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## Confrontation between the USA and the USSR in the Middle East: Geopolitical aspect

**Abstract.** The research relevance is determined by the significant role of geopolitics in the life of certain regions over the past two centuries of human history, while the methods of geopolitical play remained the same, thus studying the experience is important to prevent new mistakes. The study aims to investigate the military and political processes in the Middle East during the Cold War and to determine what political methods were used by the representatives of different parties. The main methods used in the historical research were the following: analysis of sources to determine their reliability; synthesis with other works, creating new views on the problem; the method of analogy; and the method of generalisation. The analysis of many historical works and sources determined that the territory of the Middle East was of great importance to both the United States and the USSR. During the Cold War, many serious conflicts took place in the Middle East. These conflicts had their origins in the long-standing confrontation between Arabs and Jews, and, with the spread of modern ideas at the time, the struggle between socialism and democracy. This led to significant interference by external forces in the internal affairs of the Middle East, which led to escalating conflicts and instability in the region. Geopolitical battles between various conflicting forces, as well as the deployment of military operations and sponsorship of various conflict groups, have led to deep divisions and even armed clashes. It also contributed to the rise of extremism, religious ideologies and terrorist activities, which have had a further impact on stability and security not only at the regional level but also at the global level. The study results will be useful for all those who study history and geopolitics. Using the example of the confrontation in the Middle East, it is possible to identify general trends in the policy of superpowers during the Cold War and to define certain methods of geopolitics

**Keywords:** Arab countries; doctrine; fighting; religious clashes; military conflicts

### Introduction

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, geopolitics had a significant impact on different countries of the world. Important elements of geopolitics were superpowers that defended their interests and influenced the political processes of weaker countries. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by the struggle between the USA and the USSR. In historiography, this struggle is called the Cold War (Ashford, 2018), thus the study aims to identify general trends and methods of geopolitics.

As of today, relations between the United States and Russia can also be described as tense. Both countries remain key players on the world stage and are engaged in a complex confrontation, including political, economic, military and information aspects. Issues such as the conflict in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, cyber-attacks, mutual sanctions policy and the struggle for influence in different

regions of the world are key components of the tense relations between these countries, which have a major impact on the geopolitical situation in the world and international security.

During the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, several historical studies were published describing the general course of the Cold War (McCormack, 2018; Ashford, 2018; Burke & Matisek, 2020), and numerous scientific articles explore in detail the topic of political events in the Middle East. Many materials can be retrieved on the topic of the first war between Arab countries and Israel (also known in historiography as the Israeli War of Independence) (Keefe, 2018; De Vita, 2019). An important aspect is the activity of communist parties in the countries of the region, as this factor directly affected relations with the Soviet Union (Feliu, 2019). Furthermore, during the period considered in the article, several so-called crises took place in

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the Middle East, i.e. periods when there was a high probability of a large-scale war (Andrews, 2020).

E. Ashford (2018) reassessed the US approach to policy in the Middle East. The author highlighted the imbalance and unreasonableness of this commitment and suggested new ways of interaction. Political, economic, and military support, security agreements, and other forms of cooperation are discussed. R. Burke & J. Matissek (2020) also discussed the inconsistency of the strategic logic of US involvement in the Middle East. The authors argue for a new approach to US foreign policy in the region. In addition, they provide examples of failed strategies and situations that highlight the ineffectiveness of current approaches and suggest alternative ways of action. The study by K. McCormack (2018) examines the issue of managing “ungovernable” spaces through humanitarianism, citizenship and the civilian sphere in the practices of the territorial armed sector of the US national security. The author analyses the impact of these practices on the geopolitical landscape and the role of the United States in the world.

P.R. Keefe (2018) addressed the career of General H.R. McMaster and his influence on American foreign policy. The author highlights the key events and decisions made by McMaster that played a significant role in determining the US course in geopolitical conflicts. The focus of the analysis is on the implementation of specific political and military measures that contributed to the formation of the American position on geopolitical issues. L. Feliu (2019) provides a historical overview of the development of communist parties in the region over the past centuries. It covers the period from the early twentieth century to the present day, examining various aspects of their history. The author examines their role, influence and evolution in the context of political and social change in the Middle East. In addition, the book raises questions about the future of communist parties in the Middle East and their potential role in the further development of regional politics and society. T. Andrews (2020) examines the NATO debate on intervention in non-NATO regions and the 1957 Syrian crisis. The author analyses the NATO debate on intervention in conflicts outside the territory of the alliance and its impact on the decision to deal with the 1957 Syrian crisis. He also examines the arguments put forward during this debate and how they influenced NATO's strategy in response to the specific crisis in Syria.

