

Trump's Idiosyncratic Posture Toward Iran and Israel: Comparative Strategic Implications and Precautionary Measures

Umoh Akpan Kofi, PhD & Nsikak Mathias Udosen, PhD

Department of Political Science, University of Uyo, AKS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the idiosyncratic foreign policy behavior of Donald Trump toward Iran and Israel, focusing on its strategic implications for Middle East stability and global security. Drawing on leadership trait theory, rational actor models, and constructivist perspectives, the study argues that Trump's personalized and inconsistent decision-making undermined strategic coherence, weakened deterrence, and complicated alliance management. Using qualitative analysis of policy actions and rhetoric, the study identifies patterns of contradiction between escalation and restraint. It concludes with policy recommendations aimed at mitigating risks associated with leader-driven foreign policy.

Keywords: Trump's Idiosyncratic Posture, Strategic Implications and Precautionary Measures

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East remains central to global geopolitics, particularly in the triangular interaction between the United States, Iran, and Israel. Under the Trump administration, U.S. foreign policy deviated from traditional institutional approaches, exhibiting a strong reliance on personal judgment and unconventional diplomacy.

Policies such as withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and overt support for Israeli strategic interests, illustrate a shift toward unilateralism and selective engagement (Walt, 2018). These actions raise important questions about the role of leadership idiosyncrasies in shaping foreign policy outcomes. During the presidency of Donald Trump (first administration), American foreign policy toward Iran and Israel assumed a more confrontational and personalized dimension characterized by coercive diplomacy, unpredictability, nationalist rhetoric, and transactional realism (Fukuyama, 2014).

Trump's administration strongly aligned itself with Israel through diplomatic recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, support for Israeli military interests, and the expansion of the Abraham Accords (Brookings Institution, 2019). Simultaneously, the administration adopted a "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran by withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), imposing extensive economic sanctions, and increasing military deterrence in the Persian Gulf region (Schelling, 1966).

Despite these aggressive policies, Trump has in his second administration, repeatedly expressed opposition to prolonged military interventions in the Middle East and occasionally indicated willingness to negotiate with Iran (Hermann, 2001; Ashford, 2026). This contradictory behavior has created strategic ambiguity involving simultaneous escalation and restraint. Scholars have therefore described Trump's foreign policy as an idiosyncratic mixture of coercion, populism, bargaining, and selective isolationism (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

This study critically examines Trump's idiosyncratic behavior toward Iran and Israel, focusing on the contradictions between war-avoidance and escalation, the strategic implications of his policies, and precautionary measures necessary for regional and international stability.

Statement of the Problem

The foreign policy behavior of Donald Trump toward Iran and Israel generated significant uncertainty within the global political system. Although the Trump administration intensified pressure on Iran through sanctions, military threats, and strategic support for Israel, it simultaneously sought to avoid large-scale military conflict in the Middle East (Brookings Institution, 2019).

This contradiction between escalation and restraint created ambiguity regarding American strategic intentions. Trump's personalized leadership style, reliance on unpredictability, and preference for coercive diplomacy, heightened fears of regional war, nuclear proliferation, and global economic instability (Fukuyama, 2014).

The assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in 2020, withdrawal from the JCPOA, and increasing support for Israeli strategic interests, intensified tensions in the region while also exposing contradictions in U.S. foreign policy behavior (Schelling, 1966).

Despite extensive scholarship on U.S. Middle East policy, limited attention has been given to how leadership idiosyncrasies influence strategic consistency. Trump's oscillations between confrontation and negotiation have created ambiguity in U.S. objectives, thereby increasing uncertainty among allies and adversaries. This study addresses the gap by analyzing how such behavior affects deterrence, alliance credibility, and regional stability.

