

The Local Context of U.S. Arabic Gulf Policy prior to 1980.

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Introduction

The United States of America emerged as a world super power after the Second World War. Before that, the USA used to limit its policy and avoided any central international role. In the 1940s and 1950s, Washington participated in formulating and establishing the new world system and it had noticed its need for oil and other energy resources to maintain its power. This led American officials to focused on the Arabic Gulf area. This area is unique in many ways; It is the central of Islam; the central of the old world (Asia, Africa and Europe); the central for world water routes; and the central of world oil reserves. These features attracted the US government to pay attention to this area.

This paper is to examine the US local context that had an impact on the US Arabic Gulf policy prior to 1980. Yet, before that, the paper shall illustrate the international relation (IR) theories and their importance in providing a better picture of the US global policy. After that, the work intended to focus on the subfield theories of IR and this by pointing out the importance of the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theories. This lead us to the review of the decision-making-process as the main tools to better understand Washington behaviours.

The research hereafter delves in to the domestic Influences on U.S. Arabic Gulf Policy and this section is to analyse various issues and events that engaged Washington in the Arabic Gulf area, from the 1940s to the 1970s. This will include; the role of

the Jewish lobbies and the US oil companies in the US policy; the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948; oil crises of the 1973; the case of the F15 fighter of 1975; and the Carter Doctrine to contain the communist threat of the Soviet Union. The role of different US officials and governmental bodies will be illustrated when applicable.

International Relation theories and US Foreign Policy Traditions:

Before delving into the U.S. internal context that affect Washington Gulf policy, it is important to shade light on the International Relation theories and its applicability to understanding the US international behaviours. Due to the limit of the research, this lead us to focus only on the most common International Relation theories (idealism, liberalism and constructivism) that usually used to understand the US global behaviours.

With some notable exemptions, International Relations (IR) theories scholars continues to focus on the approaches that emphasize the role of global or international influence over state abilities to practice independent foreign policies. Specialists, who are interested in understanding states' international behavior, have not yet presented a comprehensive theory of foreign policy, which, takes into account both international and domestic context. As an alternative, the field of foreign policy has sought to fill this gap by developing "middle-range theorizing" without directly engaging general international relations theories.¹

Henry R. Nau is among few scholars who moved toward bringing international relations theory to foreign policy analysis. He persuasively argues that the main US foreign policy traditions or strategy can be best formulated in terms of

the three basic IR theories: idealism, liberalism and constructivism or in simplest term ideas, institutions and power.² Isolationists, who emphasize American "exceptionalism", place heavy emphasis on ideas and relatively little on international institutions and the balance of power. Nationalists, who see America as "unique" or different but not exceptional, place less emphasis on ideas and more on power. although they assume that the balance of power operates automatically without the need for US intervention beyond the western hemisphere. Realists who see America as "ordinary" and in essence no different than any other nation, stress the need to manage the balance of power on other continents and embrace national-interest oriented international institutions such as alliances. Liberal internationalists, who like isolationists consider America "exceptional", place less emphasis on power and more on international institutions particularly those that substitute for the balance of power and solve problems peacefully through "domestic" means of compromise and the rule of law.³

Isolationism, given America's preeminent power in the world today, may no longer be a relevant foreign policy tradition. But since it is frequently identified erroneously with Jefferson, it bears further consideration.⁴ Isolationists focus overridingly on America's domestic liberal experiment (American ideals). Because foreign involvement threatens that experiment by abetting a militarized or garrison state, war and foreign entanglements are to be avoided at all costs. What is more, such entanglements are unnecessary. The United States defends itself best by simply reassuring other nations that it will not threaten them unless they threaten America's core interests. For isolationists core interests constitute at most the defense of the western hemisphere and at best America's national borders. Beyond this limited "homeland" security policy, the United States

can engage in low risk, limited interventions on behalf of democracy, human rights and humanitarian progress. And it can trade freely with all nations since trade is in the self-interest of other countries whether friendly or not. ⁵

By contrast, nationalists are less impressed by American exceptionalism (which is "good, bad and ugly")⁶ and more focused on a world of power balancing that is unlikely to be influenced significantly by the American domestic experiment, either through example or coercion. The overriding imperative in this world is defense, and nationalists believe other countries will defend themselves no less vigorously than the United States. Hence there is little need for the United States to enter alliances or foreign adventures to defend other nations, including economic engagement which many nationalists see as entangling or directly detrimental to national welfare. Alliances are admissible only if the United States dominates these institutions and uses them essentially to advance its independent national interests.