The study aims to examine the military-political processes that took place in the Middle East during the Cold War, as well as to identify the political strategies used by the different parties.

### Materials and Methods

The study employed the theoretical methods: analysis, synthesis of information, specification, analogy and generalisation. The first stage of the study involved the search and selection of information. In the second stage, after the analysis and selection of information, the synthesis method was used. This method was used to combine research from different sources and thus reach new conclusions. When studying the preconditions of the Arab countries' war with Israel, the events of the British Empire's decline were addressed, as the territory where the events of this conflict took place was part of this empire. The legislation

of the United States and the USSR was examined, as decisions that defined the development of allied relations were made at this level, and the provision of weapons was often officially proclaimed (in particular, the Eisenhower Doctrine). Furthermore, the United Nations' actions were addressed, as it often served as a forum for making important decisions on further actions in the Middle East. The economic factor was also important, as the Middle East is home to large oil fields, a substance that was important for the development of the leading powers. It is worth noting that the Suez Canal is in this area, which is of great value as it is the route to the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.

The third study stage involved the analogy method as the Middle East was not the only area where the US and the USSR fought. In particular, the case of Yugoslavia and how this country cooperated with Israel, which was in a similar situation, is considered in the article. In addition, this study discussed the Suez and Syrian crises, which are similar in many aspects but also have significant differences. Common and different trends during the struggle in different countries of the world were thus identified.

The source base of the study included legislative acts, reports, international treaties and other documents related to events in the Middle East and geopolitical relations. The Foreign Assistance Act (1961), also known as US Public Law 87-195, is an important document adopted by the United States Congress. It defines the country's policies and programmes related to the provision of foreign aid, economic assistance, and military assistance to other nations. It established various agencies and mechanisms to assist and promote US interests abroad. It reflects the US government's commitment to supporting allies, promoting economic development, and enhancing stability and security in regions such as the Middle East.

Another important document in the context of this topic is the Annual report of the Middle East Institute (2022). It contains information on the activities and achievements of the Institute in 2022. The report includes an overview of programmes, research, events and other initiatives aimed at promoting peace and partnership in the Middle East region. These initiatives include programmes to promote international security, democracy and civil society, as well as a description of activities aimed at addressing the region's most pressing challenges, such as conflict, poverty and inequality.

### Results

The Cold War was an open confrontation that began after World War II between the United States, the Soviet Union and their allies. The Cold War was waged on various fronts, including political, economic, and propaganda, while in some country's ordnance was used in limited numbers. After the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945 at the end of World War II, the complex military alliance between the United States and Britain on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other began to collapse. The Cold War intensified until 1947-1948, when US aid to Western Europe under the Marshall Plan brought these countries under American influence and the Soviet Union established openly communist regimes in Eastern Europe. However, the confrontation was not limited to the territory of Europe. These superpowers also pursued their policies in

other regions, including the Middle East. The Cold War lasted from 1945 to 1989 (Burke & Matisek, 2020).

The Middle East is the name given to the region around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, which includes the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, North Africa, and sometimes beyond. The name Middle East was given to these lands by some of the first modern Western geographers and historians who sought to divide what they called the East into three regions. The Middle East refers to the region of immediate Europe, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf (Massimiliano, 2012).

In historiography, the Cold War is divided into phases, i.e. the confrontation between the US and the USSR escalated in certain periods and weakened in others. This study focuses on the period of 1946-1964 when the confrontation between the superpowers in the Middle East reached its peak. Even before the Berlin blockade of 1948, during which the Soviet Union cut off land access to the city to the Western Allies to force them to relinquish control of West Berlin and which is generally recognised as the beginning of the bipolar rivalry, one of the first major crises of the Cold War took place in 1946 at the eastern end of the Middle East. The origins of the crisis go back to the early war years, when in 1941 British and Soviet forces occupied Iran to prevent the country from joining the Axis powers. The Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, which took place just a few weeks after Germany invaded the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa), had a decisive geostrategic goal - to ensure a continuous supply of military equipment to the USSR throughout the war. With the consent of the newly installed Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, about five million tonnes of ammunition were delivered to the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1945.

