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## STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF US FOREIGN POLICY: THE UKRAINIAN AND SYRIAN CASES

*The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of regional context and international actors in shaping U.S. foreign policy decisions. The regional context encompasses a wide range of factors: historical preconditions for the development of the conflict, ethnopolitical and religious specifics, economic potential and resource base, as well as the geostrategic location of the territory. It argues that the environment in which American policy is implemented determines the degree of strategic or tactical involvement, the set of instruments applied, and the ultimate objectives pursued. The regional context encompasses historical conditions, ethnopolitical and religious features, resource potential, and geostrategic location, which together define whether Washington perceives a region as critical or peripheral. Simultaneously, the activity of international actors – both allies and competitors – significantly impacts the content and scope of U.S. decisions, shaping the necessity of coordination, balancing, or containment. A comparative analysis of Ukraine and Syria illustrates fundamental differences in American approaches. Ukraine is considered a strategic priority requiring systemic long-term support, integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, and comprehensive deterrence of Russian aggression. U.S. policy includes military, financial, institutional, and diplomatic assistance, alongside close cooperation with NATO and the EU. The Syrian case demonstrates a tactical and situational approach, focused on counterterrorism, limiting the influence of Russia, Iran, and Turkey, and minimizing risks to U.S. national interests. In Syria, the United States relies on targeted military operations, humanitarian initiatives, and flexible cooperation with partners. The article emphasizes that regional conditions and international dynamics cause the asymmetry of U.S. foreign policy, where strategic directions receive comprehensive support, while secondary ones are managed through situational responses. It concludes that Ukraine plays a system-forming role in U.S. foreign policy, whereas Syria remains a secondary direction, which explains the asymmetry in political, military, and diplomatic engagement.*

**Key words:** regional context, international actors, U.S. foreign policy, Ukraine, Syria.

**Statement of the problem.** In the current context of international system transformation, there is a growing number of regional conflicts and crises that significantly influence global political decision-making. As a leading actor in world politics, the United States is forced to constantly adapt its foreign policy strategy to the specifics of the regional context and the activities of other international players. At the same time, academic debate reveals contradictions in determining the extent to which regional conditions and the international environment determine the nature and priorities of US policy: are they merely situational factors that adjust an existing global strategy, or, conversely, are they factors capable of radically transforming Washington's foreign policy course? This issue is particularly important when comparing US policy in different regions, where the same global actor demonstrates fundamentally different approaches. That is why it is necessary to study how the regional context and international actors influence the US foreign policy decision-making process and

cause asymmetry in the level of their strategic or tactical involvement, which is clearly evident in the cases of Ukraine and Syria.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Recent studies and publications demonstrate the convergence of two analytical lines: the institutionalization of support for Ukraine as a strategic direction and the limited, mostly tactical, configuration of the US approach to «post-Assad» Syria. On the Ukrainian track, attention is focused on the transition from ad hoc assistance to a more stable framework – the restoration and adjustment of American security support in 2025, which is recorded in the CRS materials, is interpreted as an attempt to tie the volumes and formats of assistance to the assessment of the effectiveness of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and political agreements between allies. In works dedicated to NATO, the key innovation is the results of the 2024 Washington Summit and the launch of mechanisms for long-term support for the defense sector of Ukraine (in particular, within the frame-

work of the announced initiatives on training, armaments and interoperability), which is interpreted as a step towards the «irreversibility» of Kyiv's Euro-Atlantic trajectory. Official US reports detail the nomenclature and scope of assistance (air defense systems, missile systems, ammunition), serving as an empirical basis for assessing the impact of support on Ukraine's operational capabilities. In contrast, the Syrian literature has undergone a dramatic transformation since the fall of the regime in late 2024: leading media outlets and think tanks focus on the transition of power, the risks of fragmentation, and role conflicts between external actors, creating a «narrow corridor» of policy for the US – a combination of low-key engagement, counterterrorism priorities, and selective stabilization assistance. The CSIS analysis further emphasizes the «medium» priority of the Syrian direction for Washington and the need to “be present” in order to maintain influence in a multipolar environment and coordinate with European partners.