Realists, like nationalists, consider American ideas to be no better or worse than those of other nations but have less confidence in the automatic operation of the balance of power to defend national interests. Alliances are necessary to head off power imbalances; and international diplomacy, including some international institutions such as concerts of great powers, may be needed to ensure stability and peace.⁷ Realists differ on the configuration of power that best ensures peace. Primacists (or power transition theorists) argue that hegemony stabilizes, and that America which is now a hegemon should strive to maintain that status.¹ Power balancers believe that equilibrium stabilizes and urge the United States to anticipate and accommodate

¹ Many so-called neocons, such as Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld, were actually power transition realists. They cared less about spreading democracy than enhancing American hegemony. When the Bush 41 administration debated the role of democracy in the break up of the Soviet Union, Cheney said: Even "if democracy fails [in the fifteen Soviet republics] we're better off if they are small". Quoted in George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 541.

counterbalancing challenges, whether from democracies (e.g., Europe) or non-democracies (China, Russia, Arabic Gulf States, Iran, etc.),.

Liberal internationalists reverse the nationalist and realist emphasis and give priority to ideas over power. They see international institutions playing the key role to "domesticate" international politics and eventually shift the process from military balances to domestic- like police actions.⁸ They, like Jeffersonians², envision the day when the liberal experiment prevails across the globe but they get there not only by relying on example but also by including all nations, whether democratic or not, in universal international institutions that regularize rules (e.g., rule of law) and procedures for resolving international disputes peacefully without the use of force. Treating countries equally, whether free or not, in a process of open diplomacy and trade is the best way to encourage them over the long-term to become free and democratic. While liberal internationalists use force vigorously to defend America, they insist that the use of force beyond America's borders be legitimated by universal institutions. In contrast to realists, they see force not as a normal instrument of diplomacy but as an instrument of "last" resort after diplomacy has failed. In the long run, the use of force becomes a "past" resort as international politics is "domesticated" or transformed from military balances to police enforcement.

² Jeffersonian refers to "Jeffersonian democracy", which taken from the name of famous politics scholar "Thomas Jefferson" whose idea and theory were central from the 1790s to the 1820s in the United States of America.

In short one can suggest that there is no tradition that places strong emphasis on both ideas and power and weak emphasis on international institutions. Realists and nationalists deemphasize ideas, and isolationists and liberal internationalists deemphasize power and this lead to the use of FPA theories to help understand states' behaviors.

Foreign Policy Analysis and Decision-Making-Process

Broadly and simply speaking, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is “the process and resultants of human decision making with reference to or having known consequences for foreign entities.”⁹ Foreign policy involves diverse matters ranging from the most substantial decisions about war and peace to more seemingly ordinary topics of tax on trade. FPA theories covers longstanding ends and aims (For instance, the United States commitment to the Israeli security) besides certain actions and decisions (For example, the US decision to sell F15 fighter jet to Saudi Arabia in 1975).¹⁰

The intellectual roots of FPA is traceable to Kenneth Waltz' and his classic and famous work of 1959, “*Man, the State and War*”, in which he raised the awareness on the levels of analysis in IR theories research. Waltz in his work, illustrate a distinction between individual (President or leader), national (the state's official and non-official bodies), and international-level (world context) which provide explanations of state behaviour.¹¹ In other words, in Waltz's concept, man is “*the individual level of analysis*” and comes first, the state is the “*foreign policy level of analysis*” and comes second, and third is war which reflects “*the international system level of analysis.*”¹² Nevertheless, in relation to IR theories which its main concern is dealing with the grand theories and general patterns of behaviour, academics specialized in FPA theories, typically study the outcomes of the state's decision over a particular case in a specific time through

the lens of decision-making-process, which is in the heart of the FPA theories.