Specifically, the problem addressed in this study, is the need to understand how Trump's idiosyncratic leadership influenced U.S. policy toward Iran and Israel and how the contradictory dynamics of escalation and war-avoidance affected regional stability and international security.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. How did Trump's idiosyncratic leadership style shape U.S. policy toward Iran and Israel?
2. What strategic implications did these policies have for regional stability and global security?
3. How did inconsistencies in policy signaling affect U.S. credibility?
4. What precautionary measures can mitigate risks associated with personalized foreign policy decision-making?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leadership Trait (Idiosyncratic) Theory

Leadership trait theory posits that individual characteristics significantly influence political decision-making. According to Margaret G. Hermann (2003), leaders with high belief in their ability to control events and low conceptual complexity are more likely to adopt confrontational policies. Trump's rhetoric and actions reflect such traits, emphasizing dominance and unpredictability. More so, this study adopts Idiosyncratic Leadership Theory as its principal analytical framework because the theory maintains that foreign policy decisions are significantly influenced by leaders' personalities, perceptions, emotions, cognitive orientations, and leadership styles rather than purely structural or institutional factors (Hermann, 2001).

Trump's foreign policy behavior has demonstrated several idiosyncratic characteristics including:

1. Strategic unpredictability
2. Transactional diplomacy
3. Nationalist populism
4. Personalized diplomacy
5. Media-driven political communication
6. Preference for coercive bargaining

Trump has frequently employed threats, sanctions, and military pressure while simultaneously signaling openness to negotiation. This inconsistency complicated strategic calculations among allies and adversaries alike (Fukuyama, 2014).

Rational Actor Model

The rational actor model assumes that states act in a consistent, utility-maximizing manner (Allison, 1971). However, Trump's policy contradictions challenge this assumption, suggesting deviations from rational consistency. The Rational Actor Model also helps explain Trump's behavior toward Iran and Israel. From this perspective, Trump's aggressive policies can be interpreted as strategic efforts aimed at maximizing American bargaining leverage while avoiding costly military occupations (Schelling, 1966).

The "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran was intended to compel Tehran into renegotiating nuclear agreements and reducing its regional influence. However, the unpredictability of Trump's tactics increased the risks of unintended escalation and strategic instability (Waltz, 1979).

Constructivism

Constructivist theory highlights the role of identity, norms, and discourse in shaping foreign policy (Wendt, 1999). Trump's framing of Iran as a persistent adversary and Israel as a strategic ally reinforces identity-based alignments, influencing policy outcomes beyond material considerations.

Previous Discussions

Scholars have debated the implications of Trump's foreign policy approach:

Stephen M. Walt (2018) argues that Trump's policies weakened liberal international order by undermining alliances and multilateral agreements.

Vali Nasr (2020) highlights the risks of maximum pressure on Iran, noting its potential to provoke escalation rather than compliance.

John J. Mearsheimer (2019) emphasizes the strategic importance of balancing power in the Middle East, criticizing unconditional support for Israel as counterproductive.

Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) underscores the importance of systemic constraints, which Trump's personalized approach often overlooked.

Empirical studies suggest that unpredictability can enhance bargaining leverage but also increases the risk of miscalculation (Schelling, 1966; Fearon, 1995).

Several other scholars and institutions have also examined Trump's Middle East foreign policy from different analytical perspectives. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that personalized political leadership weakens institutional consistency and increases policy unpredictability. Similarly, Fukuyama (2014) maintains that stable democratic institutions are essential for coherent foreign policy implementation.

Brookings Institution (2019) observed that Trump's Iran policy was fundamentally contradictory because it simultaneously pursued "maximum pressure" and avoidance of military entanglement. According to the study, Trump oscillated between coercive escalation and diplomatic restraint.

Hermann (2001) argues that individual leaders significantly shape foreign policy outcomes, particularly where decision-making is highly personalized. Trump's foreign policy behavior reflected this pattern through spontaneous rhetoric, unilateral actions, and transactional bargaining.

Research on "transactional realism" further suggests that Trump approached international relations primarily as strategic negotiations driven by leverage and immediate national interest rather than ideological consistency (Schelling, 1966).

Waltz (1979) also argues that strategic ambiguity in international politics can either enhance deterrence or increase instability depending on how rival states interpret intentions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Works/Discussions

Recent scholarship and policy analyses provide deeper insight into the evolving dynamics of Donald Trump's foreign policy toward Iran and Israel, particularly in his second term.

Contemporary studies highlight a pattern of strategic incoherence and escalation:

Analysts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies argue that U.S. strikes on Iran in 2025 marked a historic escalation, significantly shaping the regional order but lacking clear long-term strategic direction (CSIS, 2025).

