

## Security Prospects After the American Presidential Election 10 The Situation in the Middle East After the Establishment of the New Biden Administration: Considering future prospects through data analysis

*NIDS* コメンタリー

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### Introduction

On January 20, 2021, Joseph Biden, elected from the Democratic Party, was formally inaugurated as the new President of the United States of America. U.S. society is one of the most damaged by COVID-19 in the world, and it is difficult to say that the divisions and antagonism within it—for example, supporters of Former President Trump, who claimed that there was largescale electoral fraud after the presidential election in November 2020, rioted and forced their way into the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021—are converging even now. However, the presidential position is not the only outcome of this election; a so-called “triple blue” political scenario, in which the Democratic Party holds a majority in both the Senate and House, has emerged. As a result, for the time being the prerequisites are in place for the Biden administration to clarify how its domestic affairs and diplomacy differ from those of the Trump administration, which adopted an America First policy and is thought to have deepened the cracks in American society and with allied nations. Japan, one of the greatest allies of the U.S. in the Asia Pacific, is also very interested in how the foreign and security policies of the Biden administration will develop in the future.

As is well known, new President Biden gained experience as Vice President during the Democratic administration of Barak Obama, the president before Mr. Trump, and he used a return to the Iran nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), July 2015), a diplomatic outcome encouraged by the second Obama administration, as one of his campaign pledges for the presidential election.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Mr. Biden has appointed Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Jacob Sullivan to be responsible for foreign and security policy in his new administration; both are practical men with legal backgrounds who are close to the new president. From now on, when observing the development of the United States’ new Middle East policy, particular attention will be paid to the fact that these two men both have the experience of being deeply involved in establishing negotiations for the Iran nuclear deal during the Obama administration. Therefore, the Biden administration undoubtedly seriously intends to return to the Iran nuclear deal when it comes to foreign and security policy in the Middle East. Moreover, the new Secretary of State Blinken was born into a family with Jewish parents; he served as Vice President Biden’s Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs during the first

<sup>1</sup> Joe Biden, “THE POWER OF AMERICA’S EXAMPLE: THE BIDEN PLAN FOR LEADING THE DEMOCRATIC WORLD TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY,” p. 10, <https://joebiden.com/americanleadership/>, accessed on Feb. 7, 2021.

Obama administration (2009 to 2012), and was an advocate of humanitarian intervention, pushing for proactive military involvement in the Syrian and Libyan civil wars. It should also be noted that when he was the Deputy Secretary of State from 2015 to 2017 during the second Obama administration, Mr. Blinken was responsible for the practical work, leading the Asia-Pacific rebalancing policy.

During the second Obama administration, the government promoted this rebalancing policy in parallel with carrying out a largescale reduction of military spending; it also aimed to withdraw U.S. forces stationed in Afghanistan in 2016, following the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces stationed in Iraq in December 2011. However, the reality of the harsh security environment in the Middle East resulted in the rise of an anti-American Sunni Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with an armed force in June 2014, which took advantage of the power vacuum caused by the effects of the hasty withdrawal of the U.S. military. U.S. forces therefore began air strikes against ISIS from August 2014, and resumed deployment of ground troops in February 2015. This blunder was carried out by the Obama administration. The plan to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan was handed down to the following Trump administration, which delayed it until the establishment of the U.S.-Taliban peace deal (the Doha Agreement), agreed at the end of February 2020. However, the Biden administration has deemed that the Taliban is not fulfilling the Doha Agreement, and on January 28, 2021, Secretary of State Blinken communicated a plan to review the Doha Agreement to Afghan President Ghani. Therefore, there is a significant possibility that U.S. forces will continue to be stationed in Afghanistan after May 2021, the deadline for the withdrawal of the U.S. military set out in the Doha Agreement. This rapid reversal of the U.S. policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan is likely to cause harsh backlash from the Taliban, who are considering overwhelming the Ghani administration after the U.S. army's withdrawal. Furthermore, immediately after its establishment, the Biden administration is similarly attempting to change the Trump administration's policies vis-à-vis the Middle East in rapid succession; it has been reported that the government's plan is to stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who are intervening in the Yemen civil war, and to assist the temporary Hadi administration in opposition to the Houthis supported by Iran, so as to end the conflict in Yemen quickly. This is seen as a plan to stop American military engagement in the Yemen conflict, and thus is causing doubts as to its consistency with the aforementioned policy to continue participation in Afghanistan.

