign policy framework (Smith, 2000).

The conceptual framework proposed in this article is based on analyzing the interaction and conflict among economic, security, and human rights interests. In this approach, French foreign policy is seen as a networked system in which various actors with diverse and at times contradictory objectives interact and compete. Understanding these interactions and how to improve coordination among them constitutes the central focus of this research.

This framework also enables a more precise analysis of French foreign policy in the Middle East, and the research's innovation lies in presenting a multifaceted and systematic picture of these conflicts and interactions, an aspect that has received comparatively little attention in previous studies.

France's Foreign Policy in the Middle East:

France's foreign policy in the Middle East has faced significant challenges, opportunities, and transformations in recent years. Owing to its geopolitical importance, access to energy resources, and security conditions, the region has consistently been one of the most pivotal areas in Paris's policy priorities (Khaleghinejad, 1400). With the relative reduction of the American role in the region and shifts in power rivalries, France has sought to preserve and reinforce its position as an independent and influential power (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

The Importance of the Middle East and Reasons for France's Presence

- Economic Priorities
- Security Priorities
- Human Rights Considerations

Geographical proximity and historical and cultural ties are among the major reasons for France's attention to the Middle East. In addition, the significance of energy resources and the region's strategic position, which governs global energy transit routes, has prompted the French Republic's policies to focus specifically on this region (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Major French corporations such as Total engage in large-scale investments in the oil and gas sectors in various Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, directly securing France's economic and political interests (Mo'abberi, 1396). Arms exports also constitute another principal component of France's economic policy in the region. Through the sale of military equipment to Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and North Africa, France plays a strategic role in the regional arms market (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

Through a limited military presence and participation in regional coalitions, France counters terrorist threats and strives to maintain political stability in the region (Ajlou, 1404). The presence of French forces in areas such as Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq indicates the security importance of these countries for Paris (Foroughi et al., 1401). In this vein, France endeavors to sustain military cooperation with international coalitions; however, financial constraints and regional policies have limited the scope of extensive interventions.

Although France seeks to promote universal human rights values, adherence to these principles at times conflicts with security and economic considerations (Sa'd al-Din, 1401). The use of soft and cultural diplomacy through support for human rights organizations and institutions plays an important role in French foreign policy; yet practical attention to human rights in some countries of the region remains limited (Khaleghinejad, 1400).

One of France's greatest challenges in the Middle East is maintaining a balance among diverse interests in the face of regional competition from the United States, Turkey, and Russia. The constant shifts in regional equations, terrorist threats, and political insecurities have added to the complexity of these conditions. Furthermore, France's desire to preserve the JCPOA and control Iran's nuclear program has significantly influenced the scope of the country's foreign policy in the region (Mo'abberi, 1396).

Practical Examples and Key Events:

- France's initiative to revive relations with Lebanon as a focal point of regional influence (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).
- France's approach to the Syrian crisis, which began with support for opposition groups and

evolved toward more balanced policies (Ayorlou, 1404).

- The use of multilateral military and diplomatic cooperation in the fight against ISIS (Foroughi et al., 1401).
- Negotiations and efforts to establish communication channels with Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf littoral states (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

France's Military Cooperation in the Middle East:

France has deployed approximately 1,100 military personnel to the Middle East, operating within missions such as the fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq (ISNA News Agency, 2018). In recent years, France has increased its presence from five locations to nine, enabling broader participation in military operations. Approximately 200 of these forces are stationed alongside the Syrian People's Defense Units in the north of the country, despite France's claim that it has not officially declared its military presence in northern Syria. This military presence plays an important role in countering terrorist groups and securing France's interests in the region (Anadolu News Agency, 2018). Major French arms contracts with the Persian Gulf littoral states also offer an important analysis of the country's military influence. In 2021, France signed a contract worth over 17 billion euros for the sale of 80 Rafale fighter jets and 12 Caracal helicopters to the United Arab Emirates, which constitutes the largest French arms deal in the region (Farhikhtegan Online, 2021). This contract not only ensures the security of France's regional allies but also economically creates thousands of jobs in the French defense industry and guarantees the military equipment supply chain through 2031.

