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US Arms Trade in the Middle East:
A Complex and Dynamic Relationship

by

Mia-Maria Tabet

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of Political
Science in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at
the University of Windsor

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2024

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US Arms Trade in the Middle East:
A Complex and Dynamic Relationship

by

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January 24th, 2024

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ABSTRACT

The US foreign policy is a formidable testament to the intricate nature of international relations and exerting efforts to create international relations. Treaties and agreements are crucial to designing a symbiotic and harmonious international affair, built on the basis of shared interests and goals. Despite it not resulting in ultimate peace or seamless unity, these relations still allow the countries to prioritise their benefits by also guaranteeing others' advantages. This paper will highlight the US foreign policy as one of the biggest contributors to the Middle Eastern scenery, particularly in terms of military relations and arms trade. A brief history of both sides' upbringing and the mutual interests that lay in ensuring the continuity of their symbiotic arrangements. This paper will use a semi-systematic literature review to assess previous articles, books and statistics regarding the US foreign policy evolution, the history of wars and conflicts in the Middle East, the arms trade treaties between both sides as well as between the latter and the former's competitors. Lastly, this paper will showcase the contradicting but instrumental dynamics at interplay between the US foreign policy practices, namely military aid and arms trade, and the Middle Eastern region, particularly Saudi Arabia. This analysis reveals the contradictory yet crucial relationship between these behaviours and the Middle East's complex geopolitical situation.

Keywords: arms trade, weapons, US foreign policy, Middle East, MENA region, Russia, China, competitors, military, leverage, security, war.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

This thesis is of great personal importance. Paradoxically, it encompasses my observation of what is currently unfolding back home in the Middle East, as well as attempts to scientifically and comprehensively make sense of the conflicts and wars that have bedevilled the region over the years, but especially post WWII when the region achieved independence from colonial powers. As I write this paper, more than the usual conflicts, major war is back in the Middle East, causing chaos and unmistakably frightful consequences, especially for civilian populations. Observing the eruption of war and other violent conflicts in the Middle East raises questions concerning: 1) the exact origin of continuous political and security challenges; 2) the external forces driving it; 3) the internal susceptibility to such grave external influence; and 4) the ceaseless need for these wars to go on, to prevail, and to keep threatening the stability of the region and the well-being of its people.

During my observation of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza or the various political problems found across many countries in the Middle East region, I have found it glaringly apparent that external forces and war have become increasingly intertwined. Further, at the very heart of external influences resides American policymakers and American foreign policy. More specifically, American military weapons clearly play a vital role in the region's multiple conflict zones. Before exploring the complex role of external, and especially the presence of American military weapons in impacting the various Middle East conflicts, it is helpful to offer a brief account of the various and largely externally driven wars that have been prevalent in the Middle East.

A Sample of Middle East Regional Wars

Ever since the Ottoman empire collapsed and thus vanished from the Middle East after the end of World War I, the ‘not-so-ready’ countries were left to the control of European colonial powers. Indeed, the European powers, especially Britain and France, came to dominate the region’s politics, security and economies. The region was of enormous strategic (due to geography) and economic (primarily oil) importance to the Europeans.

In the following years, however, many revolutionary wars occurred helping to free the Arab world from Western control. And the 1917 Balfour Declaration helped to birth the creation of a Jewish state on land referred to as Palestine. Amongst the many WW1 settlements, the Balfour declaration was perhaps the most influential one for the region as it promised a piece of land (in Palestine) for the Jews. Once this promise was operationalized, and a Jewish state was declared in 1948, the Arab Israeli wars began in 1948 drawing in not only the Palestinians but also neighbouring Arab countries including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The Arab Israeli conflict created several subsequent wars including in 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 2006, and currently, 2023 was in Gaza.

The US replaced the European powers as the dominant global power in the Middle East, greatly impacting not only the trajectory of the Arab Israeli wars, but also other major regional conflicts where it played the lead role including the various Gulf war such as in 1990-91 and 2003-2011, as well as interjecting in several civil wars such as those in Libya (from 2011), Syria (from 2012), and Yemen (from 2012) (Heydemann, 2000) (Rolandsen and Selvik, 2023).

Of particular relevance to this study, the United States has been the largest exporter of weapons to the region. Indeed, this is a primary U.S. foreign policy goal. The arms industry is big business, a major player in the US economy, and an influential lobby group in Washington. During the Cold War, the US competed with the Soviet Union for arms sales (and influence) in the Middle East. The resulting arms race reflected global economic growth and helped widen the scope of weapon production, development, and trade. The change in the political landscape due to the division of previous unions and alliances, added to the enhanced seeking for weapons encouraged countries to partake in producing and exporting them, ultimately increasing the competition in the market. Understandably, the US would want to dominate this market as it ensures almost total control over international affairs and military economic gains. This is one of the logical explanations behind the repetitive and frequent military treaties, weapon agreements and reciprocal trades between the US and financially capable countries like the Gulf region in the Middle East (van Lieshout and Beeres, 2021).

Research Question

What is the aftermath of arms trade as part of foreign policies between the US and the Middle East?

Research Objectives

1. Assess the competition between several countries: explain the relationship between the US and the Middle East as well as that between Russia and China in the Middle East.

2. Highlight the History of the US foreign Policy: explain the rise of the American foreign policy because of the Cold War, as well as the offspring of the dynamic evolution of global politics.
3. Demonstrate the Saudi Arabian and American relation: explain the symbiotic relation tying Saudi Arabia, as a focal Middle Eastern entity and financial powerhouse, and the US, as a commanding political and military presence.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

Research Method

The method used in this research paper is a semi-structured literature review that aims to collect pre-existing data from diverse sources and articles, intertwine the results and evaluate the information in hopes to add more conclusive ideas to the research topic.

Qualitative research is a method of gathering data from resources and samples to create a background bulk of knowledge for the research. The system of scanning credible resources and using the essence of their findings and discussions is known as a literature review. Like the name suggests, this would entail reviewing pre-existing literature pieces to collect the needed information all centred around a precise research question, objective, or general topic. The comparison of materials is a crucial step to be able to connect the studies and add significance to the prior knowledge.

The reliance on such qualitative techniques is becoming more recognizable as an important and effective research methodology. The accessibility of research data has become significantly easier, quicker, and more efficient as it can be reached through simple web explorations. However, despite the increased efficacy of this method, applying it is proving to become trickier with time. Scholarly researchers, graduating studies and thesis are increasing immensely with the elevated educational need for employment and the general redirection towards higher educational levels. Thus, finding completely unique topics to investigate is near impossible these days, and writing absolutely original conclusions is unachievable. But, when this information is critically picked across various resources of journal articles, peer reviewed or not, books, research and national or international websites, then connected and tied to moulding conclusive and informative paragraphs, they can contribute to educational advancements, recommendations, and area-specific improvements (Synder, 2019).

Another pivotal feature of a properly conducted literature review is the informational frame of its content. It is true that literature reviews are incredibly functional in terms of validating hypotheses and demonstrating theories by building a strong basis of statistical and scientific proofs, but the method of approaching this dictates the actual effectiveness of it. Therefore, researchers cannot purely look for information wherever and then rely on them to draw interpretations, they should question the validity and credibility of the sources at hand first (Synder, 2019).

As stated above, a literature review is proven successful when it can either help the researcher come up with a new hypothesis to further investigate in smaller and more

concise settings through following quantitative methods, or it validates the ideas and theories pre-designed. To reach such satisfactory results, a certain order of step-by-step plans should be fulfilled. Firstly, a broad exploration of the topic's affiliated research papers is needed to reduce the scale of deep investigations and specify the information that needs to be accumulated. Secondly, picking the resources that best align with your research goals and ambitions to narrow down the topic elements and save up time is crucial. The tasking step then revolves around assembling the information from numerous sources, sectioning them according to relations and interconnectedness then comparing their usefulness. This is a circular cycle, repeated a dozen times before settling on enough data before moving to the quantitative section of the research. However, these steps vary from a type of literature review to another (Grant, 2009).

There are three distinctive but related approaches to conducting a literature review.

Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review is mostly encountered in scientific or medically based papers, like those aiming to prove theories relating to the human body and its associated functions and influences. That is mainly due to its more specific nature. Despite the qualitative label, a systematic literature review is heavily based on quantitative data such as empirical evidence, statistical comparisons, and numerical reviews. The validity and relevance of the findings in a systematic review rely majorly on a concise and efficient research design such that it references keywords usually stated at the beginning of articles. Therefore, precision and objectivity when

selecting relevant information to the topic in question are essential characteristics of this type of literature review (Grant, 2009). Additionally, its usage of concrete undisputable quantitative data offers an efficient framework for comparing information and synthesising a conclusion. In fact, a meta-analysis constructs a framework for differentiating between methods by calculating the effect size of numerical data compiled from different articles thus allowing the scholar to clearly identify the deficiencies in studies and compare them (Moller & Myles, 2016; Synder, 2019). However, the complicated nature of compiled statistics paired with the lack of quantified data in several fields justifies the need for a balance between qualitative and quantitative data as a more effective method of linking arguments. A possible approach could include the filtering of qualitative findings through keywords and identifying those relevant to the objective of the review.

Semi-Systematic Literature Review

Another factor to be considered is the difficulty of processing each detail in certain previous studies. Therefore, a semi-systematic literature review can be applied as a method of interpreting qualitative data selected from a wide range of articles as one general synthesis that allows the comprehension of more complicated ideas. This can be paired with a narrative analysis that differs from meta-analysis in identifying the qualitative data rather than quantitative ones from different articles according to a logical approach of analysing data, selecting the more relevant findings and then linking them. Thus, key elements of a semi-systematic literature review include quality assessment and transparent reporting where scholars follow a clear outline of accessing a wide range of articles and other credible sources and linking relevant

information of a certain subject while attempting to provide an overall view of a subject through prior research. Consequently, and through selective data extraction and synthesis, a researcher can generate a more comprehensive and general overview of the topic at hand and aid in answering a specific research question. Similar to meta-analysis, this method is mostly useful in certain areas; due to its narrative nature relying on qualitative data this type of literature review is mostly useful in analysing articles that lack quantified data. Additionally, researchers suffering from time constraints and a shortage of available literature in a certain field may benefit majorly from a semi systematic literature review (Synder, 2019).

Various Literature Review Methods

Finally, the systematic review is only one method of the wide variety of known and used literature review styles. For example, Grant (2009) lists some types of literature reviews useful in different scenarios such as the Rapid review; a time-efficient process that prioritises speed and systematic search strategies in delivering timely and concise insights on existing information relevant to a certain topic, and the Scope review which involves searching and analysing a wide range of sources, including academic papers, books, and other valid sources when researching a certain topic. The difference between these two types of literature resides in the nature of the analysis provided; a rapid review prioritises summaries and identification of relevant information whereas a scope review allows for a more comprehensive overview of previous literature and provides an efficient basis for a critical evaluation of necessary information. A more generalised review would be the Overview review that aims to deliver a broadened and general understanding without focusing on details and

specific concepts which offers a fair starting point for readers. Another example of such methods would be the Integrative review allowing for a detailed critical analysis of a certain subject (Synder, 2019).

Our paper will purely rely on a semi-systematic literature review of previously written articles and books regarding the influence of the US arms trade, as part of the US foreign policy, on Middle Eastern affairs.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy can be defined as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations” which means it is a dictating law that guides the way states or countries behave in reliance on each other. A foreign policy should then include a set of predefined and specific principles, rules, techniques, strategies, and consequent actions to control one country’s relation with another. Evidently, the purpose of this policy would be to maintain national security and hold the country’s best interest at heart, solidifying its benefits from the other states. In a way, foreign policies aim to create constructive interaction between opposing forces. Therefore, foreign policy can vastly rule over military, economic, political, and even social angles of international affairs. What is now labelled and defined as ‘foreign policies’ has been an established way of dealing with different tribes, then communities, then societies and countries. The emergence of this distinguished globally recognized definition of foreign policies emerged sometime in

the 17th century, reshaping the boundaries of nations' interconnectedness and reliance on reciprocal aids and support. (Leira, 2019)

US Foreign Policy

In light of the emergence of these international relations guidelines and its constant adaptation to the ever-changing circumstances, the United States' foreign policy remains a fascinating yet complex diplomatic concept. Due to its purpose of reigning the way the US behaves with other countries to preserve its image and boost its benefits, the US foreign policy is altered and modified to adapt to global political, economic, and military evolutions. The establishment of US foreign policy was actually an accumulation of years and years of political decisions and opposing ideologies. The essence of them relied on sustaining US dominance over all markets and aspects of international affairs.

Post-Cold War

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented a watershed moment in global politics. This time heralded an age of extraordinary influence for the United States, but it also presented issues in defining its role in a world devoid of an obvious enemy. This changing geopolitical landscape necessitated a rethinking of American foreign policy in order to navigate emerging global forces.

The disintegration of the Soviet bloc altered the geopolitical calculus, requiring a reconsideration of American foreign policy goals. With no single global enemy, the

US tried to strengthen its hegemonic position by spreading its core values of democracy, free markets, and human rights around the world. President George H.W. Bush's vision of a "new world order," pushing for collective security and global collaboration under American leadership, exemplified this emphasis on spreading democratic ideals. Furthermore, it's believed that George Washington's farewell address is amongst the building blocks of the regulations now known as foreign policies; this was initiated by President Washington's determination to guide American citizens and policymakers towards international agreements, urging them to get rid of their violent prejudices of foreign countries. In 1796, the farewell address also included a call for more neutral policies and advocated for more peaceful relations with foreign countries:

“The nation which indulges toward another a habitual hatred, or a habitual fondness is to some degree a slave.” (George Washington, “Farewell Address,” 1796 the American Yawp Reader)

Besides calling for less hatred and violence between nations, other presidents had higher ambitions for the US to seek control over the Latin American states at the time. So, President James Monroe issued a doctrine in 1823 announcing the need for freedom and proclaiming the Western Hemisphere's right to be saved from the colonisation enforced by European countries, especially that it is under the US's area of interest. Despite the harsh nature of the letter, President Monroe's doctrine played a pivotal role in portraying the US as a powerful entity, capable of asserting influence. This doctrine helped dictate the assessment of American relations for decades after its initiation. (“Monroe Doctrine (1823)”)

Another defining moment in US foreign history is marked by the 6 conditions formulating the Casper Weinberger doctrine in 1983-84. The 6 conditions were framed to enhance the handling of international relations, especially in face of military invasions and war interventions between the US and any other parties. Essentially, Secretary of Defence Casper Weinberger produced an innovative set of strict rules to dictate any American interventions. It has been said that this doctrine is heavily influenced by the acts that took place in Vietnam and Lebanon (wars, weapons' excessive usage, bombings...). Casper Weinberger's doctrine aimed to decrease the USA's participation in wars or conflicts where beneficial objectives aren't explicit enough to deploy mass military powers. Therefore, Weinberger insisted on relying on crucial goals and interests and assessing their advantages before taking a final decision. Based on that, the precise goals would naturally require a full commitment to employing certain American resources on grounds, which should be specifically supported by both the government and the public. In addition, a concrete withdrawal plan should be drawn before engaging in any military acts. And finally, forces, weapons and violence should only be used with prior agreements and decisive movements. Casper Weinberger's doctrine is thought to be one of the more impactful decisions that shaped the US foreign policy as a more considerate and careful strategy to managing any and all international relations. (Scott, 1998)

Aside from focal presidential doctrines, letters and rules, the US's progressive growth can be observed through the years. The USA's participation in the world wars, especially the second one, reflected its capacities as an influential nation. This was

possible due to the expansion of the American territories in 1898 to include areas like the current 50th state Hawaii, the currently independent Puerto Rico, and Philippines to name a few. Additionally, the US's recognizable triumph over the Soviet Union during the Cold War reinforced its presence and crowned the US as one of the more powerful political influences at that time. To put it into perspective, the newly gained control necessitates more precise and developed guidelines to rule over international relations. This is why US foreign policy owes its efficacy to the cumulative US history (Blum, William., 2014).

The post-Cold War economic side of US foreign policy concentrated around promoting free trade and market capitalism. Institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) became key to the American strategy of lobbying for open markets and lowering trade barriers. Furthermore, the United States has pushed economic partnerships and regional trade agreements in order to increase its economic power while furthering its geopolitical interests. NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), for example, was a historic trade agreement signed in 1994 with the goal of stimulating economic growth and unifying North American markets. (Riley, 1999)

Concurrently, the post-Cold War period saw a rebalancing of military plans. The lack of a direct military danger forced the United States to reassess its defence stance.