However, after hostilities ended, issues among allies emerged. As was becoming increasingly evident, Soviet troops had no intention of ending their occupation of the northern part of the country. The Kremlin even backed Azerbaijani and Kurdish separatists seeking secession and supported the creation of two independent socialist republics - the Government of Azerbaijan and the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (Annual report of Middle East..., 2022). Stalin was aware that cooperation with the Western powers would not be possible in the future, so he viewed the newly created Kurdish and Azerbaijani states as an important asset for protecting Soviet interests in the oil facilities and resources of the area. It took several months of intense diplomatic pressure - applied in both bilateral and multilateral forums, such as the newly founded United Nations - to push the Soviet Union to withdraw from Iran, but by the end of 1946, with the support of the United States, Iranian forces had regained control of Mahabad and Azerbaijan. Their separatist experiment ended in defeat, with local leaders hanged or forced to flee (Massimiliano, 2012).

For a significant period of history, the Middle East was dominated by the British Empire, but after World War II, the empire, which was almost put up for sale in 1945, was divided instead of being inherited; it was liquidated instead of finding a new owner (Rezek, 2013). At the initial stage of the Cold War, the governments of the British Empire did not actively consider their existence as an alternative to the influence between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, over time, London faced objective

difficulties in ensuring forceful control over the political unity of numerous colonial territories. Despite this, the British continued to seek to maintain influence in certain regions (Laqueur, 2021).

In 1946, the confrontation between Arabs and Jews in the Palestinian region, which was still under British rule, intensified. In the same year, the Anglo-American commission that studied the issue concluded that independent states should not be allowed to be established in the region to prevent the domination of one warring group over the other. However, the following year, the issue was considered at a meeting of the UN General Assembly, which decided to set up a separate commission to study the Palestinian question. After several months of work, the commission presented a report that recommended the creation of separate Jewish and Arab independent states (McCormack, 2018).

In 1948, after Jewish leaders announced the creation of the state of Israel, war broke out. Many Palestinians opposed this decision, which led to the invasion of neighbouring Arab states. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee their homes or were evicted, an event they call al-Nakba (or "The Catastrophe"). The following year, the fighting ended with a ceasefire, and by then Israel controlled most of the territory. The West Bank was occupied by Jordan and the Gaza Strip by Egypt. The city of Jerusalem was divided between Israeli forces in the west and Jordan in the east.

An important factor in Israeli victory in the war was military support from the United States and the Soviet Union. These countries held radically opposing views, so their involvement in the war on the same side did not mean that they had common interests. The goal of the Soviet Union, as already noted, was to weaken Britain's position, while the United States sought to establish its control in the region (McCormack, 2018). It is also worth noting that Jews living in the Soviet Union contributed to the Soviet Union's support for Israel in the War of Independence (Burke & Matisek, 2020).

Secret contacts between the Yugoslav State Security Administration (UDBA) and Jewish organisations dating back to 1946 were established to illegally immigrate Eastern European Jews to Palestine. During the first Arab-Israeli war and the Yugoslav conflict with the Soviet Union, covert cooperation between the two countries was further strengthened, and early post-war ties between Edo Brajnik, head of the fifth department of the Yugoslav KGB, and Israeli agent Shaike Dan expanded into full-fledged political, military, intelligence, and economic cooperation (Keefe, 2018).

The outcome of the war had a significant impact on the further development of Muslim countries, as the defeat in the War of Independence caused anger among the Arab population not only against Israel itself but also against corrupt Arab regimes that were considered pro-Western. This led to the emergence of revolutionary groups in the political arena, which carried out military coups in their countries. Thus, in 1949, the government of Syria was overthrown, in 1951, King Abdullah I of Jordan was assassinated, and in 1952, the regime in Egypt was overthrown. A group of so-called "free officers" led by Gamal Abdel Nasser began to rule the country (Yaakov, 2018).

After the formation of NATO, the Soviet authorities demonstrated an intensely negative attitude to the efforts of this military and political bloc to expand its influence in the Middle East. In the late 1940s, during negotiations with Arab and Israeli diplomats, representatives of the Soviet Union expressed dissatisfaction with the British and US initiatives to create a "Mediterranean Entente" or "Middle East Pact". The Syrian government maintained an unwavering position, which contributed to its good relations with Moscow. On the other hand, Israel's contradictory approach, on the contrary, pushed the Soviet leadership away from the Jewish state. In November 1951, in a letter to the countries of the Middle East, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union A.A. Gromyko expressed a sharply negative position on the plans for a regional command proposed by the United States. Soviet diplomats viewed these ideas as integration projects, perceiving them as a threat (Kott & Schayegh, 2021).