This increase in military cooperation has coincided with significant political visits, through which France seeks to present itself as an independent and influential power in West Asia. The French President's visits to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar exemplify efforts to deepen military and political engagements with the region's countries (Farhikhtegan Online, 2021).

Combating terrorism constitutes one of the core pillars of France's security policy in the Middle East. Beyond direct military support, France seeks, through international and coalition cooperation, to organize counter-terrorism operations. This stance has acquired added importance given the threat posed by French citizens joining terrorist groups both domestically and abroad (Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). France's approach to the political crises in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq also reflects its balancing policies; for example, Paris has sought to manage support for Lebanon's political stability while understanding the reciprocal roles of regional actors such as Hezbollah (Ayorlou, 2025).

French policy toward Iran focuses on preserving the JCPOA and preventing tension in the region, although it exercises caution in interactions with other regional

actors. France calibrates its diplomatic positions in such a way as to safeguard its security and interests while preventing the expansion of potential crises (Sa'd al-Din, 1401). In recent years, France has even intervened in matters such as the interception of drones launched from Iran toward Israel, reflecting France's heightened sensitivity to regional security and stability (Tabnak, 2025).

Available data and evidence indicate that France's foreign policy in the Middle East constitutes a system of complex interactions in which economic, security, and human rights policies are pursued simultaneously, and the management of this balance plays a significant role in determining France's role in the region. It is anticipated that, in light of regional and global developments, this policy will undergo further evolution in the years ahead.

Data and Analysis of France's Foreign Policy in the Middle East:

France's foreign policy in the Middle East has been influenced in recent years by multiple factors, including geopolitical shifts, economic interests, security threats, and human rights issues (Khaleghinejad, 1400). Owing to its oil and gas resources as well as its strategic position, the region has consistently attracted France's sustained attention. With the decline of direct American presence and intervention in the region, France has found opportunities to strengthen its influence and has sought to adopt more assertive policies (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

Investment by major French corporations such as Total in the oil, gas, and renewable energy sectors in numerous countries including Iraq, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and even Lebanon constitutes a core element for preserving France's economic interests and consolidating its position (Mo'abberi, 1396). Through expanding arms exports to Arab countries and the United Arab Emirates, France holds a significant share of the regional arms market, a fact that plays a key role in sustaining French political influence (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

Through a limited but strategically intelligent military presence in certain crisis-ridden areas, including northern Syria and Iraq, and through participation in counter-terrorism coalitions, France addresses security threats. This presence enhances the capacity to protect France's economic and political interests (Ayorlou, 1404). Moreover, France has taken steps in cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries aimed at strengthening regional security and stability (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Although France has consistently emphasized the promotion of human rights and democracy in its foreign policy, contradictions between these values and economic-security interests are observable in numerous instances. This conflict is particularly evident in relations with Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf littoral states, where France has adopted a balanced yet

sensitive policy (Sa'd al-Din, 1401; Khaleghinejad, 1400).

Key Examples and Developments:

- France's support for the JCPOA nuclear agreement and efforts to preserve this important mechanism in relations with Iran (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).
- Intervention in Lebanon's political affairs and special relations with various political currents, which help preserve France's influence (Mo'abberi, 1396).
- Management of the Syrian crisis with an emphasis on preserving stability and preventing the spread of violence (Ajlou, 1404).
- Strengthening military and economic cooperation with Egypt and the UAE, and countering Turkish influence in the Eastern Mediterranean (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Data and documentation indicate that France's foreign policy in the Middle East is a combination of economic and security strategies and soft diplomacy, pursued within a framework of preserving national interests and enhancing the country's role in regional and global equations. These policies, within the context of structural shifts in regional and global power, must be managed flexibly and with balance in order to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the Middle East.