While preserving military dominance, the emphasis switched from the vast buildup of forces seen during the Cold War to a more nimble and flexible military infrastructure capable of responding to a variety of challenges, including non-state actors and asymmetric warfare. The development of democracy became a stepping stone of US

foreign policy. The assumption that democratic states are more peaceful, and cooperative motivated the United States to promote global democratisation initiatives. Initiatives such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) were formed to strengthen democratic institutions and civil society in many countries, all while supporting stability and increasing American influence. (Ripley, 1997)

The shift from a bipolar world to a unipolar one, with the United States as the unchallenged global power, required a strategic realignment of its foreign policy objectives. As the United States struggled to navigate an increasingly complicated and linked global terrain, the succeeding decades saw a dynamic interplay of diplomatic manoeuvres, economic aspirations, and security imperatives.

Unipolar Moment

The Cold War's end revealed a unique phase in global geopolitics—the "Unipolar Moment"—in which the United States emerged as the undisputed superpower. This period changed international relations, laying the groundwork for strong American operations, and reshaping the global power paradigm. The "Unipolar Moment" signified an unprecedented period of American supremacy in economic, military, cultural, and diplomatic domains. However, the United States' unilateral hegemony sparked criticism and discussion about the ethics and repercussions of unilateral decisions. (Ikenberry, 2011)

Critics cited examples of American unilateralism, particularly in military interventions such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan. The use of armed action to spread

democracy and battle global dangers has drawn significant condemnation for its long-term ramifications. These measures sparked discussions regarding the validity of unilateral approaches and their compatibility with international norms and institutions. During this period, the United States demonstrated its military power by intervening in many regions, including pre-emptive strikes and interventionist measures to achieve strategic goals. Military operations in the Balkans, the Gulf War, and the long-running battles in Afghanistan and Iraq exemplified America's assertiveness in foreign affairs. For instance, Saddam Hussein was labelled “tyrannical” by some resolute Liberals, before deeming his country worthy of invasion. Other politicians disagreed with such choices, chanting the opinion of a public section as well as many thinkers and critics. (Baig, 2023) (Ikenberry, 2011)

The striking example of the criticism induced by certain US foreign policy reinforcements is the 2003 Iraq War, which marked a turning point in this foreign policy. The decision to invade Iraq, reckoning the possibility of mass destruction and the pressing need to abolish prospective threats, gained worldwide attention and widespread condemnation. The decisions were made under the presidency of George W. Bush and held global stability and safety as their primary goal. The fear of Saddam Hussein’s mysterious intentions behind his alleged weapons birthed a moment of global panic, persuading the US to intervene immediately. Nevertheless, the following failure to identify these weapons sparked accusations of deception and disputes over the intervention's legitimacy. The battle in Iraq and the subsequent instability highlighted concerns about the long-term repercussions of such unilateral military action. This emphasised the importance of military strength in shaping international policy and global dynamics. As the unrivalled superpower, the United

States used its military might to propound its influence, preserve tactical interests, and mould global politics, confirming the importance of military capabilities in international affairs. (Danju, 2013) (Baig, 2023)

As the years and politics advanced, American goals shifted their focus and the priority list changed. US foreign policy, for instance, is centred around ensuring security and continuity. Based on this, the US dedicated many of its resources and efforts into maintaining peace and international security. Many treaties and alliances bear witness of these initiatives, particularly the NATO alliance in 1949 which guaranteed collaborative efforts between America and Europe to fight off “external forces” and ensure their internal security and strengthen their bonds. Other alliances include SEATO in the 1950s to assemble the US, France, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, and Pakistan to enhance the region’s security and military defence. Same approach applies to the ANZUS treaty between the US, New Zealand and Australia, the treaty with Japan in the fifties and the VFA between the Philippines and the US. But more recent deals, post-cold war, underscore the US’s influence as a capable solitary entity. For example, START I was one of the newer agreements between the US and Russia, occurring right after the Cold War in 1991-94. To summarise it, START I aimed to reduce nuclear threats and military competitions or tensions between both countries. Furthermore, modifying older treaties like the NATO alliance repetitively occurred to improve international relations and maintain global order. (Radchenko et al., 2020) (“New START Treaty - United States Department of State”)

However, the unfettered use of military power in one-sided actions drew criticism and fuelled arguments about the ethical implications of employing force to achieve political goals. The ethical dimensions of military operations have prompted concerns about the pattern of unilateral policies as part of a broader image encompassing global goals and stability, particularly in the setting of complicated geopolitical environments such as Iraq. While the "Unipolar Moment" exemplified American dominance on multiple fronts, it was also marked by complicated criticism and ethical quandaries. Unilateral American policy, particularly military actions such as the Iraq War, generated deep challenges about the balance to be struck between establishing dominance and sustaining worldwide security and stability, contributing to the developing panorama of global influence and power dynamics. (Bert, 1997) (Baig, 2023)

Against Powerful Competitors

As the unipolar era faded, the international terrain welcomed the return of geopolitical competitors and the creation of new power centres, heralding the arrival of a more multipolar world. This upheaval in the global order posed a clear challenge to the United States' conventional supremacy, necessitating a rethinking of its foreign policy tactics and objectives. (Posen, 2011)

China's rise as an economic hustler and a challenging global competitor posed a serious challenge to American hegemony. China's rapid economic expansion, combined with its assertive foreign policy, has posed a challenge to the US-led system, and added a new angle to global relations. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),

a huge infrastructure initiative expanding over a few continents, reflected China's desire to increase its global economic and geopolitical dominance. (Al-Tamimi et al., 2020) (Grosse et al., 2021)

Furthermore, despite its economic constraints in comparison to China, Russia has emerged as an important player a US interests, particularly in historically significant regions such as Eastern Europe and the MENA region. Russia's assertiveness, particularly its occupation of Crimea and participation in crises such as Syria, heralded a comeback of Russian prominence in global affairs. The rise of these rivals forced a re-evaluation of US foreign policy goals. The emphasis moved from unilateralism and the goal of unrivalled domination to competition management and diplomatic balancing acts. In fact, Russia's limited interventions in the Middle East region was expanded when their position regarding the Syrian war went economically and militarily public in 2015. Following this, Moscow aided the Syrian regime on the ground with various weapons, challenging the American participations and positions. Moreover, Russia aimed to forge strategic relations with many Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, primarily with partnerships on arms trade and energy resources. The latter relied on gas and oil resources as a method of fortifying the Russian economy and ability to compete with the USA's dominance on the energy sector. Other examples of Russia's efforts to build a strong basis in the Middle East include their involvement in Egypt and neighbouring Libya. (Makinde, 2023) (Feinstein et al, 2021)

The need for political alliances and treaties was a significant component of this rebalancing. To counterbalance the influence of rivals, the US tried to reinforce its

existing allies in Europe and Asia while developing new connections with growing nations. Initiatives such as the Quad, a strategic collaboration between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, seek to develop partnerships in the Pacific area in order to offset China's growing influence. The 2007 initiated and 2017 reconsidered collaboration sought to enhance geopolitical efforts between the US and the Indo-Pacific region as a result of China's rapid global expansion. The Quad touched many sectors including economic and financial practices as well as technological advancements and military inventions. (Wei, 2022)

Economically, the United States sought to strengthen its position through trade and transit accords and economic agreements. Although first pushed by the United States, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) attempted to establish a trade bloc to counteract China's economic power in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the Trump administration's exit from the TPP underscored the difficulties in continuing such economic projects. Significant changes occurred in the economic sector of US foreign policy, particularly in trade relationships. While the withdrawal of the TPP revealed the difficulties in maintaining cohesive economic ventures, the United States pursued bilateral trade deals, highlighting just trade practices, and prioritising the US's interests. Furthermore, the Biden administration aimed to rebalance America's economic involvement by encouraging renewed talks on international trade, demonstrating a readiness to re-engage with multinational strategies to counteract China's economic influence in the region. The emphasis has turned to strengthening ties with Indo-Pacific states through economic cooperation, with the goal of increasing market access and economic prosperity. (Gloria and Arugay, 2021) (Palit, 2022)

Finally, the emergence of potent competitors in a multipolar environment demanded a sophisticated and flexible strategy in US foreign policy. Balancing power dynamics, creating alliances and treaties, participating in multilateralism, and capitalising on technical breakthroughs have all become critical strategies for the United States as it navigates this changing global terrain. Considering the emergence of these international relations guidelines and its constant adaptation to the ever-changing circumstances, the United States' foreign policy remains a fascinating yet complex diplomatic concept. Due to its purpose of reigning the way the US behaves with other countries to preserve its image and boost its benefits, the US foreign policy is altered and modified to adapt to global political, economic, and military evolutions. The establishment of US foreign policy was actually an accumulation of years and years of political decisions and opposing ideologies. The essence of them relied on sustaining US dominance over all markets and aspects of international affairs. (Makinde, 2023)

The fundamental aspect of security, stacked on top of the desire for control, dominance and continuous gains have urged treaties and alliances like the ones previously mentioned. They also called for military expansion, weaponry development and arms trade. These can be carried to resolve conflicts in some areas but have been assimilated as a contributing factor in the actuation of conflicts and even wars in other areas. When we discuss the impact of the US dominance and policies on political instability and the susceptibility to violence, the Middle East is the first region that comes to mind, given the historical facts and ongoing issues.