The revolutionary events in the Arab countries contributed to the establishment of relations between these countries and the Soviet Union. Although these governments were nationalist, they shared socialist ideas. Thus, the map of the region was divided into Israel, which was an ally of the United States, and the Arab countries, which were allies of the USSR. In these Arab countries, the Soviet Union cooperated with communist parties and helped them gain power in the country (Dadouch, 2019).

Similar to attempts to expand the influence of NATO, the establishment of peace between Israel and the Arab states by the United States and the United Kingdom was perceived by the USSR as an attempt to intervene in the region and expand American influence. Moscow was thus not interested in resolving the Middle East conflict, which could have led to a strengthening of the West's position in the region. The end of the conflict between Arab countries and Israel with the participation of the USSR and its military and technical assistance would not be beneficial for Moscow. These circumstances pushed the Soviet Union to establish an alliance with those who had no interest in a quick reconciliation with the Zionists on Western terms, namely Arab nationalists (De Vita, 2019).

At the same time, despite the collapse of the British Empire, the UK did not want to surrender its position in the Middle East. Relations between the UK and Egypt deteriorated progressively after the July 1952 revolution. The new Cairo government was unwilling to allow British troops and military bases to remain on Egyptian territory and refused to participate in Western collective defence organisations. In response, the UK froze £10 million from Egyptian accounts in London banks. Later, an agreement was signed to withdraw UK troops from the country and freeze the Suez base, which only deepened mutual hostility (Burke & Matisek, 2020).

In 1953-1954, Egypt was probing the possibility of negotiations with the USSR on the possible acquisition of funds worth about 1 billion rubles. To pressure the West, the Egyptian press spread reports that the USSR was trying to assist. Foreign Minister M. Fawzi even asked the new ambassador, Y. Kiselyov, not to respond to these accusations. In response to Soviet arms supplies, the United States intensified negotiations with the United Kingdom and the International Bank for Reconstruction and

Development to finance the project. It is also worth noting the growing popularity of socialist ideas in Egyptian society, which increased the importance of the Soviet Union in this country (Zavada & Dudarchiuk, 2021).

All these actions caused the Suez Crisis in 1956. It was an international crisis in the Middle East that began on 26 July 1956, when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser transferred the Suez Canal to state ownership. The canal was owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests. The Suez Crisis was triggered by the decision of the United States and the United Kingdom not to finance Egypt's construction of the Aswan Dam, as they had promised, in response to Egypt's growing ties with communist Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Nasser responded to the US and UK decisions by declaring martial law in the canal area and seizing control of the Suez Canal Company, stipulating that tolls collected from ships passing through the canal would pay for the dam's construction for five years. Britain and France feared that Nasser might close the canal and cut off oil supplies from the Persian Gulf to Western Europe. When diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis failed, Britain and France secretly prepared military action to regain control of the canal and, if possible, overthrow Nasser. Israel was a willing ally, and its hostility to Egypt had been exacerbated by Nasser's blockade of the Strait of Tiran (at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba) and the numerous raids by Egyptian-backed commandos on Israel during 1955-1956.

On 7 August, the Kremlin received information from foreign intelligence about the plans of the United Kingdom and France to immediately occupy the Suez Canal after the conference, provided that the United States maintained benevolent neutrality. The same information was also provided by Czechoslovakian intelligence services. According to data obtained on 13 August at the Leningrad airport, an intelligence officer recorded a conversation between US Ambassador Ch. Bolen and Israeli representative I. Avidar. According to reports, the American diplomat allegedly called on Israel to take provocative actions to show Egypt's aggressiveness, while promising support for the British armed forces stationed in Cyprus (Isaev, 2010).

On 29 October 1956, 10 Israeli brigades invaded Egypt and advanced to the canal, defeating Egyptian forces. Great Britain and France, sticking to their plan, demanded that Israeli and Egyptian troops withdraw from the canal, and they announced that they would intervene to enforce a ceasefire ordered by the United Nations. On 5 and 6 November, British and French troops landed in Port Said and Port Fuad and began to occupy the canal area. This move was soon met with growing opposition at home and U.S.-backed UN resolutions (partly to counter Soviet threats of intervention) that quickly halted Anglo-French actions. On 22 December, the UN evacuated British and French troops, and Israeli forces withdrew in March 1957 (Feliu, 2019).