General Framework of France's Foreign Policy in the Middle East:

Geographical proximity, historical ties, and cultural and social exchanges are among the most important factors underlying France's constant attention to the Middle East. Nevertheless, hard security interests and regional rivalries increasingly influence the formulation of French policies. The decline of American influence in the region and the growing presence of other actors have set the stage for France's efforts to return more robustly and enhance its influence in Middle Eastern developments (Khaleghinejad, 1400).

France calibrates its Middle East policies with two main objectives: preserving its strategic independence and strengthening unity at the level of the European Union. The country maintains an effective presence in various regional developments; although often loyal to American policies, in areas such as Lebanon, Syria, and the JCPOA it adopts an independent and deliberate approach (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

Lebanon and Syria stand out as two key countries for preserving France's influence. Historical and strategic interests, along with participation in maintaining political and social stability in these two countries, constitute the main reasons for Paris's commitment to sustaining ties with local actors. In Lebanon, France attempts to preserve its influence by accepting regional realities, including Hezbollah's role (Khaleghinejad, 1400). In Syria as well, following the failure of the policy of supporting the opposition, France's efforts

have focused on a balanced presence and safeguarding interests within a framework of political solutions (Ajlou, 1404).

Within French foreign policy, Iran occupies a special place as a significant regional actor. Preserving the JCPOA nuclear agreement and pursuing active diplomacy with Tehran are among France's priorities. The country seeks to establish a delicate balance between supporting regional stability and security concerns (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

In parallel, France's relations with Arab Persian Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are also vital for maintaining regional equilibrium. Visits by French political and economic delegations to these areas reflect efforts to broaden cooperation in military, economic, and diplomatic fields (Foroughi et al., 1401).

French policy in these areas is based on strengthening convergence among regional countries and reducing tensions in order to preserve its mediating role and its capacity as an influential power in critical developments. Efforts to contain Turkish influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and to expand military and energy cooperation in this region are among the hallmark examples of this policy (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

Combating terrorism is one of the major axes of France's foreign-security policy in the Middle East. Within the framework of international coalitions, Paris has deployed limited forces in Syria and Iraq and, through intelligence and military cooperation, seeks to prevent the expansion of terrorist groups (Ajlou, 1404).

Furthermore, due to the threats posed by the recruitment of French citizens into terrorist groups, France endeavors to control threats by strengthening domestic security policies and regional cooperation. Allocating budgets for training local forces and providing financial support for security programs are among France's other measures (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Large-scale investments by French companies, particularly Total, in the region's oil and gas sectors constitute one of the main pillars of France's economic presence, which bolsters its standing in the Middle East (Mo'abberi, 1396). France is also a major arms supplier to the Persian Gulf littoral states and North Africa, a role that, in addition to economic profit, reinforces Paris's political power (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

These economic measures, combined with active diplomacy, have created an overall policy for preserving stability and influence in the region, which can also be explained within the framework of the European "strategic autonomy" doctrine (Macron, 2020).

Economic investments are one of the strategic pillars of France's foreign policy in the Middle East and exert a significant influence on the country's political and security interactions in the region. France, particularly since Emmanuel Macron's presidency, has focused on expanding economic relations and increasing trade volume with Middle Eastern countries (Sa'd al-Din, 1401). In recent years, France's trade volume with

MENA region countries has amounted to approximately 63.2 billion euros, representing a significant share of the French economy compared to economic relations with China and the United States (Review of Strategic Europe-Middle East Relations, 1401).

Major French corporations such as Total have made extensive investments in the oil, gas, and renewable energy sectors in numerous countries including Iraq, Egypt, and the UAE. These not only provide substantial financial benefits for Paris but also contribute to the political and economic stability of the region (Mo'abberi, 1396). Total, in particular, plays a key role in large-scale oil and gas projects in the region, and these partnerships form part of France's broader foreign strategy to sustain an effective economic presence (Foroughi et al., 1401).