History and War in The Middle East

War in the Middle East is a devastatingly recurrent catastrophe that seems to hit distinctive sections of the region at different times, reflecting a state of continuous political pressure, conflicts and regional tensions. On one hand, violence in the region is due, in part, to internal issues such as unstable states and incompetent regimes. On the other hand, western forces focused on waging a war in the Middle East since conflicts in that region aligned with the US political goals. The first impact can be traced back to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire which, at one time in history, had an iron fist clutch on the Middle East and the surrounding areas. Following the defeat of the Central Powers (Germany, The Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria) against the Allies (The US, France, The UK, Russia, Italy and Japan) on the 11th of November 1918, the Ottoman Empire suffered great losses. Ultimately, this resulted in the deterioration of Turkish control over its colonised lands, namely the segregated sections of the Middle East like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and significant areas of Saudi Arabia. (Fieldhouse, 2008)

The post-World War I peace conferences created mandates over regions previously ruled by the Ottoman Empire, based on the core notions described in the Sykes-Picot agreement and later supported by the Balfour Declaration. Following the Empire's demise, these conquered areas devolved into disorder, necessitating protection, help, and administrative organisation. As a result, discussions for the Sykes-Picot Agreement began in early 1915 and were completed in May 1916. This agreement,

mediated by Mark Sykes for the British and François Georges-Picot for the French, defined the boundaries of former Ottoman lands. As a result, various zones of influence emerged: France took control of Lebanon, Mosul in Northern Iraq, and major Syrian cities, while Britain took control of Baghdad and South Syria (regions currently outlining Syria's and Jordan's borders). However, Palestine was reserved for "international administration" but was not assigned to any delegation (Loevy, 2016).

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, on the other hand, drastically transformed this landscape. It was issued by the British government and called for the formation of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, which was then ruled by the Ottomans. This proclamation had a tremendous impact on the region, planting seeds of resentment among Arab communities who saw it as a betrayal of pledges made during World War I about Arab nations' self-determination. Since Israel's formation as a state, disputes have erupted between the various parties, resulting in wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 (Loevy, 2016).

The United States played a significant role in funding Israel in its early wars in several of its advances like those during 1948, 1967 and others. Western countries also played different, and sometimes even contrasting roles in the Israeli conflicts with other Middle Eastern countries. The US support stemmed from multiple factors, including shared democratic values, domestic political considerations, and strategic interest in the Middle East. During the 1948 Arab Israeli War, the US did not provide direct military support to Israel. However, it did play a role by recognizing the newly established state shortly after its declaration of independence. Additionally, private donations from American Jews and various fundraising efforts contributed to Israel's

war effort. By the 1960s the US started providing significant military aid to Israel. This support increased after the 1967 Six-Day war, where Israel was able to establish its position in the Middle East. The US saw Israel as a key ally and began providing considerable economic and military assistance. Over time, US assistance to Israel has included various forms of aid, including financial support, advanced weaponry, and military technology. This aid has been a key part of the US-Israel relationship (Britannica, 2023).

On the 6th of October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israeli lands in retaliation to the occupation. This attack was scheduled on the Jewish holy day Yom Kippur, which happened to occur during the holy Muslim month Ramadan. The interesting aspect of this war is its suddenly enlarged influence on the US's involvement in the Middle East conflicts. In fact, this war highlighted the United States competitive approach against the Soviet Union's advances since both sides rushed to help their allies. Israel naturally turned to the US for help once the Syrian and Egyptian violent attacks started to weigh heavily on their military forces. Initially, the US was hesitant in providing the much-needed Israeli support, but this rapidly changed once the Soviet Union announced its military assistance to both Egypt and Syria. The US hurried to supply Israel with weapons, arms, machines, and armed military planes. This financially immense aid provided by the US is one of if not the most important factor that tipped the scale to the Israeli Defence Forces (Britannica, 2023).

In 1982, the Israeli forces conducted a strategic invasion of Lebanese lands for what was supposed to be a "swift operation" only to turn into a three-year long war. This

counts as Israel's longest and toughest war against Middle Eastern countries. The US's military and financial support to Israel during that time was critical to its increasing power. Nevertheless, it was not the only form of American support that was unconditionally offered to Israel; the representation of the Israeli governmental decisions through the eyes and speeches of US politicians and influential figures established a certain power gradient in the area. These factors prolonged the duration of this war as they constantly supplied Israel with the power and diplomatic cover to continue carrying out its military invasion. Similar events were observed during the 2006 war between Israel and its neighbouring Lebanon once again. (Cochran, 2016) (Darwich, 2019)

Other examples of the constant US spirits' presence on Middle Eastern grounds through their arms would be the 1980 to 1988 war between Iran and Iraq, the 2003-2011 US invasion of Iraq based on the possible creation of Iraqi nuclear weapons, the ongoing Syrian Civil War dating back to 2011 and the ongoing war in Yemen which started back in 2014. (Britannica, 2023)

Heads: The Foreign and American View

Economic Motive

After World War I, countries and nations raced to own more advanced arms, more trained troops, and more capable weapons. Clearly, when demand on a certain merchandise increases tremendously, the prices rise with it, offering phenomenal

advantages to sellers. The gradual economic growth of arm sales and weapons' exports is prevalent across the globe with a worldwide increase in arm transfers. In fact, this economic relation increased from 9.4 billion US dollars to 19.1 billion US dollars between 1969 and 1978. The US contributes largely to this surge in arm trades, especially with its rise to dominance after the dissociation of the Soviet Union. Between 1950 and 1979, the US was responsible for a colossal percentage of the global arm sales, bringing in more than 110 billion US dollars in military sales, weapons' exports, and arms trade. During this era, the US's military support was distributed amongst its allies and spent to fund peace treaties and agreements, especially in the Middle East region. This is evident in the case of the 1979 peace agreement where the US began the settlements between Egypt and Israel with a 4.5 billion USD deal, all of which were in forms of sales and loans, military weapons, arms, tanks, aircrafts and more. The financial and military deal did not stop there, the US had promised yearly military funds of approximately 1.5 billion USD to Egypt and other regional countries to alleviate regional tensions. (Klare, 1984) (Pierre, 1982)

In the 1970s, the US reigned over military funds and exports, which became more noticeable and needed to keep international and regional conflicts at bay. Another example of this would be President Carter's 1978 decision to supply the Middle East with modern jet fighters, 200 of them to be precise. This sale included 15 F-15, 75 F-16s, 60 F-15 sent over to Saudi Arabia and 50 F-5ES to Egypt. (Klare, 1984).

To understand the economic revenue of this arms trade, we need to look at the estimated price list of the items:

- An F-16V Block 70/72 might 63 million US Dollars x 75 = 4,725,000,000 \$
(Neumann, 2023)
- An F-16C/D Block 50/52/52+ might cost 34 million US Dollars x 75 =
2,550,000,000 \$ (Neumann, 2023)
- An F-15 might cost anywhere between 70 to 95 million US Dollars x 60 =
4,200,000,00 to 5,700,000,000 \$ (Decker, 2023)
- An F-5ES might cost is around 117 million US dollars x 50 = 8,850,000,000
(Venckunas and Venckunas, 2023)

Cumulatively, this sale alone can guarantee a total of 22.185 billion US dollars. This is an evident proof of how international arms trade is significantly impactful for governments, namely countries capable of dominating markets and keeping up with the augmented demands. The US is a prime example of benefiting from resources and finances to fund a sector that is constantly high in demand, and partaking in the increased need for weapons by either supporting conflicts or edging countries only adds to the military and economic value of these trades.

Global Arms Trade

As we progress with political decisions, technological revolutions and nations' greed in acquiring bigger and more influential global roles, there seems to be an increase in the global interest in producing weapons locally and selling them rather than just buying them. Between the years of 2017 and 2022, and with increasing concerns about potential conflicts and possible wars in several corners of the world, the domain of worldwide arm sales witnessed an unimaginable success. As represented in the

graph below, the lowest arm net sale took place in the second quarter of 2017 with 252 million dollars. This net sale increased sharply in the 3rd quarter of 2017 to hit 520 million dollars in net sales. The net sales barely fluctuated, staying in this range until the 1st quarter of 2021 when it rose to 675 million dollars. The escalation continued until we reached a total and global arms net sales of 745 million dollars in the third quarter of 2022.