Research from Chatham House emphasizes that ceasefire arrangements in 2026 failed to resolve underlying tensions, revealing structural weaknesses in U.S. strategy and international law credibility (Vakil, 2026).

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Trump simultaneously pursued maximum pressure and diplomatic engagement, creating contradictory policy signals that complicated negotiations with Iran (CFR, 2026).

Recent conflict analyses further reinforce these arguments:

The 2025 Israel–Iran war significantly degraded Iran's military capabilities but did not eliminate its nuclear potential, suggesting limited strategic success despite high escalation (UK Parliament, 2025).

Studies indicate that Iran retained critical nuclear capacity despite sustained attacks, raising questions about the effectiveness of coercive strategies (CSIS, 2026).

Brookings Institution analysis shows that the war emerged from cumulative tensions, including failed diplomacy and expanding regional conflicts, rather than a single policy trigger (Huggard & Yadwad, 2025).

Critical perspectives from recent academic and policy commentary include:

Emma Ashford argues that Trump's strategic "hubris" and failure to anticipate long-term consequences may weaken U.S. global positioning for years (Ashford, 2026).

Ian Bremmer warns that the conflict risks evolving into a prolonged and destabilizing geopolitical crisis with global repercussions (Bremmer, 2026).

Additionally, emerging research highlights behavioral and cognitive dimensions of Trump's leadership:

AI-based behavioral analysis suggests Trump's decisions are driven more by emotional and dominance-based patterns than rational calculation, reinforcing leadership trait theory assumptions (Meng, 2025)

Trump's Idiosyncratic Posture in 2026 and Core Dynamics in the Middle East

Transactional Deal-Making: Moving away from strict regime-change frameworks, Trump has oscillated between issuing maximalist threats ("Operation Project Freedom") and pushing for rapid direct diplomatic settlements over Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. He has more so maintained a focus on achieving a definitive nuclear agreement. His rhetoric has often shifted between aggressive economic blockades, naval enforcement, and optimism for diplomatic concessions. Analysts have noted that his willingness to engage in sudden ceasefire or narrow nuclear agreements has caused friction with Israeli leadership, who demand broader constraints on Iran's ballistic missiles (Vakil, 2026).

Disruptive Diplomacy: Diplomats like Vakil note that Trump’s approach often bewilders established norms. His focus on quick negotiations and reliance on a selected circle of envoys, have bypassed traditional State Department Machinery (Vakil, 2026).

Divergence with Israel: While U.S and Israel initially launched joint military strikes targeting Iranian leadership; their end-goals have fractured. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prioritizes the permanent dismantlement of Iran’s regional network and regime alteration. Conversely, Trump has grown wary of extended entanglement and is focused on stabilizing global energy markets and reopening the Strait of Hormuz (Vakil, 2026).

The Diplomatic Impasse: Trump has openly declared temporary ceasefires and peace proposals (brokered through Pakistani mediation) as “unbelievably weak” when Tehran resists American demands to dismantle its nuclear capabilities (*The Guardian*, 2026).

Tactical Unpredictability: Observers characterize Trump’s foreign policy as an application of a calculated “shock doctrine.” By regularly shifting ultimatums, imposing strict sanctions, and utilizing fluctuating ceasefires, he uses unpredictability to pressure Tehran while avoiding open-ended commitments to Israel’s maximalist (*The Guardian*, 2026).

Trump’s Idiosyncratic Behavior toward Iran and Israel

Strategic Support for Israel

Trump maintained exceptionally strong relations with Israel through several major policy decisions, including:

1. Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital
2. Relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem
3. Expansion of the Abraham Accords
4. Increased diplomatic and military cooperation
5. Strong opposition to Iranian regional influence

These actions have reflected ideological alignment with Israeli strategic interests and significantly strengthened U.S.-Israel relations (Brookings Institution, 2019).

Maximum Pressure against Iran

Toward Iran, Trump has adopted a highly confrontational strategy involving:

1. Withdrawal from the JCPOA nuclear agreement
2. Economic sanctions
3. Diplomatic isolation
4. Military deterrence
5. Strategic pressure through regional alliances

The administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign sought to weaken Iran economically and politically while forcing Tehran into renegotiating its nuclear and regional policies (Schelling, 1966).