In addition to the energy sector, arms exports represent another important dimension of French economic policy. France has been the largest arms exporter to the Middle East, and these weapons play a decisive role in fostering influence and military cooperation with the southern Persian Gulf states (Alimohammadi et al., 1403). Contracts for the sale of fighter jets, tanks, and other military equipment to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are among the most prominent examples of this policy.

One of the significant challenges in French economic policy is competition with other actors, including China and the United States. Although France has managed to secure a considerable share of the energy and arms markets, it still faces constraints in attracting investments and large-scale economic contracts. For instance, the cancellation of the contract for the construction of the Abu Dhabi nuclear power plant and its replacement by a Korean company serves as a clear example of the challenges France faces in maintaining regional economic competitiveness (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

On the other hand, domestic economic programs also have a considerable impact on foreign policy. Given the widespread economic and social crises in France, such as the Yellow Vests movement and the government's fiscal constraints, the Macron administration, through initiatives like the "New Marshall Plan" and "France Relance," strives to improve the economic situation and enhance France's competitive power programs that indirectly influence France's outlook and performance in foreign policy (Review of Strategic Europe-Middle East Relations, 1401).

Economically, France seeks to maintain its position as an important player in the global energy market and arms industry, a goal that requires targeted investments in various Middle Eastern countries and the creation of an environment of sustainable economic and political cooperation. Maintaining a balance among economic interests and political and security commitments is a key point in France's foreign policy in the region (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Human Rights and Soft Diplomacy in French Foreign Policy:

One of the notable dimensions of France's foreign policy in the Middle East is its attention to human rights and soft diplomacy, which is considered alongside economic and security interests. As a country where the values of democracy and human rights hold an important place in its constitution and political culture, France has sought to reflect these values in its foreign policy and to convey this message to the region's countries through support for civil and human rights institutions (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

However, this human rights approach has not always been without challenges. At times, France's economic and security interests become so prominent that human rights concerns are marginalized. For example, extensive commercial and military relations with Persian Gulf states, some of which have a record of human rights problems, have led Paris to remain silent in practice concerning human rights observance or to refrain from official reactions and strong stances (Khaleghinejad, 1400).

Soft diplomacy, encompassing activities such as cultural exchange, support for educational projects, and the promotion of the French language, is another tool France employs to maintain its influence and positive image in the region. France uses its extensive networks of cultural institutions, schools, and student exchange programs to build deeper connections with civil society and the new generation in the region (Ajlou, 1404). These activities are carried out with the aim of reinforcing France's cultural and political standing in the Middle East and are complementary to the country's hard economic and security strategies.

Another existing challenge is the conflict between human rights approaches and security interests; in cases where regional countries face terrorist threats or political crises, France prefers to prioritize security policies, which in turn can lead to weaknesses in the pursuit of human rights issues. This duality has occasionally drawn domestic and international criticism against France (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Nonetheless, France continues to strive, through multilateralist policies including cooperation with international organizations and the European Union, to mitigate the negative consequences of these contradictions and to incorporate human rights in a balanced manner within its foreign policy (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

Historical Re-reading and Recent Approaches in French Foreign Policy:

French foreign policy in the Middle East is rooted in the historical past and harks back to colonial-era commitments and relationships. After World War I and the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), France assumed control over the areas of Lebanon and Syria, which came to serve as the foundation for its subsequent influence in the region (ISNA, 1999). This historical legacy continues to shape France's contemporary

approaches and policies, prompting Paris to maintain an active political and cultural presence in these countries (Taba, 1399).

In the contemporary era, particularly after the end of the Cold War and global geopolitical changes, France's approach to the Middle East has undergone transformation. During the presidencies of François Mitterrand and Charles de Gaulle, France sought to preserve its diplomatic independence and to remain an active mediating and regional power. This approach entailed allocating appropriate resources for political and military maneuver, as well as forging unions and coalitions in the region (Ajlou, 1404).