(“Arm Limited Net Sales Worldwide 2017-2022. By Quarter”)

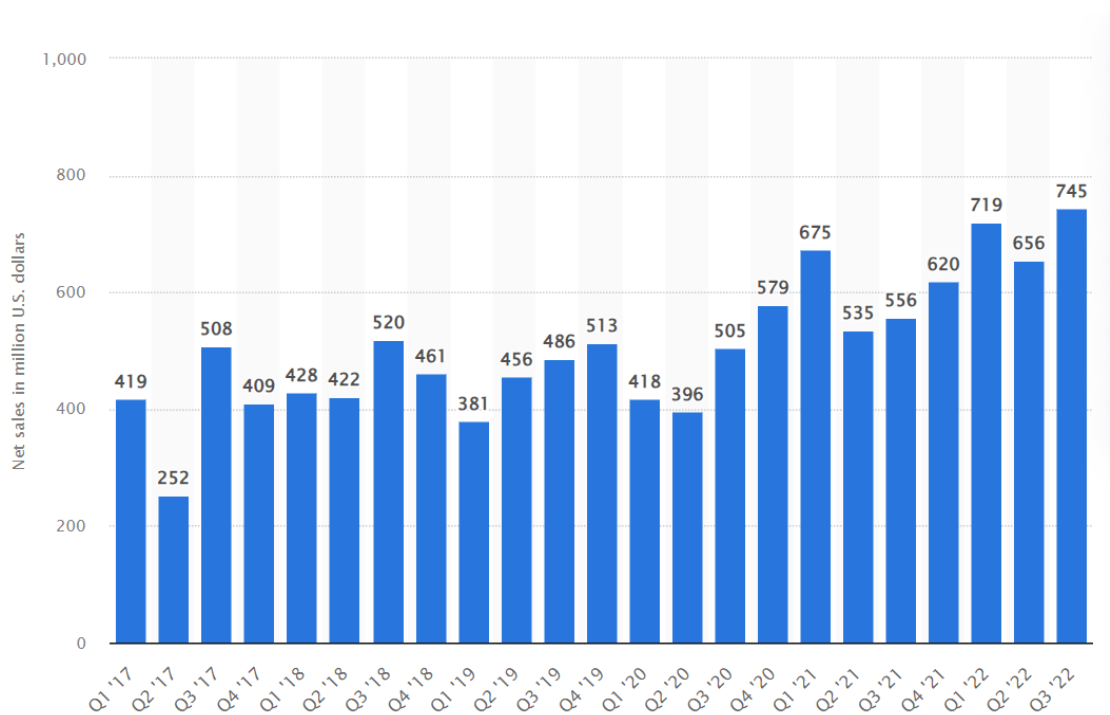


Figure representing the increase in arms net sales globally between 2017 and 2022.

(“Arm Limited Net Sales Worldwide 2017-2022. By Quarter”)

US Arms Trade

The US has been entangled with numerous military agreements and arms trade deals with several countries across the globe. As stated above, the US military forces have only been growing in impact and value as the US gains more power. In fact, the “US foreign military sales agreements” can be visualised in the graph below, this elucidates the positive curve of the American military trades and gained potentials. For instance, the US started from a low 16 billion USD worth of constant agreements (as of 2019) in 2000. This progressively augmented to stabilise at close numbers, slightly shy from 20 billion USD between 2001 and 2004. However, the Foreign Military Sales or FMS agreements took a hit in 2005 and almost reached the 10 billion USD bottom. Soon after, the expected growth continued to reach an all-time high in 2012 with over 70 billion USD, decreasing to 25 billion USD in 2013 and then increasing again barely touching the 50 billion USD mark. The fluctuations in the FMS values went on to finally record 50 billion USD in 2020. (“CAAT - US Arms Exports”)

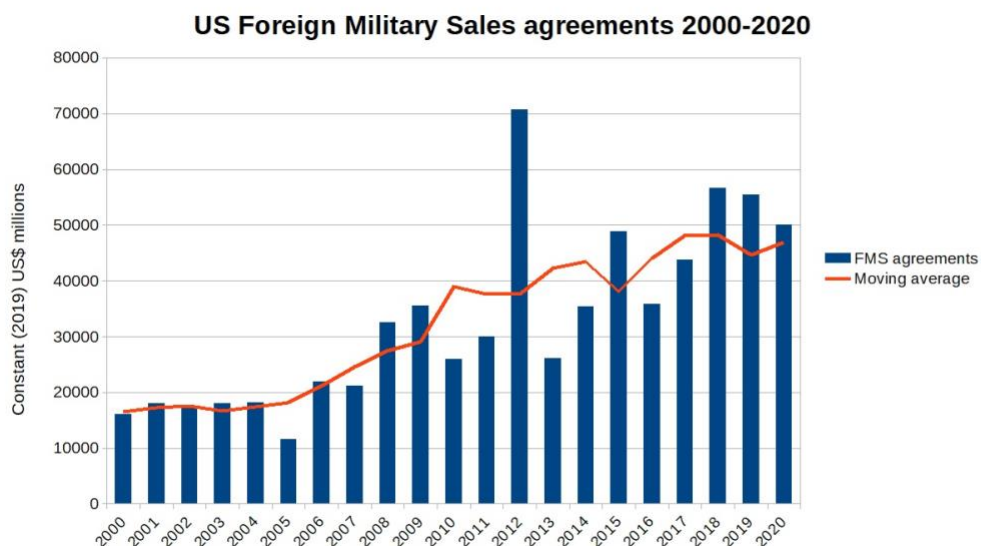


Figure representing the US foreign military agreements between 2000 and 2020 in millions USD. (“CAAT - US Arms Exports”)

These arm trades and sales are not necessarily equally divided amongst the countries, with various factors affecting the distribution of these military funds and resources.

According to SIPRI data, between 2016 and 2020, 46.7% of US exports were dedicated to the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia being the US’s largest Middle Eastern consumer by far. 26.9% were to the Asia Pacific Region, 16% to Europe and Central Asia, 5.4% to South Asia, 2.7% to Africa, and 2.6% to other American countries.

US arms exports by region 2016-20
SIPRI data on transfers of major conventional weapons

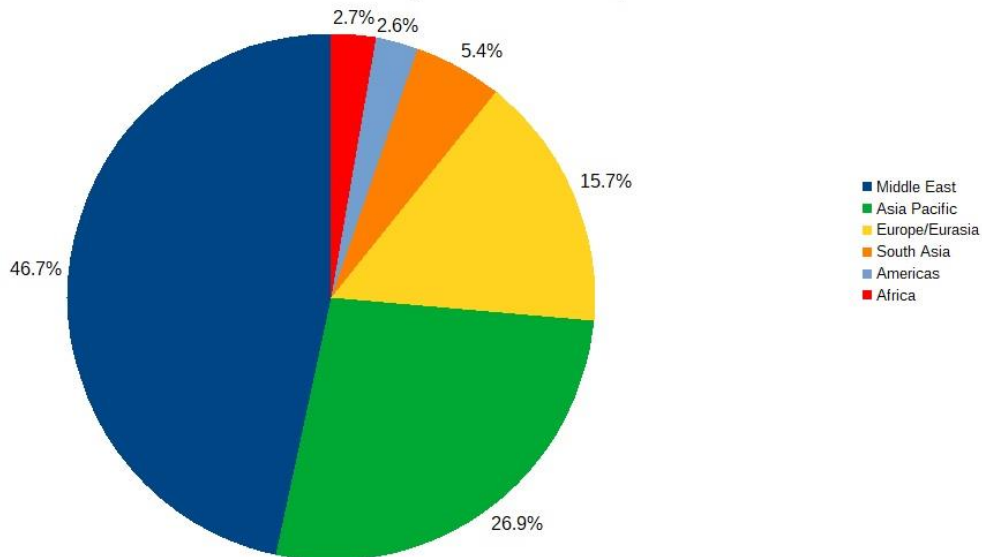


Figure representing the distribution of US arms trade according to regions between 2016 and 2020.