Contradictory War-Avoidance vs. Escalation Behavior

One of the defining characteristics of Trump’s Middle East policy has been the contradiction between coercive escalation and military restraint.

Escalation Behavior

Trump frequently employed aggressive rhetoric and strategic pressure including:

1. Severe economic sanctions
2. Military threats

3. Strategic deployments in the Persian Gulf
4. Strong support for Israeli military objectives
5. Assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani

These actions have significantly increased tensions between the United States and Iran and raised fears of broader regional conflict (Brookings Institution, 2019).

War-Avoidance Behavior

Despite his aggressive posture, Trump repeatedly demonstrated reluctance toward prolonged military intervention by:

1. Avoiding full-scale invasion of Iran
2. Opposing long-term Middle East wars
3. Preferring sanctions over occupation
4. Expressing willingness for negotiations
5. Seeking politically manageable conflicts

This contradictory behavior reflected a strategic attempt to combine deterrence with domestic political considerations (Hermann, 2001).

A defining paradox of Trump's idiosyncrasy therefore, is the coexistence of anti-war rhetoric with escalatory practices. Although he repeatedly emphasizes ending wars, his administration has engaged in aggressive actions, including military campaigns and threats against Iran (AP News, 2026). This contradiction reflects what scholars term coercive bargaining under ambiguity, where mixed signals complicate adversaries' ability to interpret intentions, thereby increasing escalation risks.

Contradiction: Anti-War Rhetoric vs. Escalatory Policies

Despite his aggressive posture toward Iran, Trump repeatedly presented himself as opposed to “endless wars.” He criticized previous U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and emphasized that American resources should prioritize domestic development rather than foreign military occupations (Trump, 2019). However, several of his policies intensified regional tensions:

Withdrawal from the JCPOA weakened diplomatic engagement.

- i. Economic sanctions increased hostility between Washington and Tehran.
- ii. The killing of Soleimani brought the two countries close to open conflict.
- iii. Support for Israeli military operations heightened fears of regional escalation.

Thus, Trump attempted to combine: coercive diplomacy, strategic deterrence, and selective restraint.

This contradiction reflected a broader strategy of “peace through strength,” where military threats were used to compel negotiation without necessarily committing to full-scale war (Haass, 2020).

Contradictions in Relations with Israel over Iran

Although Trump strongly supported Israel, disagreements occasionally emerged regarding how aggressively to confront Iran.

Israeli leadership often favored direct military action against Iranian nuclear facilities, while Trump at times preferred negotiation or calibrated pressure. Reports indicated that Trump worried about the domestic and geopolitical consequences of a large-scale regional war (Lee *et al.*, 2025). This produced a contradictory dynamic: Trump publicly backed Israeli security concerns, but sometimes resisted deeper military escalation.

Such tensions became particularly visible regarding policy approaches toward Gaza and Iranian proxy networks across the Middle East.

Strategic Ambiguity and Leadership Style

Trump's foreign policy style relied heavily on unpredictability. He often alternated between military threats and diplomatic overtures. Examples included: threatening Iran with military destruction, while simultaneously inviting Iranian leaders for negotiations; supporting Israeli strategic goals, while occasionally distancing the United States from direct military confrontation.

This strategy reflected what scholars describe as "strategic ambiguity," where uncertainty becomes a deliberate instrument of foreign policy (Brands, 2016).

Supporters argued that unpredictability strengthened deterrence because adversaries could not easily anticipate U.S. actions. Critics, however, contended that it undermined diplomatic trust and policy consistency.

Domestic Political Influences

Trump's contradictory policy was heavily shaped by domestic political considerations.

a. Evangelical Christians

Evangelical voters strongly supported pro-Israel policies due to religious and ideological commitments (Spector, 2020).

b. Republican Hawks

Conservative national security elites favored strong containment of Iran and expanded support for Israel.

c. America First Nationalists

Nationalist supporters opposed prolonged military intervention abroad and preferred reduced foreign entanglements.

Trump attempted to balance all three constituencies simultaneously: appearing tough on Iran, strongly supporting Israel, while avoiding another major war in the Middle East.