As such, when it comes to the effects on the situation in the Middle East following the creation of the new Biden administration in the United States, it is possible to view the government's approach after its establishment as prioritizing the alteration of the previous Trump administration's policies, and to believe that there is no consistency among its plans vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Yemen. Saudi Arabia and Israel, the largest pro-U.S. allies in the region who oppose Iran, are visibly against the campaign pledge to return to the JCPOA; considering the situation in Iran, which has ceased to fulfill the JCPOA due to the increased influence of conservative hardliners who strongly oppose the economic sanctions on Iran that were fully resumed in November 2018 by the Trump administration, it will not be easy for the Biden administration to realize a return to the JCPOA. In addition to the problem of restarting the Iran nuclear deal, other points of contention that will have a major effect on the conditions in the Middle East and its balance of power in the future are: whether, in the context of a recession caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the Biden administration will take the bold action of reducing military spending in the same way as the second Obama

administration did, and whether it will reduce the U.S. forces stationed in the Middle East and Afghanistan and restart rebalancing the Asia-Pacific; these are major issues. Thus, this paper will focus on the aforementioned three discussion points, and offer the author's personal opinions through empirical analysis of panel data concerning three countries, including Japan and Russia, to compare this to the United States. The data includes military spending, defense costs, national hard power (CINC scores), and the GDP share of world total.

### The Possibility of Reduced Military Spending in the United States: Can the Biden Administration Follow the Policies of the Second Obama Administration?

Firstly, the military expenditure of the United States and Russia below, from the establishment of the Obama administration until 2019, is taken from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database.<sup>2</sup> Looking at this, it is true that during the second Obama administration, American military expenditure decreased each year, from around 732.1 billion dollars in 2013 to around 669.4 billion dollars in 2016, its final year, and that this tendency for reduction continued, with the Trump administration cutting expenditure to around 662.6 billion dollars in 2017, its first year. Incidentally, the Trump administration increased military expenditure each year from 2018, when it announced its unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. During the peak of the Persian Gulf crisis, in 2012, there were rumors that Israel may attack Iranian nuclear facilities, and to counter this threat, Iran warned it would blockade the Strait of Hormuz. This was the final year of the first Obama administration, and around 793.2 billion dollars were allocated to American military spending; in comparison, during the four years of the second Obama administration this was reduced by a huge amount: around 123.8 billion dollars.

Table 1: Military spending by the United States and Russia (in millions of US dollars)

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
United States	826247	849867	839803	793157	732148	687112
Russia	48218	49198	52506	60836	63800	68378
	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	
United States	671509	669448	662550	682491	718689	
Russia	73694	79007	63652	61388	64144	

<sup>2</sup> Source: Created by author from SIPRI Military expenditure by country, in constant (2018) US\$ m., 2000–2019, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>. Figures in blue are SIPRI estimates.

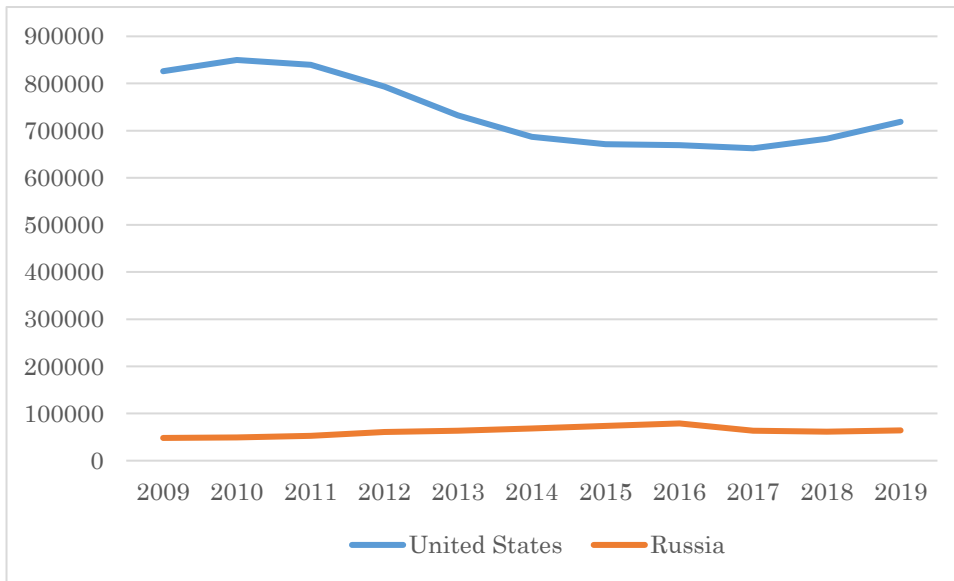


Figure 1: Military spending by the United States and Russia (2009–2019, in millions of US dollars)

However, as it is not possible to surmise the relationship between the United States' national power and economic power during the period of reduced military spending just by observing data on military expenditure, this is not practical. Thus, the panel data set below was created using numerical values made by converting CINC scores,<sup>3</sup> which are officially announced as simple, composite indicators measuring the national power of each country in the world in terms of National Material Capabilities by the Correlates of War (COW) Project, into percentages, and by using the numerical value of each nation's GDP share of the world total,<sup>4</sup> calculated through a single set of World Economic Outlook (WEO) data: purchasing-power-parity (PPP), which is announced biannually by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April and October. These are insufficient indicators in that only the data up to 2012 during the second Obama administration is complete, and the indicators do not include nuclear force; however, it was decided to analyze this data mainly using descriptive statistics.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "National Material Capabilities (v5.0)," The Correlates of War Project, accessed Feb. 7, 2021, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities>. The CINC (Composite Index of National Capability) scores used here are globally comparative scores of each country's national power, which are simple averages of six indicators—military personnel, military expenditure, iron and steel production, energy consumption, total population, and urban population—for each country around the world, as devised by David Singer in 1963 for the COW Project.