As can be noted, the main course of events of the Suez crisis took place in the plane of military operations, but several historians reject this opinion, focusing only on the economic factor. In particular, D. Coons refers to this. The author argues that it was economic rather than military factors that played a decisive role (Hosseini, 2022). However, as noted above, active hostilities took place during the Suez Crisis, and they influenced the outcome of the conflict.

As soon as the fighting against Egypt ended, the Anglo-French-Israeli coalition realised that the geopolitical situation in the Middle East had changed radically. British influence was finally undermined. Now the question arose as to who would have more influence in these regions. Tensions between the USSR and the US increased drastically. On 5 January 1957, the Eisenhower Doctrine was adopted in the "Special Message to Congress on the Situation in the Middle East" (Hosseini, 2022), a policy proclaimed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Macias, 2019). According to this doctrine, any country in the Middle East could request American economic aid or assistance from the US armed forces if it was threatened by armed aggression. Eisenhower singled out the Soviet threat in his doctrine, allowing US forces to "guarantee and defend the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such assistance in the event of open armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism". The phrase "international communism" made the doctrine much broader than just a response to Soviet military actions. The danger that could be associated with communists in any nation could be invoked by the doctrine. On 9 March 1957, the US Congress passed a law that gave the president the right to use a combined "military force to assist any nation or coalition of nations in need in the event of armed aggression by any country controlled by a Communist regime" under the pretext of defending the independent countries of the Middle East. This provision was the basis of the Eisenhower Doctrine (Eisenhower, 1957).

In response to the US initiative, which was put forward on 11 February 1957, the Soviet side adopted the following position. First, the Soviet Union proposed to preserve peace by peacefully resolving disputes through negotiations. Secondly, it reaffirmed the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the Middle East and respect for their sovereignty and independence. Thirdly, the rejection of attempts to involve these countries in military blocs, including the great powers, was confirmed. Fourthly, it was proposed to eliminate foreign military bases and withdraw foreign troops from the territory of the Middle East. Fifth, the mutual refusal to supply arms to these countries was discussed (The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957). Finally, it was proposed to promote the economic development of the countries of the region without any political, military or other conditions incompatible with their dignity and sovereignty. Most Middle Eastern states have not officially expressed their affiliation with the US or Soviet doctrine, trying to balance the contradictions of international forces for their benefit. For example, Syria showed its lack of confidence in the Eisenhower Doctrine and signed an agreement with Czechoslovakia to build an oil refinery (Burke & Matisek, 2020). These positions led to an attempt by the US to intervene in Syrian affairs, which led to new conflicts and misunderstandings between the countries (Andrews, 2020).

The American administration deemed such scenarios unacceptable. They could no longer rely on British military support, even though American diplomats considered it the main deterrent to annexation and Arab recognition a secondary factor. The Americans insisted that the presence of Arab League troops in Kuwait, instead of

British troops, would be more favourable to Kuwait. The State Department considered various scenarios of military conflicts between the Iraqi army and British or coalition Arab forces. However, State Department officials concluded that Baghdad could not have succeeded without Soviet support, which required a decisive deterrence of Moscow's intentions. In addition, the possibility of providing the young state with broad economic assistance from various sources, including the IMF, IBRD, the US government and other Western countries, was considered (Lesch, 2016).

In July 1961, the Arab League Council adopted a Saudi resolution to resolve the crisis in Kuwait, making several decisions. Among them were the non-interference of other states in the internal affairs of Kuwait, the withdrawal of British troops, the admission of the young country to the UN and others. In September, military personnel from Arab countries arrived in Kuwait after the British had left the territory. Although the Democratic administration considered this a positive development in general, State Department officials noted that the presence of the Arab coalition in Kuwait symbolically guaranteed sovereignty but had no real power to resist Iraqi tanks delivered from the USSR. On 9 September, Secretary of State D. Rusk, in his memorandum to JFK, urged the President to raise the consulate in Kuwait to the status of an embassy but to postpone the appointment of an ambassador. D. Rusk stressed that on 5 September, the government of Kuwait, whose status was recognised by the United States, requested the establishment of diplomatic relations. The new British ambassador to Kuwait was to receive his diplomatic credentials on 12 September, following the agreement between the United Kingdom and Kuwait of 22 August on the exchange of ambassadors. Other countries were to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait in the near future. After that, during a meeting of the UN Security Council on 30 November, the United States and 9 other members voted in favour of a draft resolution submitted by the AU, which recommended Kuwait's admission to the UN. However, Kuwait was not admitted to the UN until 14 May 1963 (Benedict, 2015).