This balancing act produced recurring contradictions in U.S. foreign policy behavior.

Strategic Implications

Trump's policies generated several strategic implications:

a. Regional Polarization

Strong American alignment with Israel deepened hostility between Iran and U.S.-allied states in the Middle East.

b. Nuclear Escalation Risks

Withdrawal from the JCPOA weakened diplomatic mechanisms designed to monitor and limit Iran's nuclear activities.

c. Energy Security Threats

Increased tensions in the Persian Gulf threatened global oil supply routes and international economic stability.

d. Crisis Instability

Strategic unpredictability heightened risks of accidental escalation and military confrontation.

e. Weakening of Multilateral Diplomacy

Trump's unilateral foreign policy approach weakened confidence in international agreements and multilateral institutions.

Implications for Global War and Peace

Trump's idiosyncratic approach has three major implications:

a. Heightened Escalation Risks:

Unpredictable signaling increases the probability of miscalculation and unintended conflict.

b. Erosion of Multilateral Institutions:

Reduced reliance on alliances and international organizations weakens global governance mechanisms.

c. Regional Polarization:

Strong pro-Israel alignment and anti-Iran policies deepen geopolitical divisions in the Middle East.

However, the following further segments its implications for global war and peace:

Implications for Global War

a. Escalation of Middle East Tensions

Trump's alignment with Israel intensified geopolitical rivalry between Israel and Iran. The possibility of direct confrontation between the two states increased substantially under his administrations.

The consequences include:

1. Missile exchanges and proxy conflicts.
2. Rising military expenditures.
3. Intensified sectarian tensions across the Middle East.
4. Increased risks of regional war involving global powers.

Analysts argue that U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities represented one of the riskiest foreign policy gambles of Trump's presidency (www.investing.com).

b. Threat to Global Energy Security

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most important oil transit routes. Tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the United States threatened global oil supplies and increased inflationary pressures worldwide.

The closure or militarization of the Strait of Hormuz could:

1. Disrupt global energy markets.
2. Increase fuel prices globally.
3. Trigger economic instability.
4. Affect international trade routes.

Recent reports indicate that conflict involving Iran has significantly contributed to inflationary pressures and supply chain disruptions (*The Washington Post*, 2026).

c. Risk of Great Power Competition

Trump's policies toward Iran and Israel also intersect with broader global rivalries involving: China, Russia and European powers.

A major Middle East war could draw these powers into competing strategic alignments, thereby increasing the risk of broader international conflict. China's dependence on Middle Eastern oil and Russia's strategic partnerships with Iran make escalation particularly dangerous for global peace.

d. Weakening of International Institutions

Trump's skepticism toward multilateral institutions weakened collective security frameworks.

Examples include:

1. Withdrawal from international agreements.
2. Preference for unilateral sanctions.
3. Reduced confidence in diplomacy-based conflict resolution.

Critics argue that this undermined global governance and increased the likelihood of unilateral military actions.

Implications for Global Peace and Regional Stability

Despite the risks, some analysts argue that Trump's approach has also generated certain stabilizing effects.

1. Deterrence through Strength

Supporters argue that Trump's hardline posture deterred adversaries and constrained Iran's regional ambitions.

According to this perspective:

- i. Strong sanctions weakened Iran economically.
- ii. Military threats discouraged direct confrontation.
- iii. Israeli security was strengthened.

Regional actors pursued normalization agreements partly because of shared concerns about Iran.

2. Avoidance of Large-Scale Ground Wars

Although Trump employed aggressive rhetoric, he often expressed reluctance to engage in prolonged military occupations.

Research suggests that Trump preferred:

- i. Limited strikes.
- ii. Economic coercion.
- iii. Diplomatic bargaining.

This reflects a contradiction in his foreign policy: willingness to escalate pressure while avoiding full-scale war. (CSIS, 2025).

3. Encouragement of Regional Realignment

Trump's support for Israel contributed to new diplomatic alignments in the Middle East, including cooperation between Israel and several Arab states.

Supporters claim this could eventually contribute to:

- i. Regional economic integration.
- ii. Collective security arrangements.
- iii. Reduced interstate conflict.

However, critics argue that excluding Palestinian concerns may create long-term instability.