Perhaps the most famous work studied the “decision-making-process” is the book of Graham T. Allison’s, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*¹³. This work has been cited in over 1,500 journal articles³. Allison presented three models that offered better understanding of how foreign policy is actually formulated? The first model is the Rational Actor Model, the second is the Bureaucratic Politics Model and third is the Individual Leader Model. In the rational actor model, the state that confronted with global circumstances that require action will evaluate, select, and implement foreign policy “action that will maximize strategic goals and objectives”.¹⁴ In this case the state is the key actor working only for only the state’s interest.

In the bureaucratic politics model that presented by Allison, the governmental behaviour is driven “neither by the President nor by the Congress, but by depending”¹⁵ on “large-scale organizations”¹⁶. Thus, “each organization attends to a special set of problems and acts in quasi-independence on these problems”¹⁷. For example, in the United States, the State Department, the Defence Department, and the Central Intelligence Agency are “vital in driving foreign policy and are all involved in generating foreign policy decisions”.

The Individual Leader model is Allison’s third model, and in this model, “Leaders and the kind of leadership they exert shape the way in which foreign policies are made and the consequent behaviour of states in world politics”¹⁸. Hence, the head of the state in this model assumed to work on maximizing their power and elevate their authorities to play central role in the state’s decisions. Furthermore, they “seek to create impressions of their own self-importance”¹⁹ and “do this by gaining extensive public support”²⁰.

³ Social Science Citation Index, 2014; Google Scholar, 2014.

In short, foreign policy analysis theories is a subfield of international relations theories and help in offering better understanding of states' international behaviours. The heart of foreign policy analysis theories is to examine the Decision-Making-Process. Allison presented one of the most famous work that presented three models that help in giving a clearer image of how a state perform foreign policy. In the case of the United States, these models include the president, the US officials' bodies and the interested organisational groups. Since this article deal with the local context of the US policy towards the Arabic Gulf before 1980, these models will take into consideration the impact of the US business groups and the Jewish lobby on the US Arabic Gulf polices.

Domestic Influences on U.S. Arabic Gulf Policy

Internal considerations seem to have largely affected U.S. foreign policy. William Quandt argued that American foreign "...policy has often seemed to reflect domestic political forces more than calculations of national interest..."²¹ There were diverse groups with different interests in the United States. By 1945, there were 2000 formally registered lobbies. One of these was the Israeli lobby, which played an important role in driving U.S. foreign policy, particularly the U.S. Gulf policy²². It was as early as 1922 when the Israeli lobby successfully pressed Congress to accept legislation that supported the establishment of an Israeli state as a country for Jewish people from all over the world²³.

American oil companies reached the Gulf in the 1920's²⁴. These were interested in developing business in the area and were dispirited by the lack of support from their government. In other words, oil companies played a significant role in inducing the U.S. government into the Gulf area. In 1933 Standard Oil of California (SOCAL), gained a concession from Ibn Saud (the King of Saudi Arabia) to search for oil²⁵. SOCAL started wildcatting for oil and during the 1930's, took responsibility for giving aid to Saudi Arabia²⁶. On many occasions California-Arabian Standard oil Company (CASOC), SOCAL, and other American companies tried to support the relationship between the USA and Saudi Arabia by illustrating the importance of oil. The Vice President of Bahrain Petroleum

Company said: “Here, we have some oil concessions over there, and we think they are pretty important to the United States. We would like to have you take notice of them.”²⁷ Other oil company members explained, that “Ibn Saud is anxious to have American assistance.”²⁸

Many advisors’ reports emphasised the need for oil from outside the USA and drew attention to the huge oil reserves in the Arabic Gulf area, especially those of Saudi Arabia²⁹, and under pressure from the oil companies the United States began to pay attention to the area in the early 1940’s. Although the United States recognised the Arabic Gulf as an area of British interest, it began to offer financial support to Saudi Arabia in 1942³⁰.