The political situation in the Middle East has changed significantly throughout the period covered in this article. All this was due to the diplomatic struggle between the USSR and the United States, during which these countries defended their interests. As a result, a balance was established in this area, when both superpowers had their influence in the region.

## Discussion

There is no unanimous opinion among historians who study the course of the Cold War on the significance of the Middle East. Some historians do not attribute much importance to this region, focusing on other countries, such as V. Buzan (2010). However, this study shows how important this region was in the confrontation between the US and the USSR. For both superpowers, the Middle East was important because of the large oil fields located in the region. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, oil was a necessary resource for the development of various industries, including the military (Massimiliano, 2012).

The creation of the joint Anglo-American commission was a successful diplomatic step for Britain, but according

to historian N. Degli (2022), this statement is not true, as such actions imposed many responsibilities on the United Kingdom. The Soviet Union representative to the UN, A. Gromik, also supported this idea. It is interesting to note that Stalin's regime was characterised by anti-Semitism, but the creation of an independent Jewish state in the Middle East was beneficial, as it could weaken Britain's position (Burke & Matisek, 2020). These two papers examine the importance of the Middle East in the context of geopolitical relations between the US and the USSR, particularly the role of oil as an important resource. The first paper focuses on the importance of the Middle East for both rivals in the context of the military-industrial complex. A. Macias (2019) emphasises that oil was a strategically important resource for both countries, as it provided the necessary fuel for industry and military capabilities. In particular, the author notes the importance of oil in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its impact on geopolitical processes (Macias, 2019).

K. Kryszak (2020) focuses on the analysis of diplomatic relations between England and the United States in the context of the creation of a joint Anglo-American commission. She notes the different assessments of this diplomatic step by historians. At the same time, the study highlights the unexpected support from the Soviet Union for the creation of an independent Jewish state, which can be seen as an attempt to weaken Britain's position (Burke & Matisek, 2020). Thus, both articles address important aspects of the geopolitics of the Middle East and its impact on relations between world powers, but each focus on different aspects of historical events and different assessments of their significance.

It is worth noting that many historians, especially from English-speaking countries, tend not to focus on the friendly relations between Israel and the USSR, and one of the representatives of this view is M. Landler *et al.* (2018). After declaring its independence, Israel positioned itself as a democratic state, with appropriate institutions and separation of powers. Therefore, the country chose to cooperate with the United States, as it was ideologically closer to Israel than the USSR. However, the fact of Israel's cooperation with socialist Yugoslavia is interesting (Dadouch, 2019).

However, according to I. Isaev (2010), after the creation of NATO, this organisation did not want to extend its influence on the entire Middle East region. In 1953, the USSR continued to maintain a balance between Israel and the Arab states in the Middle East. At that time, the Arab world was not a top priority in Soviet foreign policy. In Russian propaganda in the newspaper *Pravda*, materials about the Middle East were rare, mostly on the last page as short notes on the general state of affairs in the world. Articles about other neighbouring countries of the Middle East, such as Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and North Africa, were no less common. However, after 1953, the Soviet Union's policy was aimed at improving relations with Arab countries (Annual Report of the Middle East..., 2022).

Both of the foregoing studies examine the role of the USSR in relations with the Middle East, but each focus on different aspects of these relations. The first study notes that many English-speaking historians avoid focusing on the friendly relations between Israel and the USSR.

S. Dadouch (2019) points out that Israel chose to cooperate with the United States because they were closer ideologically, but also notes the interesting fact of Israel's cooperation with Yugoslavia. A. Hrubinko and N. Buhrai (2020), on the other hand, emphasise that after the creation of NATO, this organisation did not seek to expand its influence on the entire Middle East region, and the USSR continued to balance between Israel and the Arab states (Hrubinko & Buhrai, 2020). The second study also highlights that after 1953, the Soviet Union's policy was aimed at improving relations with Arab countries.

To summarise, the first paper examines Israel's choice of cooperation with the United States and cooperation with other countries, while the second paper analyses NATO strategy and changes in Soviet policy towards Arab countries. Both papers reveal the complexity of relations between the Middle East and the USSR in the context of the geopolitical realities of the time.