<sup>4</sup> "World Economic Outlook database: October 2020," IMF, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2020/October/download-entire-database>, GDP based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP) share of world total (%), accessed on Feb. 7, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> However, it goes without saying that each column of this panel data set is in chronological order, and so individual pieces of data are not independent data gained from random sampling; they have autocorrelation due to the time difference (for example  $t-1$ ), at the same time as not necessarily being satisfactory in terms of normality (distribution), which is a prerequisite required for a great deal of statistical analysis. Therefore, it is impossible to use many tests and most inferential statistical methods, such as linear regression analysis. Nonetheless, I believe that there is further utility value in descriptive statistical methods, including those that visually confirm approximate straight lines using scatter diagrams and summary statistics of the average value of CINC scores and the GDP share of the world total, and so I would like to add analysis using the descriptive statistics below, although it is limited.

Table 2: GDP share of world total (PPP conversion) and CINC scores for the United States, Japan, and Russia

state	year (t)	group	GDP share of world total (%)	cinc t (%)	cinc t-1 (%)
USA	1980	Pro-USA	21.406	13.31146	13.72161
USA	1981	Pro-USA	21.584	13.80075	13.31146
USA	1982	Pro-USA	21.153	12.95889	13.80075
USA	1983	Pro-USA	21.589	13.29419	12.95889
USA	1984	Pro-USA	22.185	13.5594	13.29419
USA	1985	Pro-USA	22.326	13.73146	13.5594
USA	1986	Pro-USA	22.315	13.52873	13.73146
USA	1987	Pro-USA	22.236	13.40296	13.52873
USA	1988	Pro-USA	22.168	13.44698	13.40296
USA	1989	Pro-USA	22.169	14.8239	13.44698
USA	1990	Pro-USA	21.701	14.13318	14.8239
USA	1991	Pro-USA	21.164	13.72464	14.13318
USA	1992	Pro-USA	19.726	14.83136	13.72464
USA	1993	Pro-USA	19.872	15.35161	14.83136
USA	1994	Pro-USA	20.076	14.56364	15.35161
USA	1995	Pro-USA	19.887	14.03365	14.56364
USA	1996	Pro-USA	19.874	13.8368	14.03365
USA	1997	Pro-USA	19.958	13.95226	13.8368
USA	1998	Pro-USA	20.292	14.16442	13.95226
USA	1999	Pro-USA	20.55	14.26249	14.16442
USA	2000	Pro-USA	20.42	14.28047	14.26249
USA	2001	Pro-USA	20.137	14.14571	14.28047
USA	2002	Pro-USA	19.915	15.37646	14.14571
USA	2003	Pro-USA	19.683	15.19185	15.37646
USA	2004	Pro-USA	19.407	15.15293	15.19185
USA	2005	Pro-USA	19.169	15.65189	15.15293
USA	2006	Pro-USA	18.719	15.44305	15.65189
USA	2007	Pro-USA	18.097	14.97976	15.44305
USA	2008	Pro-USA	17.566	14.78703	14.97976
USA	2009	Pro-USA	17.187	14.59863	14.78703
USA	2010	Pro-USA	16.744	14.80978	14.59863
USA	2011	Pro-USA	16.333	14.3291	14.80978

USA	2012	Pro-USA	16.192	13.93526	14.3291
JPN	1980	Pro-USA	7.828	5.36086	5.38683
JPN	1981	Pro-USA	8.022	5.14903	5.36086
JPN	1982	Pro-USA	8.271	5.24131	5.14903
JPN	1983	Pro-USA	8.356	5.06413	5.24131
JPN	1984	Pro-USA	8.368	5.11058	5.06413
JPN	1985	Pro-USA	8.507	5.06028	5.11058
JPN	1986	Pro-USA	8.491	4.97457	5.06028
JPN	1987	Pro-USA	8.565	4.91406	4.97457
JPN	1988	Pro-USA	8.753	4.97705	4.91406
JPN	1989	Pro-USA	8.853	5.16204	4.97705
JPN	1990	Pro-USA	8.922	5.07399	5.16204
JPN	1991	Pro-USA	9.008	5.4339	5.07399
JPN	1992	Pro-USA	8.18	5.41936	5.4339
JPN	1993	Pro-USA	7.978	5.47533	5.41936
JPN	1994	Pro-USA	7.824	5.43495	5.47533
JPN	1995	Pro-USA	7.755	5.43461	5.43495
JPN	1996	Pro-USA	7.7	5.21298	5.43461
JPN	1997	Pro-USA	7.483	5.11088	5.21298
JPN	1998	Pro-USA	7.2	4.8576	5.11088
JPN	1999	Pro-USA	6.943	4.8296	4.8576
JPN	2000	Pro-USA	6.809	4.98948	4.8296
JPN	2001	Pro-USA	6.676	4.70631	4.98948
JPN	2002	Pro-USA	6.497	4.86104	4.70631
JPN	2003	Pro-USA	6.338	4.69896	4.86104
JPN	2004	Pro-USA	6.153	4.50076	4.69896
JPN	2005	Pro-USA	5.969	4.32995	4.50076
JPN	2006	Pro-USA	5.747	4.14682	4.32995
JPN	2007	Pro-USA	5.544	3.99738	4.14682
JPN	2008	Pro-USA	5.33	3.93901	3.99738
JPN	2009	Pro-USA	5.061	3.60672	3.93901
JPN	2010	Pro-USA	5.009	3.70358	3.60672
JPN	2011	Pro-USA	4.806	3.61619	3.70358
JPN	2012	Pro-USA	4.745	3.5588	3.61619
RUS	1992	Anti-USA	4.854	6.72895	10.33478
RUS	1993	Anti-USA	4.345	5.80243	6.72895