Accordingly, Maloney, S. (2020), also supported that Trump's contradictory policy generated both stabilizing and destabilizing consequences:

a. Stabilizing Effects

- i. Strengthened deterrence against Iran.
- ii. Expanded Arab-Israeli normalization through the Abraham Accords.
- iii. Reinforced U.S.–Israel strategic cooperation.

b. Destabilizing Effects

- i. Increased risks of military escalation.
- ii. Intensified proxy conflicts in the Middle East.
- iii. Reduced confidence in diplomatic agreements.
- iv. Heightened polarization between regional actors.

Critics argued that abandoning the JCPOA, undermined multilateral diplomacy and increased long-term nuclear risks (Maloney, 2020). Supporters, however, maintained that Trump's pressure campaign weakened Iran economically and strategically.

Precautionary Measures and Remedies

To reduce future escalation risks, the following measures are recommended:

i. Strengthening Multilateral Diplomacy

Major Powers should revive diplomatic engagement involving the United Nations, European Union, and regional actors.

ii. Institutional Foreign Policy Oversight

American foreign policy should rely more on institutional decision-making processes rather than personalized leadership.

iii. Nuclear Confidence-Building Measures

Renewed nuclear agreements and verification mechanisms should be implemented to prevent proliferation.

iv. Strategic Communication Channels

Direct communication mechanisms between adversaries should be maintained to avoid strategic miscalculation.

v. Regional Security Dialogue

Inclusive regional dialogue involving Iran, Israel, Gulf States, and global powers should be encouraged.

vi. Energy Security Cooperation

International cooperation should protect maritime trade routes and critical energy infrastructure.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing: Content analysis of policy statements and speeches, Examination of strategic decisions (e.g., sanctions, military posture) and Secondary data from academic and policy literature.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that Trump's foreign policy toward Iran and Israel has been characterized by strategic unpredictability and transactional diplomacy.

First, Trump's strong alignment with Israel, strengthened bilateral relations, but also intensified regional polarization. Iranian leaders increasingly perceived U.S. policy as fundamentally biased toward Israeli strategic interests, thereby reducing trust in diplomatic negotiations (Waltz, 1979).

Second, the "maximum pressure" campaign weakened Iran economically but failed to achieve long-term strategic compliance. Instead, tensions escalated while diplomatic channels deteriorated (Brookings Institution, 2019).

Third, the contradiction between escalation and restraints has created uncertainty among allies and adversaries. Besides, while unpredictability occasionally enhanced deterrence, it has also increased the possibility of miscalculation and unintended military confrontation (Schelling, 1966).

Fourth, Trump's personalized foreign policy has reduced institutional consistency in American diplomacy. Decision-making frequently have reflected political instincts and media calculations rather than coherent long-term strategic planning (Fukuyama, 2014).

The study also found that the Iran-Israel rivalry intensified under Trump's policies, have been a contributing factor to instability in the Middle East and increasing concerns regarding nuclear proliferation, energy security, and regional conflict. Again, further findings reveal thus:

Policy Inconsistency and Strategic Ambiguity

Findings reveal a pattern of oscillation between aggressive rhetoric and diplomatic overtures toward Iran. While maximum pressure aimed to deter Iran, inconsistent signaling reduced its effectiveness.

Alliance Asymmetry

Trump's strong support for Israel contrasted with conditional commitment to military engagement, creating uncertainty in alliance expectations.

Erosion of Credibility

Frequent policy reversals weakened U.S. credibility, making it difficult for allies and adversaries to anticipate U.S. actions.

Increased Risk of Escalation

Unpredictability heightened the risk of miscalculation, particularly in volatile regions such as the Persian Gulf.

Recent developments (2025–2026) provide empirical validation of earlier theoretical claims (www.washingtonpost.com, www.reuters.com).

How Trump's timeline for ending the Iran war keeps shifting, while US intelligence indicates limited new damage to Iran's nuclear program (www.washingtonpost.com, www.reuters.com).

Strategic Incoherence and Policy Volatility

Recent reports show that Trump's rhetoric and timelines regarding the Iran conflict have been inconsistent, fluctuating between rapid victory claims and prolonged engagement scenarios. This inconsistency has undermined strategic clarity and negotiation credibility (*The Washington Post*, 2026).