The Middle East has been receiving the US’s intensive focus as it’s crowned the biggest receptor of the US’s military resources and arms trade. However, even in this region, the numbers greatly vary between its countries, with a believed reliance on mutual interests and possible benefits from each nation. The data from 2019 show that Saudi Arabia obtains the largest portion of the US arms with a total of 3.1 billion weapons. The number seems even more staggering when comparing it with the total of arms pumped into the Middle East that year, equalling a bit over 4.9 billion weapons. This is a part of the financial terms, detailing the US agreement to offer nearly 37 billion USD worth of FMS arms sales to Saudi Arabia between 2016-20. (“Middle East: U.S. Weapon Sales Volume by Country 2019 | Statista”) (“CAAT - US Arms Exports”)

The remaining 1.8 billion weapons were distributed to other Middle Eastern countries like Qatar, ranking second with a total of 531 million weapons in 2019, followed by Israel with 482 million weapons and the UAE with 383 million weapons. The 5th rank is assimilated to Turkey, although considering it as part of the Middle East is ambiguous. The rest of the countries present in the graph have received a minimal number of arms from the US in 2019 with Lebanon owning 60 million, Egypt 48 million, Morocco 26 million, Jordan 25 million etc. (“Middle East: U.S. Weapon Sales Volume by Country 2019 | Statista”)

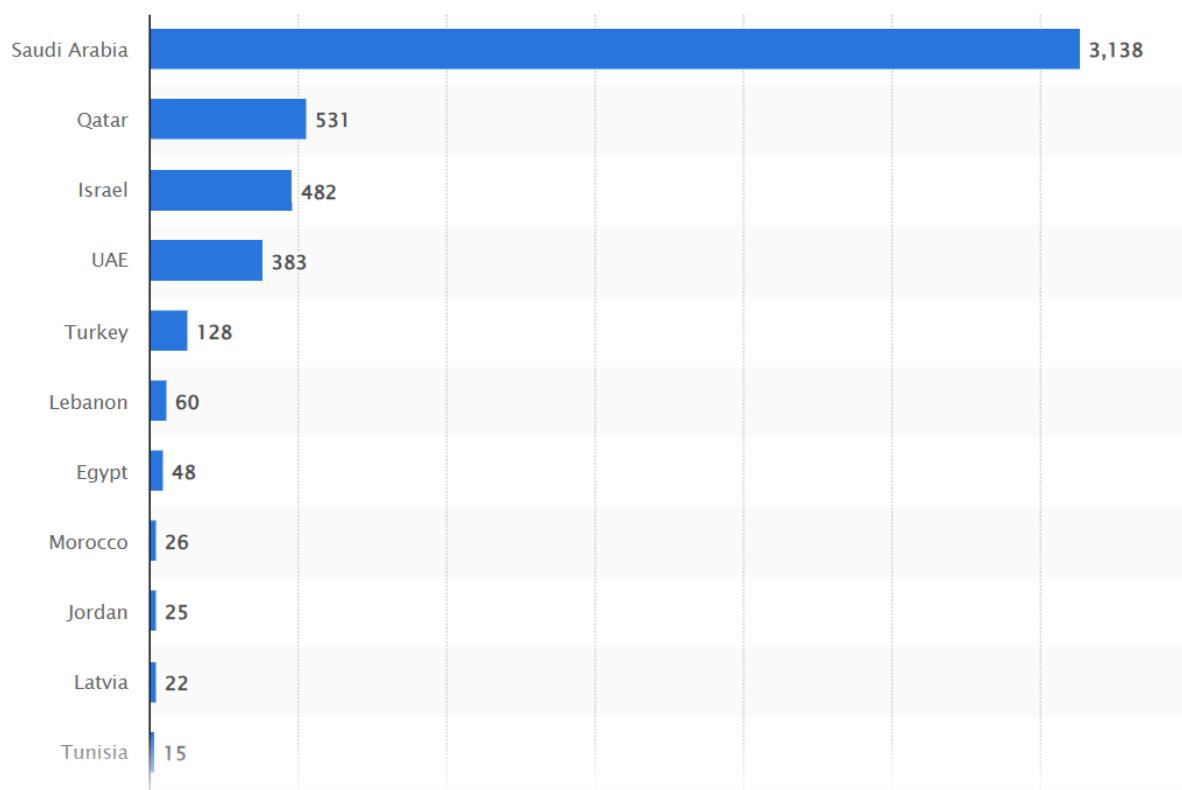


Figure representing the distribution of US weaponry trade in the Middle East in millions in 2019. (“Middle East: U.S. Weapon Sales Volume by Country 2019 | Statista”)

Arms Trade Competitors

Russia

Amongst the countries who exert respectable efforts to compete over arm trades to smaller third world countries, Russia stands out. If we were to rank the countries in terms of their contribution to arm sales and military achievements, Russia would come second, following suit after the US. This was unmistakably proven recently, between 2012 and 2016 Russia witnessed a rise in its international arm sales, this crowned Russia as the second biggest exporter of weapons amounting to 23% of global military sales while the US amounted for 33%. The rest of the European countries and China trailed behind Russia, with major gaps of almost 17%. Despite the common belief that Russia only grew in power and influence, the last 10 years presented political challenges to the countries, hindering its ability to contribute to international situations, decisions and chief military control. 2013 was one of Russia's more significant years where it sold military equipment for a total of 15.7 billion US dollars. However, this amount stabilised over the years to average 15 billion US dollars for yearly arm exports. (Malmlöf, 2017)

In 2012 to 2016, Russia was still responsible for various counts of arm exports and trades as it sold its machinery to 38 countries. Amongst these 38 countries, approximately 75% of the total sales went to India, Vietnam, China, Algeria and Venezuela in respective order of most to least sales. India was at the very lead with 38% out of the 75% of total sales, meaning that India received 28.5% of all Russian military exports during that time. Russia's arms trade seems to rely heavily on aircrafts and fighter jets as they constitute around 40% of all Russian arm sales. The

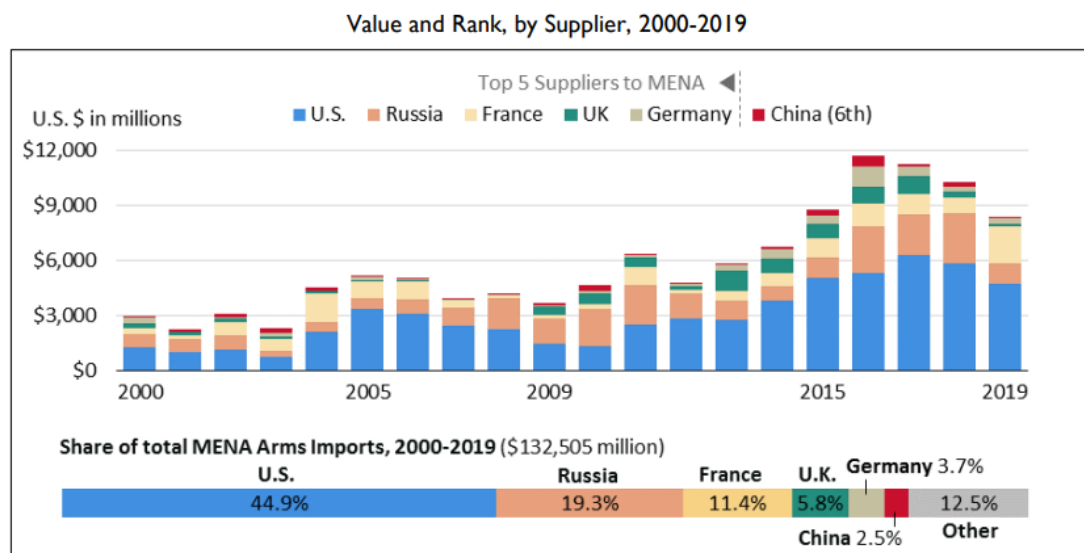
most fruitful exchanges included sales of the strong fighter aircrafts belonging to the SU-27 jet family like Su-30/MK/MKL and Su-35 that later emerged in 2015.

Additionally, Russia was known for its helicopters used in wars and sold for military purposes like Mi-28N, Mi-24/35 and Ka-52. Over the past few years, Russia's exports shifted slightly with a 7% fluctuation in air defence machines and jets, much lower than its highest record of 14% in 2013. The contract portfolio is another example of the reduced Russian contributions to global arm sales since they dropped in 2016 to 50 billion US dollars from their 56 billion US dollars peak not even a year prior.