During the late 1940’s, the main objective of the Jewish lobby was the creation of a State of Israel and it understood that support from the United States was vital. Accordingly, the Jewish lobby convinced the majority of Congress members to support Israel. In addition, the lobby worked hard to influence President Harry Truman’s Advisors and the Senate to add more endorsements to its main issue.³¹ The plan of the Jewish lobby was to surround Truman and urge him to support the creation of an Israeli State.

The United States was aware that an Israeli State in the Middle East would negatively affect its interests in the area, especially in the Gulf. Many politicians in the State Department were in opposition to the creation of the State of Israel due to the potential for angering their Arab partners and the turmoil that would occur in the area, which would negatively affect the U.S. interests there.³²

The Saudi King understood the role of the oil companies in U.S. policy decisions and he used them as an instrument to influence American decisions on many occasions. Saudi Arabia was against the establishment of an Israeli State in Arab territory and in 1948, Ibn Saud was so annoyed by the U.S. support for Israel that he threatened to ban American oil companies and withdraw concessions.³³

However, on the 14th of May 1948, Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel and the Jewish lobby

exercised its influence on the United States to be the first country to recognize the independent Israeli State.³⁴

During the 1950's and 1960's, the United States focused on the importance of Gulf oil. Eisenhower approved a statement by the National Security Council in 1954, which concluded that one of the main aims of the U.S. in the Gulf was to guarantee the supply of the oil to the West.³⁵ In 1957, Eisenhower requested authorisation from Congress to give more aid and military assistance to pro-Western countries in the Middle East; his aim was to build strong economic relations with these countries and to limit Soviet influence in the area. The Department of State was against the idea because it might have provoked the Soviet Union. However, Congress supported the Eisenhower Doctrine even though it was contrary to the views of the Department of State, and approved the President's request.³⁶

President Kennedy was supportive of Israel and worked to strengthen the U.S.-Israeli relations and this continued during the Johnson Administration.

In the early 1970s U.S.-Arab relations deteriorated because of the continuous American support for Israel. The Saudi government again used the oil company as a route to influence the U.S. policy towards the Middle East. King Faisal, in May 1973, met with presidents and representatives of the U.S. oil companies and told them "...time is running out with respect to U.S. interests in the Middle East....you will lose everything..."³⁷. However, these efforts did not prevent the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

After the 1973 oil crisis, the USA tried to search for other oil suppliers, but this resulted in them being even more dependent on Saudi oil.³⁸ A statement written by Rodger Davies, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in November 1973, argued that the American Government should "...make a greater effort than ever before to sell U.S. goods and services..." to the Gulf States, "...otherwise we risk losing our markets to our competitors..."³⁹ The statement emphasised that the American Government had to encourage and support companies that went to the Gulf area.

In the mid-1970s Kissinger, as a National Security Adviser, was extremely active in dealing with Middle East issues. He and President Ford worked on improving U.S.-Arab

relations, especially with Egypt. These improvements led to Saudi and Egyptian requests for American aircraft.⁴⁰ In 1976, some of the U.S. Government departments were in disagreement regarding the Arab-Israeli war. The Department of State believed that America should send a fleet and solve the crisis by force, whereas the Pentagon was against any U.S. troops being sent and argued that Israel was capable of taking care of itself.⁴¹

During the Carter Administration, the U.S. government faced one of the major issues in the history of its policy towards the Middle East: the sale of fighter aircraft to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The Israeli lobby strongly opposed the sale of one of the most advanced fighters in the world (F15) to other states in this region and the lobby used its influence within the government to attempt to stop the deal. Many members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wrote letters to the President advising and persuading him to re-evaluate the deal.⁴² In general, Congress was sympathetic to Israel and opposed the deal; it argued that the F15 fighter could be used against Israel.⁴³

Saudi Arabia desperately wanted the jets and used all arguments possible to support the deal, to the extent that the Saudi Government threatened to reduce oil production if the U.S. Government failed to fulfil its promise to provide the F15 fighters.⁴⁴ American oil companies were afraid of any deterioration in U.S.-Saudi relations and strongly supported the sale of the jets. In addition, Saudi Arabia won the support of some of the biggest and strongest American companies.⁴⁵ These firms were interested in business with Saudi Arabia and did not want to lose the deal as had occurred in the late 1960's. The Congress then had refused to sell aircraft fighters to Saudi Arabia, which had led the Saudi government to obtain jets and military equipment from Britain, France, Sweden and China.⁴⁶ In 1978 Saudi Arabia had made an arms deal with France which was worth 24 billion U.S. dollars⁴⁷, a clear sign that the Saudi government was able to obtain military equipment and assistance from other countries which resulted in a loss of business for U.S. arms companies.

Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defence, argued that if the USA wanted to protect its oil interests in the Gulf, it should

supply Saudi Arabia with F15 fighters; he pointed out that Israel had a superior military force, which could defeat any other power in the area. He tried to assuage the concerns of opponents to the deal by stating that Israel could defend itself from any threat. Kissinger was in favour of the deal with Saudi Arabia and his view was that Israel could be given more fighters, which would maintain the supremacy of its power in the area.⁴⁸

Carter and his main advisors, Vance and Brzezinski, were not in favour of the Israeli lobby's objectives and were supporters of the sale of F15 fighters to Saudi Arabia. Carter understood that Congress was going to deny the request but, fortunately, Israel had requested F16 fighters and Egypt had asked for F-5E jets. Carter, in an attempt to approve the Saudi deal, submitted "...the three cases as a single package to the Congress. Unless all were approved, he stated, he would withdraw the entire package..."⁴⁹ Finally, Congress indignantly passed the whole package in February 1978 and the efforts of the Israeli lobby to stop the Saudi deal ended in failure. However, they did not lose the whole battle as they forced the modification of the contract and pressed Carter to add limitations on the use of the F15 fighters in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰

Due to the Arabic-Israeli conflict, Arab states boycotted American Jewish companies as a tool to put pressure on the USA. This action led to a hot debate within the American government, which reached a peak during the late 1970's when it reached Congress. American oil companies, such as Mobil and Exxon, strongly opposed the vote on anti-boycott legislation and worked to prevent it, whereas Jewish corporations and the Israeli lobby did their best to force approval of the new law. Congress passed the anti-boycott legislation and it was shown to have less of an impact on American oil firms than expected.⁵¹ This situation was a clear example of the way in which internal conflict between U.S. institutions influenced U.S. policy in the Middle East, to the extent that President Carter admitted to Arab leaders that "...his domestic problems limited his freedom of action..."⁵²

During 1979, Carter and the American policy makers were shocked by two crises: the fall of the Shah in January 1979,

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which marked the end of the “Twin Pillar” strategy, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

After the fall of the Shah, the U.S. government increased its military presence in the Middle East and focussed on Saudi Arabia. Combined with three hundred officers from the American Air Force, twelve F15 fighter aircraft were sent to Saudi Arabia⁵³, a sign of increased U.S. interest in Saudi Arabia.

At the beginning of 1980, the Congress was warned by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David Jones, that the Soviet Union was very close to the Gulf after the invasion of Afghanistan.⁵⁴ During the 1970’s and the early 1980’s, the Soviet Union had the power to control the Gulf because of its presence in Ethiopia and South Yemen and its recent control of Afghanistan.⁵⁵ This condition led General David and other American officials to motivate Congress to accept and support an increase in U.S. military presence in the Gulf area.

These changes in the Middle East prompted the U.S. Secretary of Defence, Harold Brown, to suggest that the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) was motivated to allow the U.S. forces to move quickly to protect its interests in the Gulf in case of a crisis. The National Security Adviser, Brzezinski, supported the project and persuaded the President to authorise Brown to work on it⁵⁶; he argued that this strategy would provide the U.S. with the ability to take rapid action and move “...effectively and perhaps even pre-emptively in those parts of the world where our vital interests might be engaged...”.⁵⁷ After a governmental debate, the RDJTF was established in March 1980 with the support of President Carter.⁵⁸