In general, the current body of work explains the asymmetry of US approaches due to the different strategic weight of cases, the density of allied institutions, and the degree of controllability of the regional context, which determines the discrepancy between long-term, institutionalized support for Ukraine and limited, risk-managed intervention in Syria.

**Task statement.** The purpose of the study is to identify and theoretically substantiate the role of the regional context and international actors in the process of shaping US foreign policy decisions, as well as to identify differences in the strategies and tactics of American policy using the examples of Ukraine and Syria. Achieving this goal involves analysing how local geopolitical conditions and the international environment influence the choice of instruments, the prioritisation of areas of focus, and the scale of US involvement, which helps explain the asymmetry of American approaches to different crisis situations.

**Outline of the main material of the study.** In the current climate of global instability and increasing number of conflicts of varying intensity, the role of the regional context and international actors in the process of shaping the foreign policy decisions of the United States of America is becoming particularly important. The nature of the environment in which American policy is implemented determines not only its instruments, but also the level of strategic or tactical engagement. For the US, as a leading actor in the international system, it is important not only to respond to challenges arising in a particular region,

but also to integrate these responses into the overall logic of maintaining global leadership, securing national interests and preserving the stability of the international order.

The regional context encompasses a wide range of factors: the historical preconditions for the development of conflict, ethno-political and religious specifics, economic potential and resource base, as well as the geostrategic location of the territory. The combination of these characteristics determines whether Washington perceives a particular region as critical to its own security and international position, or as a peripheral area requiring limited, situational action. At the same time, the presence and activity of other international actors – both allies and rivals – significantly influence the nature of US decisions. Coordination with NATO and EU partners in the European context significantly strengthens American capabilities, while the multipolarity of the Middle East forces the United States to resort to balancing tactics and limited engagement.

Thus, studying the role of the regional context and international actors is key to understanding the differences in US approaches to various crisis situations. It is the combination of local circumstances and global interaction that determines whether US policy will transform into a long-term strategy with complex goals or remain at the level of short-term, tactical decisions aimed at minimising risks and managing instability.

The formation of US foreign policy decisions is the result of complex interactions between the regional context and the activities of international actors. Regional conditions determine not only strategic priorities, but also the choice of instruments of influence, their sequence and intensity. In other words, the US makes decisions based on the specific geopolitical, economic and security situation on the ground, as well as taking into account the actions of allies and competitors.

Ukraine is an example of how regional threats shape long-term US policy. Since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and started the conflict in Donbas, the US has gradually increased its support for Ukraine. By 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine's strategic value to the US had increased dramatically due to the threat to the security of the entire European continent and the transatlantic space.

In response, the US is implementing a multi-level support policy:

1. Military aid: supply of modern HIMARS systems, Javelin anti-tank complexes, air defence systems and training for the Ukrainian military.

2. Financial support: macro-financial guarantees, assistance in stabilising the economy and support for reforms in the financial and energy sectors.

3. Institutional assistance: support for anti-corruption initiatives, reform of state bodies and the judicial system.

4. Diplomatic tools: coordination of sanctions with European allies, coordinated political statements and support for Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO, EU).

Here, the regional threat determines strategic priorities – the need to deter Russian aggression and ensure European security, while the activities of allies and international organisations shape the specific instruments for implementing these priorities, including the coordination of sanctions and political initiatives. For example, joint sanctions packages against Russia demonstrate how the US integrates regional and international factors into its long-term strategy.

Syria illustrates a different approach, where the regional context is much more complex due to multipolarity. The US is forced to take into account the simultaneous influence of:

Russia, which supports the Assad regime and has a military presence in the region;

Iran, which is forming its own armed groups and influencing regional politics;

Turkey, which is conducting operations against Kurdish formations;

Local forces, including Kurdish and Arab opposition groups, as well as Islamic radical organisations.

Multipolarity limits the US's ability to intervene directly on a large scale, so it takes a situational approach:

fighting ISIS and other terrorist organisations;

containing the influence of Russia and Iran in the region;

supporting 'moderate' opposition groups through military, logistical and humanitarian aid.