RUS	1994	Anti-USA	3.683	6.70384	5.80243
RUS	1995	Anti-USA	3.408	6.29018	6.70384
RUS	1996	Anti-USA	3.163	5.91888	6.29018
RUS	1997	Anti-USA	3.083	5.59937	5.91888
RUS	1998	Anti-USA	2.84	5.12986	5.59937
RUS	1999	Anti-USA	2.92	5.1515	5.12986
RUS	2000	Anti-USA	3.067	5.15117	5.1515
RUS	2001	Anti-USA	3.147	5.35273	5.15117
RUS	2002	Anti-USA	3.204	4.9657	5.35273
RUS	2003	Anti-USA	3.305	4.97054	4.9657
RUS	2004	Anti-USA	3.364	4.76593	4.97054
RUS	2005	Anti-USA	3.415	4.08001	4.76593
RUS	2006	Anti-USA	3.506	4.11584	4.08001
RUS	2007	Anti-USA	3.612	4.10956	4.11584
RUS	2008	Anti-USA	3.695	4.10097	4.10956
RUS	2009	Anti-USA	3.419	3.93509	4.10097
RUS	2010	Anti-USA	3.394	3.94878	3.93509
RUS	2011	Anti-USA	3.425	4.02336	3.94878
RUS	2012	Anti-USA	3.479	4.00789	4.02336

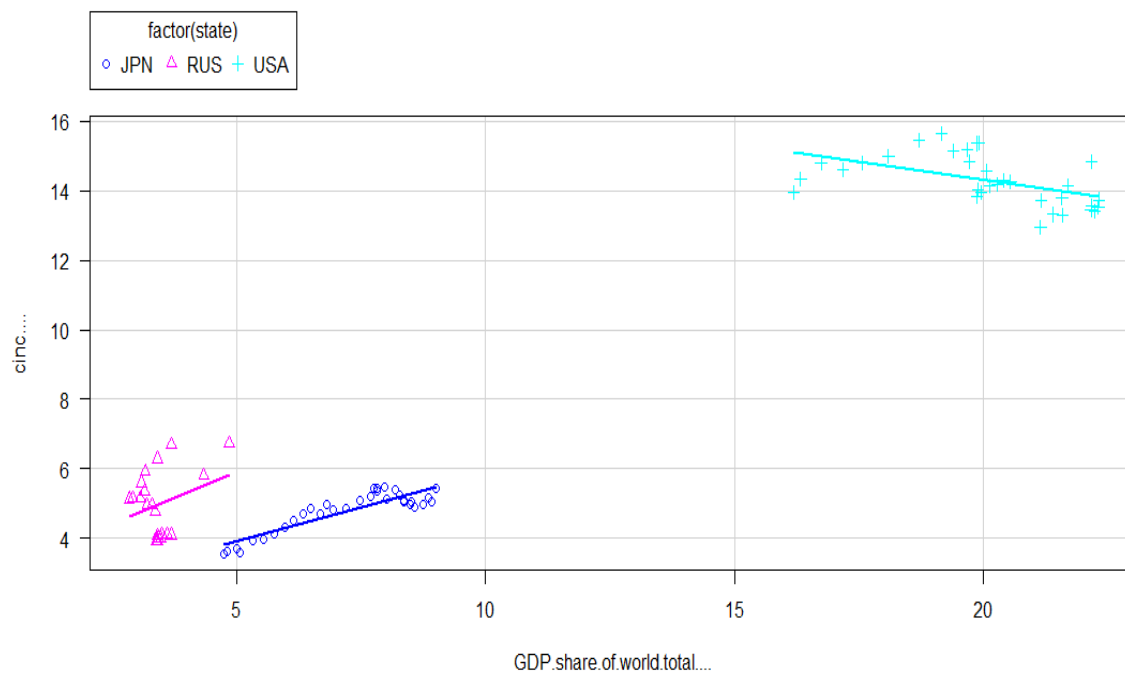


Figure 2: The relationship between the GDP share of world total and the CINC scores for the United States, Japan, and Russia