Congress and the American public were not in favour of military engagement in the Gulf because of the considerable U.S. losses in the Vietnam War. However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan gave Carter a rare opportunity to focus national attention on the threat of the Soviet Union to U.S. interests in the Gulf and convinced Congress and the public of the need for a military presence in the Middle East.⁵⁹ The difficult situation in the Middle East led Carter to publicise the RDF in his famous speech when he illustrated that an “...attempt by any outside force to gain control of the...” Gulf region “...will be regarded as

an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”⁶⁰ In U.S. policy, this speech marked the start of what was known as the “Carter Doctrine”. From Roosevelt until Ford’s Administration, all American presidents have demonstrated an interest in the Gulf area; however, the vital difference of the Carter Doctrine, which distinguished it from other presidents’ policies, was that for the first time in U.S. policy, it mentioned the use of the force to protect its interests in the area. The United States would intervene in the area without being requested to do so. In other words, in a time of crisis and regardless of the Gulf States’ attitude, the United States would act to protect its interests.⁶¹

Washington policy in the Middle East usually triggered conflict within the US Decision-Makers and other influential elements; The dilemma caused due to the fact that the United States in need of the Arabic Gulf oil as long-term strategies that guarantee the continuous supply of the world power’s muscles, and this led to the fact that it needed a good relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Arabic Gulf States. This relation with the Arabic Gulf States is supported by the US oil firms. Nevertheless, the United States had commitment to the Israeli security. This was supported by the Jewish lobbies which had an enormous effect on Senates and Congressmen. Consequently, there was a dilemma in U.S. Gulf policy, which caused enormous obstacles to the US policy makers. This dilemma began with the creation of the Israeli state and set to continue on today politics.

Conclusion:

This work initially draws a clearer picture of IR theories and points out those relevant in understanding the US international politics at large. The work then went on and shed light on the middle range theories of Foreign Policy Analysis to have a better view of the US Decision-Making-Process which involves the United States local elements that have an impact on Washington foreign policy towards the Arabic Gulf.

The paper after that discussed various issues and events in the 1940s-1970s with reference to the US Arabic Gulf policy. Oil reserves in the Arabic Gulf and the Soviet threat were the cases that post Washington relations with the Arabic Gulf States. The US-Israeli relation was the case that brought a dilemma to the United States policy in that area. The F15 fighters deal was a very good example that defines the involvement of different actors and different interested groups in the US foreign affairs. By the end of the 1970s, Carter Doctrine and the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, is set to show how the United States became heavily involved in the Arabic Gulf area.

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- ⁵⁰ Bard. *The Water's Edge and Beyond*. p 35
- ⁵¹ For full desiccation on the Anti boycott legislation and the role that the Jewish lobby played see: Terence Prittie, and Walter Henry Nelson. *The Economic War against the Jews, Corgi Books*. (London: Transworld Publishers, 1979); Bard. *The Water's Edge and Beyond* . pp 91-115
- ⁵² Bard. *The Water's Edge and Beyond* . p 238
- ⁵³ Bernard Gwertzman, "Plane sales to Israel and Saudis Pose Problems for Administration," *The New York Times*, 24 January 1978, pp 6-7.
- ⁵⁴ David D. Newsom, "America Engulfed," *Foreign Policy*, No.43. (Summer, 1981): p 19.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, p 19

- ⁵⁶ Memo, Brzezinski to Carter, 24 Jan. 1980, ZB Collection- Meetings, Box 32, Meetings SCC 254, folder, JCL. As quoted in: Olav Njolstad, "Shifting priorities: the Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years," Cold War History 4(3),(April 2004): p 41
- ⁵⁷ Joe Stork, "U.S. Targets Persian Gulf for Intervention," MERIP Reports 10 (2) (February 1980): p 3.
- ⁵⁸ Njolstad, "Shifting priorities,". p 41
- ⁵⁹ Charles A Kupchan. *The Persian Gulf and the West : Dilemmas of Security*. (Boston ; London: Allen & Unwin,, 1987) p 92; Njolstad, "Shifting priorities,". p 38
- ⁶⁰ Jimmy Carter. *Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982), p 483.
- ⁶¹ Newsom, "America Engulfed,". p17

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السياقات المحلية لسياسة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية في الخليج العربي قبل عام 1980م

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