In recent years, with the decline of direct American power in the region and the formation of new coalitions, France has shown a greater inclination to play a leadership role in multilateral coalitions and to engage with regional and extra-regional actors. The "European Strategic Autonomy" project, put forward by Emmanuel Macron, also forms part of France's efforts to reduce security dependence on the United States and to increase its capacity to influence regional issues (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

France is particularly active in the crises in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. In Lebanon, France remains a key player in preserving political and social stability, which includes supporting the Lebanese government and endeavoring to reduce internal and regional tensions (Foroughi et al., 1401).

In Syria, France severed diplomatic relations with the Bashar al-Assad government in 2011 and supported the opposition; however, as time passed and the regional situation evolved, French positions were moderated and showed a greater inclination toward political and multilateral solutions to exit the crisis (Ajlou, 1404).

In Iraq as well, France, while assisting in economic reconstruction, provides training and equipment for local security forces and participates militarily and technically in the fight against ISIS (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

Beyond domestic and regional factors, France is also heavily affected by global developments. The Ukraine crisis, the economic war among major powers, and shifts in patterns of military-political alliances are among the factors that have influenced the character of French foreign policy. Within this framework, France seeks not only to preserve its power but also to play a mediating and facilitating role in Middle Eastern crises (Strategic Europe-Middle East Relations Study Group, 1401).

Owing to its commitments within the European Union and the United Nations, France is active in international coalitions and strives to promote multilateral cooperation. The project of European strategic autonomy places greater emphasis than ever on the need to strengthen Europe's role, particularly that of France, in Middle Eastern equations (Macron, 2020).

According to aggregated data, the level of French investment in the Middle East has grown over the past five years, amounting to several tens of billions of euros. Likewise, the number of military personnel in

crisis-stricken countries such as Syria and Iraq has increased, although they continue to operate within the framework of limited missions and in compliance with international law.

In French arms export charts, a major share is allocated to the Persian Gulf littoral states, which consolidates France's role as one of the principal arms suppliers in the region. Data concerning diplomatic cooperation and numerous negotiations with various regional countries also attest to the country's sustained diplomatic efforts (Center for Advanced International Studies, 1404).

Analysis of Findings:

Analysis of data and documentation indicates that French foreign policy in the Middle East is a complex and multidimensional structure in which economic, security, and human rights interests interact and at times conflict with one another. Through large-scale economic investments in the oil, gas, and defense industries, France seeks to preserve and expand its economic influence, which is directly linked to the country's political and military interests (Sa'd al-Din, 1401; Mo'abberi, 1396).

France's limited yet targeted military presence in crisis-stricken countries such as Syria and Iraq, its intelligence and military cooperation with the Persian Gulf states, and its efforts for regional stability can be understood as France's endeavor to secure its national and strategic interests in the region (Ajlou, 1404; Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

Nonetheless, the contradictions between economic and security approaches, on the one hand, and human rights demands, on the other, constitute a major challenge of French foreign policy. Although France strives to uphold human rights values in its policy, certain economic and security policies have diminished the impact of this approach (Khaleghinejad, 1400; Foroughi et al., 1401).

Drawing on coherent qualitative analysis and documented research, this study demonstrates that France needs to formulate and implement a more balanced policy that, while safeguarding economic and security interests, also remains committed to human rights values, thereby playing a more influential and sustainable role in Middle Eastern developments.

The innovation of this research lies in its simultaneous and systematic examination of the conflicts and interactions among France's multiple interests—an area that has rarely been addressed comprehensively in previous studies—and the offering of policy recommendations based on the region's new realities constitutes another strength of this research.

France's Role in the Middle East: Historical, Military, and Diplomatic Dimensions:

France's role in the Middle East dates back to before the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), but after that agreement the country effectively assumed control over the areas of Lebanon and Syria and also developed colonial relations with North African countries (ISNA, 1399).