Firstly, when it comes to the United States, Japan, and Russia and their major influence on the current situation in the Middle East, and the relationship between their GDP share of world total (which indicates economic power) and their CINC scores (which show material national power) this paper will confirm the broad trends regarding the United States, Japan, and Russia by drawing approximate straight lines on scatter diagrams.<sup>6</sup> The distinctive facts that can be observed are that Russia's economic and national power are less than expected (they are approximately level with Japan once military strength is removed), and that, in contrast to Japan and Russia, the United States' national power shows a negative correlation with its economic power. Just to be sure, EZR,<sup>7</sup> a free statistics software that is used for medical statistics, was used; when confirming the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient<sup>8</sup> of the United States' GDP share of world total and CINC score, the coefficient was -0.655 and the P-value<sup>9</sup> was 0.0000528 (data quantity n=33), which confirmed a high negative correlation at a significant 5%.

Moreover, when it comes to why the United States' economic power and material national power display negative correlation, it is thought that the reason lies in the fact that the contribution of the military sector to the total national power of the United States is greater than its contribution to the country's economic power. Considering this point, in the context of the slump caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the Biden administration needs to firstly rebuild the domestic economy and improve the unemployment rate as urgent issues; in these circumstances, the new administration will likely find it difficult to carry out the same large-scale reductions in military spending as the second Obama administration. The reasoning behind this is the fact that in the United States, governmental military expenditure supports a great deal of employment, and so in the current situation—in which the country is finally coming out of a state of recession—suddenly reducing military expenditure may result in the continuation of a high unemployment rate, and there is the possibility that it could have a negative effect on the governing Democratic Party during the midterm elections in two years' time. Therefore, it seems that the Biden administration will try to successfully evade the pressure from the left wing of the Democratic Party, which wants to reduce the national defense budget,

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<sup>6</sup> In Figure 2, each approximate straight line drawn on scatter graphs created with the United States, Japan, and Russia's GDP share of world total (x) and CINC scores (y) uses the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method in practice, with y as the dependent variable and x as the independent variable, making it the same as a model that uses single regression analysis. Therefore, as stated above, there is absolutely no meaning in inferential statistical analysis for the panel data, which is assumed to lack independence and normality, but I have presumed it can be used here in the sense of confirming trends in data scattering.

<sup>7</sup> EZR (Easy R) is a free statistics software created by altering the functions of R commander for medical statistics; it was made by Professor KANDA Yoshinobu of the Jichi Medical University Saitama Medical Center's Hematology Department. It is managed and released by the Center (<http://www.jichi.ac.jp/saitama-sct/SaitamaHP.files/statmed.html>). It saves users time by memorizing and inputting R commands for free statistics software that have spread around the world, and makes it possible to carry out many different statistical analyses just using a mouse; the software can also be used for the statistical analysis of quantitative data from sociology, not just medical statistics.

<sup>8</sup> Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is a correlation coefficient for data in which at least one population does not follow a normal distribution, and serves as an indicator that shows that the greater the absolute value between -1 and 1, the higher the correlation.

<sup>9</sup> The P-value is the probability that test statistics will be a given value based on a null hypothesis in statistical hypothesis testing. The smaller the P-value, the less likely it is that test statistics will yield that value. Typically, if the P-value is 5% or less than 1%, the null hypothesis (in this case, no correlation) is dismissed as false and an alternative hypothesis (there is a correlation) is adopted.



and, for the present, maintain the level of defense expenditure expanded during the time of the Trump administration.

### The Possibility of Reducing the US Forces Stationed in the Middle East: Can the New Administration Carry Out Rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific?

Table 3 below shows stationed U.S. troops deployed in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East respectively, based on official announcements from the U.S. military. However, the forces deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria are likely military secrets, and so have not been officially announced. The total force from the U.S. military deployed in the Middle East is therefore said to be a mere 10,044 people in total; this data cannot be considered a value that reflects an approximation of the actual number. For example, even now, one can see that there are approximately 10,000+ troops stationed in the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, where the frontline headquarters for the implementation of anti-terrorist aerial bombing operations by United States Air Forces Central (USAFCENT) in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan are located, but according to the official data from Table 3, there are only 490 active U.S. service troops stationed in Qatar. Calculating from this data, approximately 52% (just under 88,000 people) of around 169,000 active U.S. military personnel deployed overseas are stationed in East Asia and the Pacific region, including Japan. Compared to this, only 5.95% of these personnel are stationed in the Middle East. Considering the current situation, in which U.S. military operations against ISIS and Al Qaeda are continuing even now, it must be said that it is difficult for us to believe this data from official announcements.