(Malmlöf, 2017)

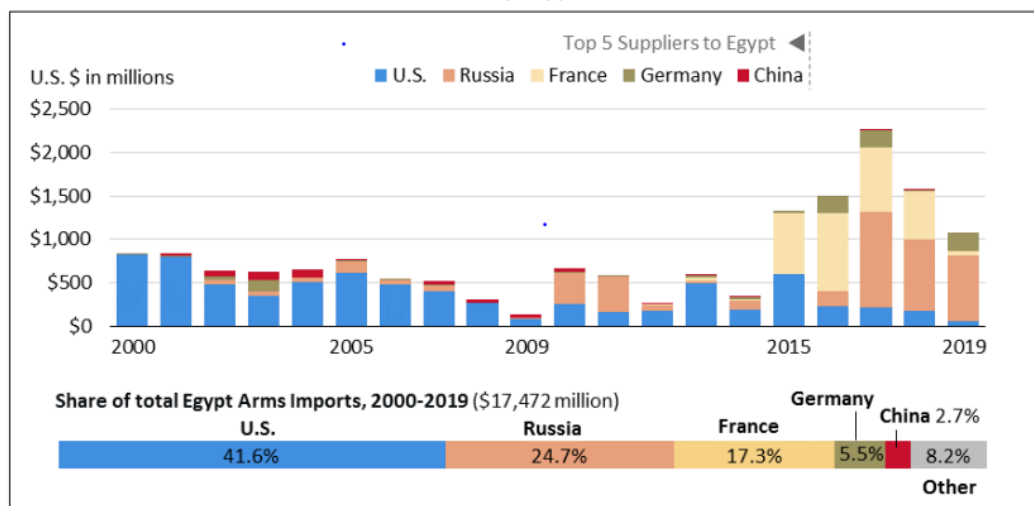
When compared to the US arm sales, Russia always comes second, whether that is in quantity, demands, sales, quality or reputation. This prompts both countries to enhance their readiness to always compete and their expectations of improved versions of their own military creations at the hands of their competitors. This has helped the birth of many alliances between both parties and other countries to demonstrate the potency, efficacy and reliability of their weapons and affiliated political support. Countless records of treaties, agreements, military funds and political liaisons have been initiated by either side, efforts aimed at tugging worldwide military dominance closer to their homes. An evident example of such intrusions would include the Syrian Civil war which started back in 2011 and the constant military fights between the US and Russia not only to gain control over the area, but to display their distinctive weaponry powers. This fight is continuously relocating and obtaining more lands as battlefields, and the Middle East is proving as a compatible candidate to carry out the military competition. As seen below, the US has always been in control of almost half of the arms supply in the MENA region

between 2000 to 2019. Russia comes right after it with less than half the contribution of 19.3%. Other countries who are honourable participants in the race are France with 11.4% contribution to the weapon sales in the Middle East region, UK with 5.8%, Germany with 3.7% and China with 2.5% all between 2000 and 2019. (“Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy”)



The Egyptian case displays the heated competition between Russia and the US in terms of arm sales. It is important to know that Egypt’s strategic position, military forces, geopolitical features, and ideologies ranks it as the world’s third biggest importer of weapons. In the 1970s and the few decades after it, Egypt was one of the US’s largest importers, constituting a profitable military market for the American vendors. The interconnected relation stabilised over a notable duration before tensing up in 2013 because of the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi overthrowing the government at the time. Thus, Egypt looked for war and defence machines elsewhere. Still, the American weapons constituted around half of the Egyptian military imports

between 2010 and 2014, and as expected, this dropped to 15% between 2015 and 2019. This is due to the Russian participation, amounting for 34% of the Egyptian arm trade. France also helped fill the gap (35%) left by the Egyptian American conflict of interests. (“Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy”)



China

The Middle East's geopolitical environment has shifted significantly in recent years, as China has progressively emerged as a major actor in the region. Western nations' supremacy is being challenged by China's systemic involvement, a substantial break from historical standards. China's growing influence in the Middle East is based on a strategic mix of economic investments, political manoeuvring, and energy alliances. China, the world's second-largest economy, has moved to guarantee its energy

interests by building broad ties with Middle Eastern governments. (Grosse et al., 2021)

For instance, the aforementioned Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure development project, has not only boosted economic growth in participating Middle Eastern countries, but it has also highlighted China's position as a key factor in defining the region's future.

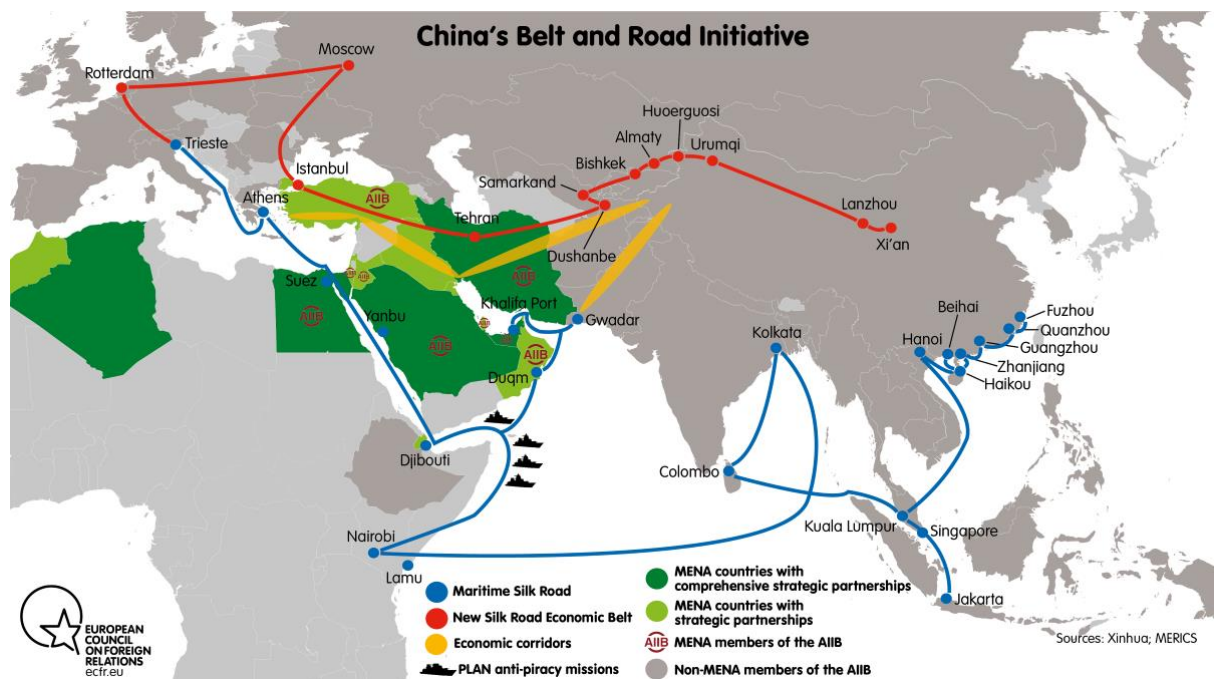


Figure representing China's Belt and Road Initiative and its connections across the globe (Al-Tamimi et al., 2020)

As seen in the map above, the MENA region has been intensively included in China's attempt to glorify its economy and grow its influence in various international aspects. This initiative, however, was strictly neutral and aimed to connect China to a number of resourceful poles in various sectors. The primary goal was to boost the Chinese economy by creating alliances and deals with powerful entities, purely based on

investments and economic or monetary interests. The carefully positioned neutrality soon perished as tensions in many regions grew, notably in the MENA section. It's been theorised that China will struggle immensely to maintain a strict economic approach to its Middle Eastern relations, especially due to security and safety measures. Geopolitical stability has been linked to China's efforts, although not explicitly, it has been discussed that China's economic involvement in the Middle East ought to drag it into a more politically torn position. (Al-Tamimi et al., 2020)

It is crucial to note that China's involvement in worldwide arms exports and trade is an expanding phenomenon with contributonal percentages varying on a yearly basis. For instance, the below graph demonstrates a reputable contribution of China in the global arms exports' scenery as it amounted for 6.2% of all sold weapons between 2012 and 2016. (Loesche, 2017)