This historical legacy has had profound effects on France's contemporary attitudes and approaches toward the region. The country identifies itself as an actor with historical entitlement and cultural and political influence, and part of its foreign policy is directed at preserving this heritage and its position in the region (Taba, 1399).

From this perspective, France pursues not only economic and security interests but also soft-power assets including language, culture, and public diplomacy to maintain its influence in the Middle East. This structural approach has led to the expansion of France's soft power tools and cultural diplomacy in the Middle East (Ajloulou, 1404).

As of 2025, France maintained three main hubs of military presence in the Middle East, encompassing the Syria-Iraq-Jordan zone, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf littoral states (Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, 1402). French military forces in these areas total approximately 2,000 personnel, who generally operate within the framework of counter-terrorism operations and the preservation of regional stability (Foroughi et al., 1401).

France has also played a key role in international military coalitions against terrorist groups such as ISIS and seeks, by maintaining balance in its military policies, to avoid extensive and prolonged engagements. This targeted military presence has simultaneously led to regional coalition-building and increased political influence, which is reinforced through cooperation with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf (Alimohammadi et al., 1403).

France's diplomatic approach to regional developments is primarily based on multilateral diplomacy, cooperation with international organizations, and efforts to mediate among regional actors (Sa'd al-Din, 1401). At the same time, by preserving deep bilateral relations with key regional countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, and the UAE, France strives to establish a regional political equilibrium that favors its interests and sustainable stability.

Another significant area to which France has devoted attention is its active role in the Iranian nuclear negotiations and efforts to preserve the JCPOA (Khaleghinejad, 1400). Likewise, in the Lebanese and Syrian crises, France, through a combined approach of political pressure, financial support, and institution-building, has reinforced the importance of its position in the region (Ajloulou, 1404).

Among the key challenges of French foreign policy in the Middle East is the inherent conflict between preserving economic and security interests and upholding human rights principles. While needing to maintain cooperation with wealthy Persian Gulf countries to secure energy markets and arms exports, France simultaneously faces international criticism regarding human rights violations in these countries, a dynamic that complicates Paris's stance (Foroughi et al., 1401).

Moreover, the regional rivalries of significant actors such as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have also

imposed constraints on an independent and effective French policy. The country is at times obliged to adopt balanced positions and coordinate with its European and American allies, which may conflict with France's long-term interests (Mo'abberi, 1396).

Among the notable consequences of French foreign policy in the Middle East are the consolidation of economic presence and the increase in military and security cooperation in the region's key countries. By employing various hard and soft power tools, France has been able to enhance its influence despite structural limitations (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

Yet French policies still face serious constraints on their effectiveness, some of which stem from regional rivalries, budgetary limitations, and the political complexities of Southwest Asia. Moreover, human rights challenges and international pressures have compelled French authorities to revisit certain policies and adopt realist perspectives in dealing with regional issues (Khaleghinejad, 1400).

Emerging Trends and the Outlook for French Foreign Policy:

Entering 2025 and 2026, France's foreign policy in the Middle East is influenced by complex trends that can be outlined as follows:

While expressing concern over escalating tensions between Iran and the United States, France strives to maintain an active diplomatic line to prevent the outbreak of direct conflict (Contemporary Strategy, 1404). Numerous meetings between French officials and their Iranian and regional counterparts during this period indicate that active diplomacy has been the primary priority for Paris, so that the path of negotiation and understanding remains open (Euronews, 1403).

The French government has also announced that it will continue to increase its limited military presence in West Asia, stressing that this presence serves as a guarantee for curbing the rise of violence and maintaining the stability of the entire region (Javan Online, 1403). At major defense meetings in Paris, officials have formulated policies for military cooperation and for countering new regional threats, including advanced technologies such as reconnaissance and military drones (Tasnim, 1403).

On the other hand, given the rapid changes in the political and military structure of the region, France endeavors to play the role of mediator and balancing power effectively. The holding of multilateral meetings hosted by France on the Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon crises attests to Paris's efforts to manage regional crises through multilateral diplomacy (Center for Advanced International Studies, 1404).