An example is the special operation to eliminate Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2019, which demonstrates the US's targeted approach, combining military, intelligence and diplomatic tools. Coordination with NATO allies and regional partners, particularly in the context of humanitarian programmes and security in north-eastern Syria, determines the content and scope of assistance, reducing risks to American interests.

Thus, the regional context and international activity are decisive factors determining the nature, priorities and scope of US foreign policy decisions. In Ukraine, this manifests itself in systematic strategic support, integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and deterrence of aggression, while in Syria it manifests

itself in limited, tactical intervention with a focus on stabilisation, counterterrorism and risk minimisation. This approach demonstrates the US's ability to combine strategic and tactical instruments, effectively balancing local and global geopolitical conditions (Table 1).

A comparative analysis of US policy towards Ukraine and Syria shows a significant difference in the level of strategic attention, forms of engagement and ultimate goals. For Washington, Ukraine is not only a regional partner, but also a key element in the formation of a new architecture of European and transatlantic security. The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is seen as an existential threat to the international order, which requires a systemic and long-term response. That is why American policy towards Ukraine is characterized by complexity and strategic stability: it includes high-tech military assistance, macro-financial support, promotion of structural reforms, as well as active diplomatic activity aimed at integrating Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Coordination of actions with the EU, NATO and other allies creates the effect of collective influence, which significantly strengthens the US capabilities in confronting Russia and strengthens the positions of the West as a whole. In contrast, Syria is perceived by the United States as a peripheral, although tactically important, direction. American policy here focuses primarily on local tasks – the fight against terrorism, containing the influence of regional rivals (Russia, Iran, Turkey) and minimizing risks to its own national interests. A characteristic feature is the situational and tactical nature of the approaches: instead of long-term strategic programs in Syria, spot operations, cooperation with individual armed groups, humanitarian initiatives and flexible balancing between the conflicting parties are used. The absence of a stable international coalition, similar to the Ukrainian case, determines the limited influence of the United States on the course of the Syrian conflict and makes their policy less effective in the strategic dimension. Thus, the analysis of the two cases clearly demonstrates the difference in the priorities of US foreign policy. If in the case of Ukraine, we are dealing with a strategic long-term investment in the future of European security and the global balance of power, then in the case of Syria American policy is reduced to managing chaos and responding to specific threats without a holistic vision of the future of the region. This allows us to conclude that Ukraine's role in the US foreign policy strategy is system-forming, while Syria occupies a

**The strategic importance of Ukraine and Syria for the US: a comparative analysis**  
**[developed by the author]**

Parameter	Ukraine	Syria
Regional context	Direct military aggression of the Russian Federation, threat to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, stability of Europe and the transatlantic space	Multipolarity: influence of Russia, Iran, Turkey, local formations (Kurds, Arab opposition forces), Islamic radical groups
Strategic value for the US	High: deterrence of Russia, ensuring the security of Europe, support for the sovereignty of Ukraine	Medium/limited: containment of influence of regional rivals, fight against terrorism, minimize risks to American interests
Key international actors	EU, NATO, allied countries (Great Britain, Poland, Canada, etc.)	Russia, Iran, Turkey, regional partners, NATO allies
Nature of US policy	Systemic, long-term strategy, comprehensive support: military aid, macro-financial guarantees, support for reforms, diplomatic coordination	Limited, tactical intervention: fight against terrorism, support for “moderate” opposition formations, humanitarian aid, special operations
Examples of specific US actions	Supply of HIMARS, Javelin, air defense systems; training of the Ukrainian military; macro-financial guarantees; joint sanctions with the EU; diplomatic support for integration into NATO	Elimination of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (2019); support for Kurdish and Arab formations; humanitarian and logistical aid; coordination of actions with NATO allies and regional partners
Policy objective	Deterrence of Russian aggression, integration of Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures, strengthening of European security	Stabilization of the region, minimizing risks to American interests, fight against terrorism
Implementation features	Comprehensive coordination with international allies, long-term support for reforms and modernization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine	Situational, flexible approach, targeted actions, balancing between regional actors and risks

predominantly auxiliary, tactical place in the global geopolitical picture.