Thus, upon searching for highly authentic data that is closer to the total number of U.S. military personnel stationed in the Middle East, the data in Table 4 (Statista) was discovered. According to these values, there are a total of around 54,000 U.S. military troops stationed in the Middle East, and it is thought that this value suggests a more appropriate number of troops than the low estimate. Whatever the case, if the Biden administration tries to carry out a hasty Asia-Pacific rebalancing policy, then there are concerns that the power balance in the Persian Gulf, which the U.S. military stationed in the area has been continuously responsible for since the 1991 Gulf War, could crumble on a large scale. It is unlikely that Secretary of State Blinken and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Sullivan, who were responsible for the negotiations for the nuclear deal with Iran during the second Obama administration and should therefore have expert diplomatic experience and be well versed in the balance of power in the Middle East, will choose a withdrawal policy with such a huge risk to the execution of the U.S. military's ongoing anti-terrorism operations. Until any major issues arise, it is conceivable that for the foreseeable future President Biden himself will place importance on advice from Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Sullivan and Secretary of State Blinken, who have been his close associates since his time as Vice President, when carrying out policies vis-à-vis the Middle East. Therefore, immediately after establishing his administration, President Biden decided on a plan to revise the Doha Agreement concerning the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Afghanistan that the former Trump administration agreed with the Taliban at the end of February 2020; in the same vein, it is thought that there is an increasingly large possibility that a fast

withdrawal of US forces, which could inhibit the implementation of anti-terror operations, will be halted for the moment, and that the U.S. military stationed in the Middle East will continue on the same scale as it is at present. In this context, the Biden administration is not likely to rapidly develop an Asia-Pacific rebalancing policy.

Table 3. U.S. Military troops deployed overseas  
(Excluding Europe, 20 people or more) <sup>10</sup>

	East Asia/Asia-Pacific	Middle East
1	Japan 53,732	Bahrain 4,004
2	Republic of Korea 26,416	Kuwait 2,169
3	Guam 6,140	Turkey 1,685
4	Australia 1,085	Qatar 490
5	Singapore 206	Saudi Arabia 382
6	The Philippines 185	Egypt 269
7	Thailand 100	Jordan 254
8	Vietnam 26	Diego Garcia 230
9	Indonesia 22	UAE 195
10	Total d 87912	Djibouti 176
11	d/a 52.09%	Israel 94
12	d/b 6.40%	Somalia 73
13		Oman 23
(Including the Coast Guard)		Total f 10044
Total overseas (active service)	a 168,766	f/a 5.95%
Total active service	b 1,374,019	f/b 0.73%
Percent stationed overseas (active service)	C=a/b 12.28%	*Revised values =f'(f×3) 30132
		f'/a 17.85%
		f'/b 2.19%

<sup>10</sup> Source: Created by the author based on Number of Military and DoD Appropriated Fund (APF) Civilian Personnel Permanently Assigned By Duty Location and Service/Component, As of September 30, 2020, [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp\\_reports.jsp](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp), accessed on Feb. 7, 2021.

**Table 4. Current numbers of U.S. troops in the Middle East<sup>11</sup>**

Kuwait	16,592
Bahrain	9,335
Iraq	9,122
Qatar	6,671
UAE	4,240
Jordan	2,730
Turkey	2,265
Syria	1,723
Saudi Arabia	850
Egypt	455
Lebanon	110
Israel	41
Oman	32
Yemen	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,180</b>

### The possibility of a Return to the United States' Iran Nuclear Deal: The Effects on the Balance of Power in the Region

As was stated at the start of this paper, returning to the Iran nuclear deal was one of new President Biden's election pledges.<sup>12</sup> However, a United States return to the Iran nuclear deal has been raised with the prerequisites that Iran resume its compliance with the nuclear deal in advance, and effectively controls any other destabilizing activities that it is carrying out.<sup>13</sup> Iran's "destabilizing activities" is an abstract expression, but in a paper published in the March/April 2020 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Mr. Biden argued that he actively values the Iran nuclear deal concluded by the Obama/Biden administration as having historical significance, being designed so that Iran cannot possess nuclear weapons, and that it is first necessary to make Iran return to a route complying with the deal.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is clear that to President Biden the negotiations with Iran are not limited to the issue of nuclear development; he sees the cessation

<sup>11</sup> "Number of United States military soldiers stationed in the Middle East in 2017, by country," Statista Research Department, Aug 26, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1007251/middle-east-us-troops-by-country>, accessed on Feb. 7, 2021. This data reflects values from 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Joe Biden, "THE POWER OF AMERICA'S EXAMPLE: THE BIDEN PLAN FOR LEADING THE DEMOCRATIC WORLD TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY," <https://joebiden.com/americanleadership/>, p. 10, accessed on Feb. 7, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>, accessed on Feb. 7, 2021.

of ballistic missile development and of Iran's support for anti-U.S./anti-Israel armed forces and Shia armed forces such as the Houthis in Yemen as prerequisites for the United States to return to negotiations.