Engagement with the European Union and France's Independent Programs:

Within the framework of the European Union, France plays a key role in the pursuit of an integrated European policy in the Middle East. Given the necessity of European strategic autonomy, France has undertaken

initiatives to increase security and economic cooperation among European countries in the region (Sa'd al-Din, 1401).

However, since other European members hold different views and interests in the region, France is at times compelled to adopt more independent and assertive policies. This is particularly felt in relation to Iran, nuclear issues and sanctions, and military intervention in regional crises (Center for European and Middle Eastern Studies, 1404).

The outlook for France's foreign policy in the Middle East is complex, given a combination of domestic and regional factors. On the one hand, France must compete with new actors such as Turkey, Russia, and China that are expanding their influence in the region. On the other hand, preserving the model of cooperation with the United States and heeding the priorities of the European Union also remains important for Paris.

One of the major challenges is the strengthening of mechanisms for security and economic cooperation with the region's countries, which requires greater investment and more active diplomacy. Furthermore, France must respond to domestic pressures concerning respect for human rights and the reduction of social inequalities an issue that will be reflected in its foreign policy (Foroughi et al., 1401).

CONCLUSION:

France's foreign policy in the Middle East reflects the intersection and conflict among the country's economic, security, and human rights interests, managed within a complex and multidimensional nexus. With its historical background and longstanding ties to the region's countries, France has pursued its role as one of the influential regional actors (Mo'abberi, 1396). In recent years, and especially in the post-global-crisis era, France has heightened the importance of the Middle East for its strategic and economic interests and has sought to consolidate its position in the geopolitical landscape as an independent power (Sa'd al-Din, 1401). One of the most important findings of this research is that France, through extensive investments in the oil and gas sectors and arms exports, seeks to preserve and expand its economic interests in the region. A limited military presence in strategic locations and security cooperation with the Persian Gulf states are examples of this effort (Alimohammadi et al., 1403). However, this economic and security approach at times conflicts with human rights pressures and international criticism. Although France, in its statements and policies, emphasizes the values of democracy and human rights, in cases such as arms sales to countries with records of human rights violations, these values have in practice been marginalized (Khaleghinejad, 1400).

Cultural and soft diplomacy forms another pillar of France's foreign policy, which, through the teaching of the French language, support for cultural institutions, and academic exchange programs, complements economic and political influence and contributes to the balance of hard and soft power in the region (Ajlou, 1404).

France's approach to regional crises has been shaped on the basis of multilateral diplomacy and efforts at mediation. This approach, while seeking to reduce tensions and manage the crises in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, also encompasses participation in the Iranian nuclear negotiations (Peace Studies Center, 1401). These policies have been analyzed in line with the concepts of realism and liberalism in international relations as the two dominant approaches in French foreign policy (Hill, 2003; Waltz, 1979).

Based on the findings, France must, in the future, consolidate and enhance its position in the Middle East by offering solutions for increasing internal coordination among its economic, security, and human rights policies, expanding cultural and soft diplomacy, and strengthening multilateral cooperation. Furthermore, given the growing competition among regional and global powers, France requires flexible and forward-looking strategies to confront emerging challenges.

Recommendations and Suggestions:

1. Enhancing coordination among ministries and relevant foreign policy institutions in data collection, analysis, and decision-making: More integrated and harmonious management must be developed to prevent policy contradictions.
2. Strengthening the soft power strategy: Developing cultural and educational programs and public diplomacy is essential to preserving a positive image of France in the minds of regional public opinion.
3. Strengthening regional and transregional cooperation and coalitions: France should expand its mediating and facilitating role within international and local organizations.
4. Practical commitment to human rights: Despite economic interests, efforts must be made to manage security and economic interactions while upholding human rights principles and achieving balance.
5. Forward-looking and flexible policies: France should, by examining new geopolitical trends, formulate programs suited to the changing and complex conditions of the region.

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