**Conclusions.** The study concludes that the regional context and the activity of international actors are determining factors in the process of forming US foreign policy decisions. They directly influence the choice of instruments, the scale of involvement and the ultimate goals of American policy, which is especially clearly seen in the examples of Ukraine and Syria. First, it was established that in the case of Ukraine, the regional context, caused by the direct military aggression of the Russian Federation, transforms American policy into a comprehensive long-term strategy that includes military, financial, institutional and diplomatic support. Coordination with the European Union, NATO and other allies enhances the effectiveness of this strategy, making it a key element of the global security architecture. Ukraine is viewed by Washington not only as a regional partner, but also as a system-forming factor in the stability of the transatlantic space. Secondly, the analysis of the Syrian case shows that the multipolarity of the region, the high density of external actors (Russia, Iran, Turkey, local formations) and the lack of a stable allied coalition limit the US's capabilities for large-

scale policy. This determines the tactical, situational nature of American involvement, which focuses on combating terrorism, containing the influence of regional rivals and minimizing risks to its own interests. Thirdly, a comparison of the two cases demonstrates the asymmetry in US foreign policy: in strategically important regions, a comprehensive and long-term approach is used, while in secondary areas, the policy is reduced to targeted actions and balancing between competing interests. This approach allows Washington to maintain global leadership, effectively allocate resources and adapt to dynamic changes in the international environment.

In summary, it can be concluded that the regional context and international actors not only adjust the existing US foreign policy strategy, but also in some cases determine its fundamental nature. Ukraine in this dimension serves as an example of a strategic investment in the future of Euro-Atlantic security, while Syria is an example of chaos and risk management in a multipolar environment. Such a difference confirms that US foreign policy is multidimensional and contextually determined, and its success depends on combining global goals with sensitivity to local realities.

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### **Черкес І. В. СТРАТЕГІЧНІ ТА ТАКТИЧНІ ВИМІРИ ЗОВНІШНЬОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ США: УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ І СИРІЙСЬКИЙ КЕЙСИ**

У статті здійснено комплексний аналіз ролі регіонального контексту та міжнародних акторів у процесі формування зовнішньополітичних рішень США. Регіональний контекст охоплює широкий спектр факторів: історичні передумови розвитку конфлікту, етнополітичну та релігійну специфіку, економічний потенціал і ресурсну базу, а також геостратегічне положення території. Доведено, що характер середовища, у якому реалізується американська політика, визначає рівень стратегічного чи тактичного залучення, набір інструментів та кінцеві цілі. Регіональний контекст охоплює історичні передумови, етнополітичні та релігійні особливості, ресурсний потенціал і геостратегічне положення території, що у сукупності формує уявлення Вашингтона про критичну чи периферійну значущість регіону. Водночас присутність і активність міжнародних акторів – як союзників, так і суперників – істотно впливають на зміст і масштаб американських рішень, зумовлюючи потребу координації, балансування або протидії. На прикладі України та Сирії проведено порівняльний аналіз, який демонструє принципові відмінності у підходах США. Україна розглядається як стратегічний пріоритет, що потребує довгострокової системної підтримки, інтеграції у євроатлантичні структури та комплексного стримування агресії РФ. Політика США тут охоплює військову, фінансову, інституційну й дипломатичну допомогу, а також активну співпрацю з ЄС і НАТО. Сирійський кейс ілюструє тактичний підхід, орієнтований на боротьбу з тероризмом, стримування регіональних суперників та мінімізацію ризиків для національних інтересів США. Використовуються точкові військові операції, гуманітарні ініціативи та ситуативна взаємодія з партнерами. У статті підкреслюється, що регіональні умови та міжнародне оточення зумовлюють асиметричність політики США, коли стратегічні напрями отримують комплексну підтримку, тоді як другорядні – ситуативне реагування. Зроблено висновок, що Україна виступає системоутворюючим елементом зовнішньополітичної стратегії США, тоді як Сирія залишається другорядним напрямом, що визначає різний рівень політичного, військового та дипломатичного залучення Вашингтона.

**Ключові слова:** регіональний контекст, міжнародні актори, зовнішня політика США, Україна, Сирія.