It is no exaggeration to say that conditions on the Iranian side are falling into the greatest national crisis since the success of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The country is plunging into a situation more difficult than the state of international isolation established in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War. It goes without saying that the first cause of this is the serious damage brought about by the so-called "maximum pressure" financial sanctions and economic sanctions, mainly the ban on crude oil exports, imposed on Iran since August 2018 by the Trump administration. The second is the negative impact of the sharp drop in crude oil prices in the world market that occurred in March 2020. The third is the fact that since 2020, Iran has been the Middle Eastern country hit the worst by the COVID-19 pandemic, due in part to the adverse effects of delayed initial responses by the government and information concealment.<sup>15</sup> Within Iran, which is suffering from these three economic hardships, the value of its currency, the rial, has fallen sharply and imported inflation is occurring; foreign exchange reserves are drying up, and it is predicted that the unemployment rate will exceed 12% in 2020.<sup>16</sup>

In these circumstances, conservative hardliners such as people from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps made major gains in the elections that took place in February 2020 for the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and consequently approved a bill containing strategic measures to lift sanctions and protect the interests of the Iranian people on December 1, which obliges the Rouhani administration to begin 20% highly-enriched uranium production and to stop accepting investigations from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The following day, a supervisory council that reviews the constitutional appropriateness of laws approved the bill.<sup>17</sup> Then, on January 4, 2021, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran actually began activities to enrich uranium to 20% purity at the Fordo nuclear site.<sup>18</sup> From the start of this year, Iran has boldly begun enriched uranium production; in light of the creation of the Biden administration, which will likely call for a return to the Iran nuclear deal with the United States within the month, its intentions probably lie in making the first move and drawing concessions advantageous to Iran from the Biden administration.

In terms of the changes in the national power (CINC score) and economic power (PPP conversion GDP share of world total) of the three nations of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, which are fierce opponents in the Middle East, this paper will check and view data from 1980, after the Iranian Revolution, to 2012, the final year of the first Obama administration (Figure 3 and Figure 4). As nuclear force is not included in the CINC score, it is clear that Israel's national power is estimated to be extremely low when compared to that of Iran and Saudi Arabia. In addition, with the single exception of 1992, it is possible to observe a slow rise and

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<sup>15</sup> As of February 5, 2021, the number of infected people in Iran exceeded around 1.445 million people, and the cumulative number of deaths exceeded 58,000; the death rate is calculated at 4.03%. "Coronavirus (COVID-19) death rate in countries with confirmed deaths and over 1,000 reported cases as of March 5, 2021, by country," Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1105914/coronavirus-death-rates-worldwide/>, accessed on Feb. 8, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook: A Long and Difficult Ascent*, Oct. 2020, p.58.

<sup>17</sup> "Iran nuclear crisis: Law aims to boost enrichment and block inspectors," *BBC News*, Dec. 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55168112>, accessed on Feb. 8, 2021,

<sup>18</sup> "Iran resumes enriching uranium to 20% purity at Fordo facility," *BBC News*, Jan. 4, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55530366>, accessed on Feb. 8, 2021,

nearly identical trends in the national power of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Israel's economic power has remained stable at around the same level during this period, whereas it is possible to broadly grasp that the economic power of both Iran and Saudi Arabia have followed a downward curve since 1992. The cause of this is thought to be the effects of the downward trend in crude oil prices that began in the 1990s. The data isn't shown in Figure 4, but Iran and Saudi Arabia were badly hit by the sharp drop in crude oil prices and the novel coronavirus pandemic in 2020, so it is clear that these countries suffered further recession and economic decline than was seen in the data series used when creating Figure 4.

If it is assumed that Saudi Arabia suffered the two hardships of suddenly dropping crude oil prices and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, then Iran suffered three hardships: the previous two plus the severe economic sanctions imposed by the United States from 2018. Due to this, it is possible to say that Iran has fallen into an unprecedented national crisis to the extent that it surpasses the plight of the international isolation it experienced during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s after the Islamic Revolution. Looking at this from the perspective of the balance of power in the region, diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel, mediated by the former Trump administration, began in the middle of August 2020; after this, certain Arab countries followed Egypt and Jordan in taking the historic step of normalizing diplomatic relations with Israel: Bahrain in early September, Sudan in late October, and Morocco in early December. As a result, the anti-Iran encirclement in the Middle East and North Africa was strengthened.

Iran, having fallen into a situation of such internal and external crisis, has continued its strategic perseverance and, at the same time, stirred things up in an attempt to rapidly secure a promise from the Biden administration to lift the sanctions. Its provoking behavior, including starting to produce 20% highly-enriched uranium and ceasing to accept inspections from the IAEA, may be a manifestation of the feeling of desperate frustration in Iran, which is in a quandary. Even if the Biden administration held up a return to the Iran nuclear deal as an election pledge, as long as it continues to desire an expanded negotiation agenda in addition to the nuclear issue, and for Iran to return to compliance with the nuclear deal in advance, it is very likely that there will be a new president from among former President Maḥmūd Aḥmadī-nezhād's different conservative hardliners in the coming Iranian presidential election, scheduled to take place in June 2021, rather than any candidate that will inherit President Rouhani's route of international cooperation. Conversely, if the Biden administration concedes to Iran and tries to quickly begin the process of restarting negotiations and lifting sanctions, it is thought that the tendency for Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to distrust the Biden administration and distance themselves from the United States will become stronger. If President Biden inherits a route of reconciliation with Iran from the time of the Obama administration and takes the direction of promoting an Asia-Pacific rebalancing policy, there is no doubt that the existing power balance in the Persian Gulf will change greatly.