However, the American historian D. Lesch (2016) believes that the creation of the UAR was beneficial for the USSR, as it strengthened the position of this superpower. But this is not the case, since, as noted above, nationalists who defended their interests came to power in Arab countries in alliance with the Soviet Union. After the creation of the UAR, Muslims no longer needed support from the USSR, which weakened its position in the region. The 1960s were an important period in international relations. At that time, the United Kingdom began to withdraw completely from the Persian Gulf region. As part of the process of decolonisation, one of the last waves of which was the granting of independence to Kuwait in 1961 and later to South Yemen in 1963, London lost its position of influence in the Middle East. This happened despite the military operation in Kuwait and attempts to intervene in the events in South Yemen.

Historiography suggests that Kuwait's independence was only a formality, as Britain continued to influence the country's policy, in particular, this idea is advocated by R. Wood (2020). However, this opinion is not correct, as the whole world cooperated with Kuwait as an equal ally. As a result, during Iraq's conflict with Kuwait, the United States opposed Iraq's intentions. In addition to diplomatic support for Kuwait, the United States was ready to send troops. However, the leading role was played by US economic assistance. These events influenced the US attitude to A. Qassem, as they confirmed the instability and short-lived nature of his power. With the assistance of US intelligence, the general was assassinated, which caused Iraq to abandon its claims to Kuwait, ending the conflict. Given the changing relations with Egypt, the USSR began to establish relations with Baghdad immediately after the 1958 revolutionary events in Iraq (Kleeman, 2019).

The two recent studies, both examine historical events in the Middle East, particularly the influence of external powers on political processes in the region. However, the first study analyses the creation and functioning of the Arab League in the context of the struggle for influence between the USSR and the United States. It provides evidence that the creation of the OAS led to a weakening of Soviet influence in the region, rather than its strengthening, as nationalist Arab governments were more

interested in preserving their independence. Instead, the second paper examines the process of decolonisation in the Middle East, in particular the independence of Kuwait and South Yemen. It examines the extent to which Kuwait's independence was formalised and how this independence affected international relations, including Iraq's conflict with Kuwait and the US response to it. Both articles point out the complexity of the political situation in the region and the various factors that influence it, such as relations with the USSR, the US, and the internal political and economic processes themselves.

### Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions can be made. Relations between the USSR and Western countries in the Middle East began during the Second World War, as control of Iran's territory was strategically important in the war against Nazi Germany. However, after the defeat of Germany, contradictions arose between the USSR and its former allies in Iran. After the end of World War II, the British Empire collapsed, but the British did not want to lose their influence in the Middle East, so it was decided to keep the area under their control, but over time it became increasingly difficult to do so, and as a result, it was decided to allow the countries to become independent. This decision led to a conflict between the newly created Israel and the Arab countries. The Arabs outnumbered the Israelis in this war, but that was until other countries intervened. The United States and the Soviet Union sided with Israel, but the representatives of these countries had different views: the US wanted to preserve the newly created democratic state, while the USSR wanted to reduce the influence of the British in the region. During the war, Israel received many weapons from the Allies, and representatives of this country also cooperated with representatives of Yugoslavia, as the latter were in a similar situation. The

defeat in the war was the impetus for the Arab population to overthrow the conservative government. It was more profitable for the Soviet Union to cooperate with revolutionary Arab governments than with democratic Israel. Thus, there was a division into zones of influence. There were many oil fields in the Middle East, so countries like the US and the USSR wanted to keep control of these lands.

An important event was the Suez Crisis, during which Britain, France and Israel sought to privatise the Suez Canal by military means. However, their attempts failed and Britain finally lost influence in the region. Thus, the confrontation between the US and the USSR intensified. The United States passed several bills that provided for the provision of arms to its allies in the region, and the Soviet Union took reciprocal steps. During the Syrian crisis, the possibility of war reached a maximum. The first half of the 1960s was a period of fierce diplomatic struggle and local wars. At this time, Iraq's war with Kuwait, in which the US and the USSR also participated, was taking place, and the USSR provided military assistance. Thus, it is possible to note that the confrontation between the superpowers was not direct. The US and the USSR tried to fight indirectly through other countries. A variety of methods were used, including military assistance to allies, tough diplomatic struggles, support for certain political forces in allied countries, and the promotion of soft power.

Further study prospects include its potential importance for further understanding of geopolitical processes and their impact on the Middle East region, as well as for developing strategies for security and stability in the region.

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### Conflict of Interest

None.

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