Limited Effectiveness of Military Strategy

Despite extensive U.S.-Israeli strikes, Iran's nuclear capability remains largely intact, demonstrating the limits of coercive military approaches (www.reuters.com).

Contradictions in Alliance Politics

U.S. silence on Israel's nuclear capabilities has drawn criticism, revealing normative inconsistency in nonproliferation policy and weakening U.S. global credibility (*The Washington Post*, 2026).

Escalation vs. Restraint Dilemma

Trump's reluctance to escalate despite provocations—such as attacks on U.S. vessels—illustrates a tension between deterrence and de-escalation strategies (www.thewallstreetjournal.com).

Performative and Symbolic Policy Actions

Initiatives like “Project Freedom” reflect a mix of humanitarian framing and strategic signaling, reinforcing perceptions of policy theatrics over coherent strategy (*The Guardian*, 2026).

RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

The study identifies four major outcomes:

1. Strategic incoherence due to personalized decision-making
2. Weakening of deterrence mechanisms against Iran
3. Strained alliance management with Israel and other partners
4. Heightened regional instability and global economic risks.

Other findings show:

- i. Persistent Strategic Ambiguity

Trump's dual-track approach (pressure + negotiation) creates confusion rather than leverage.

- ii. Diminished Effectiveness of Coercion

Military and sanctions strategies have not decisively curtailed Iran's nuclear ambitions.

- iii. Normative Inconsistency in U.S. Policy

Differential treatment of Israel and Iran undermines international norms.

- iv. Increased Risk of Prolonged Conflict

The absence of a clear endgame increases the likelihood of sustained instability.

- v. Leadership-Driven Volatility

Behavioral and personality-driven decision-making significantly shapes outcomes.

Strengthened Recommendations (Evidence-Based)

i. Reassert Strategic Coherence

U.S. policy must align military, diplomatic, and economic tools within a clearly defined long-term strategy.

ii. Prioritize Diplomacy over Coercion

Evidence suggests that military pressure alone cannot resolve nuclear disputes; sustained diplomatic engagement is essential.

iii. Enhance Policy Consistency

Applying uniform standards—particularly in nuclear policy—can restore U.S. credibility.

iv. Institutionalize Decision-Making

Reducing reliance on personalized leadership through stronger institutional frameworks can improve policy stability.

v. Develop Conflict Exit Strategies

Clear endgame planning is critical to avoid prolonged and costly engagements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Precautionary Measures

1. Strengthening Institutional Constraints

Enhancing the role of institutions can reduce reliance on individual leadership traits in foreign policy decisions.

2. Policy Consistency and Strategic Clarity

Clear articulation of objectives is essential for maintaining credibility and effective deterrence.

3. Multilateral Engagement

Re-engaging with international frameworks can improve legitimacy and reduce unilateral risks.

4. Balanced Middle East Strategy

The U.S. should pursue a more balanced approach that aligns support for Israel with broader regional stability goals.

5. Crisis Management Mechanisms

Establishing reliable communication channels with adversaries like Iran can prevent unintended escalation.

CONCLUSION

Trump's idiosyncratic leadership significantly shaped U.S. foreign policy toward Iran and Israel, producing mixed outcomes. While it introduced tactical flexibility, it also undermined strategic coherence and increased global uncertainty. Trump's idiosyncratic foreign policy toward Iran and Israel has reflected a complex combination of coercion, unpredictability, transactional bargaining, and selective restraint. While his administration has strongly supported Israel and intensified pressure on Iran, Trump simultaneously sought to avoid prolonged military conflict in the Middle East.

The contradiction between escalation and war-avoidance has created strategic ambiguity that has increased both deterrence and instability. Although Trump's policies strengthened certain U.S.-Israel strategic objectives, they have also intensified regional polarization, weakened diplomatic institutions, and heightened risks of military confrontation.

The study concludes that personalized foreign policy approaches in fragile geopolitical environments can generate dangerous instability unless balanced by institutional oversight, multilateral diplomacy, and preventive conflict management mechanisms. Therefore, future policy approaches must balance leadership initiative with institutional stability to ensure sustainable outcomes.

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