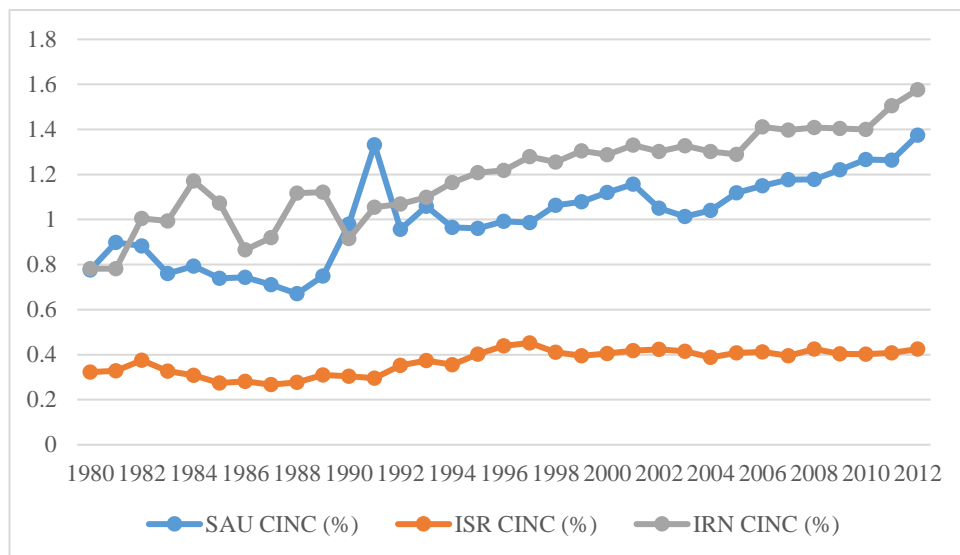


Figure 3. Changes in the CINC scores of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel

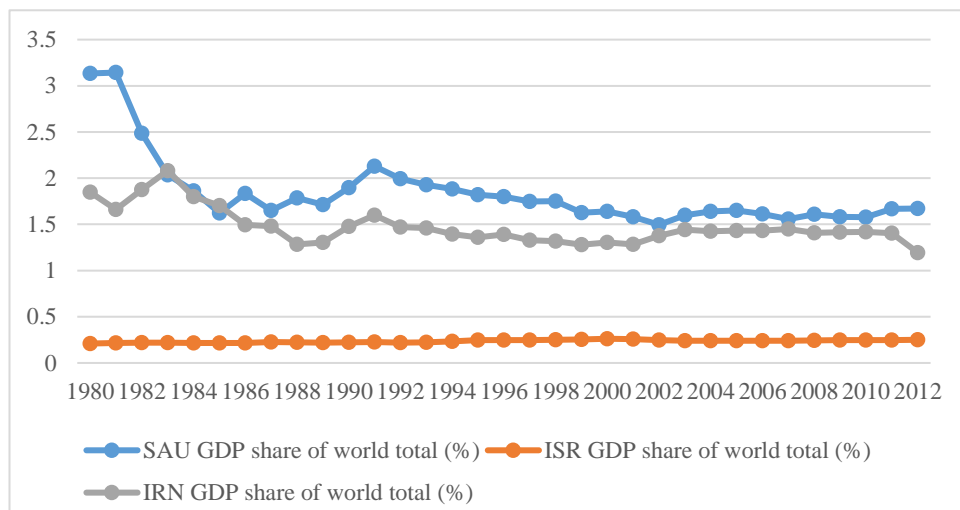


Figure 4. Changes in the GDP share of world total of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel

### Concluding Remarks

This paper has put together data analyses while considering three points of discussion in connection to the situation in the Middle East after the creation of the Biden administration: the possibility of reducing U.S. military spending, the possibility of reducing the U.S. forces stationed in the Middle East, and the possibility of the United States returning to the Iran nuclear deal. To give a short summary of the conclusion, the probability of the Biden administration quickly promoting any of the three points of discussion considered is low. This is the natural result of the fact that the situation in the Middle East is considerably different now from what it was during the time of the Obama administration. This is because it would be hard for even new President Biden to ignore the reality of the regional security environment and emulate the policies of the Obama administration, two administrations ago, with which he worked as the former Vice President.

However, not even a month has passed since the Biden administration officially started on January 20, 2021. To clarify the direction of the new administration's Middle East policies to a certain extent will likely take until the fall of this year at the earliest. In this sense, I would like to conclude by confirming that the considerations of this paper were made from the perspective of a single possibility: that President Biden's government will emulate the policies of the four years of the second Obama administration.

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