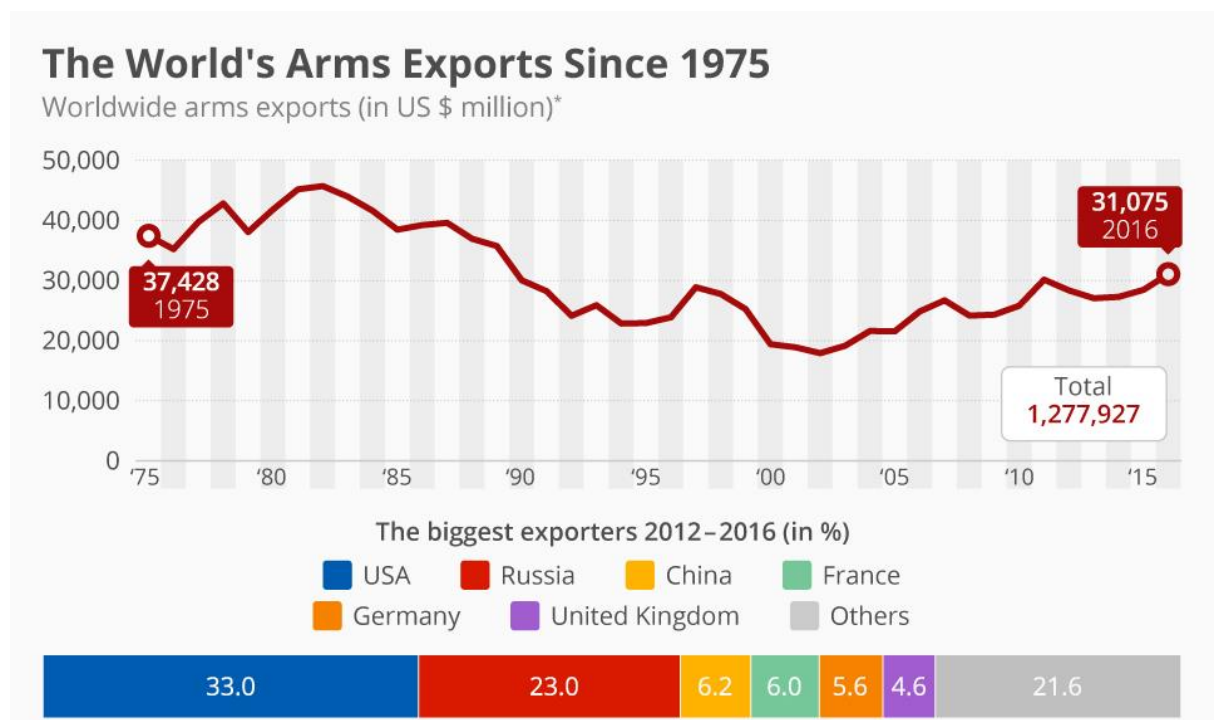


Figure representing the distribution of the biggest global arms' exporters between 2012 and 2016. (Loesche, 2017)

This percentage remained quite stable over the following years to hit a slightly lower 5.2% when comparing the 2012-2016 numbers to those of 2018-2022. Evidently, these numbers remain greatly overpowered by both the Russian and American arms trade with 10.8% and 34.8% gaps respectively. Additionally, China's rank dropped to tag behind France with less than a 5% difference. This is a remarkable change between the previous statistics, where France ranked 4th with a small 0.2% gap between it and China between 2012 and 2016. ("Share of Weapon Exports by Country Worldwide 2022 | Statista")

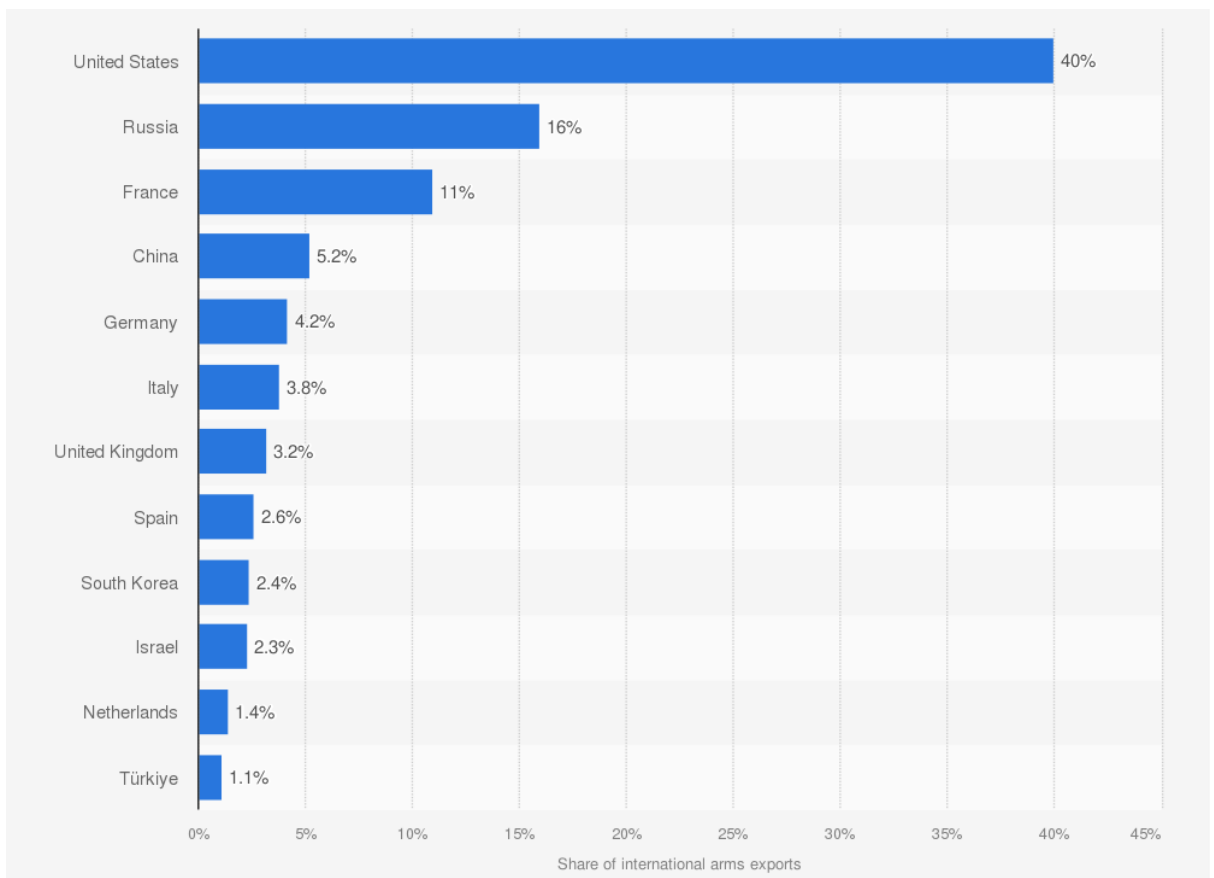
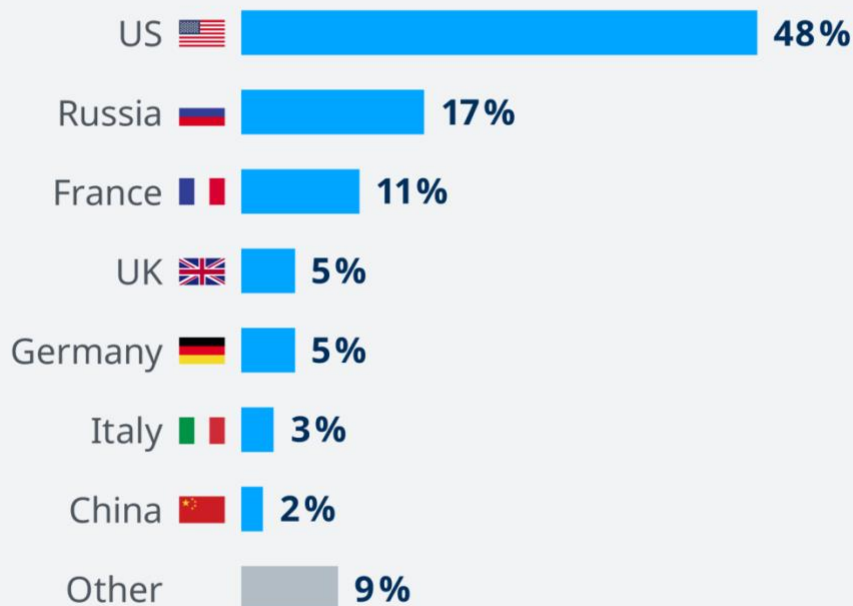


Figure representing the distribution of the biggest global arms' exporters between 2018 and 2022. ("Share of Weapon Exports by Country Worldwide 2022 | Statista")

As for the specific arms trade to the Middle East, China is amongst the top suppliers, but with a smaller percentage than in other countries. For instance, China only amounted to 2% of the arms supplied to the MENA region between 2015 and 2019, a tinier contribution than its competitors'. For example, the US supplied the region with almost half of all received weapons and arms between 2015 and 2019. These data place China as the 7th biggest arms supplier to the MENA region. ("Western Arms Exports Fuel Conflict in Middle East, 2020")

Top arms suppliers to Middle East and North Africa



Source: The Mideast Arms Bazaar report (2015 - 2019), Center for International Policy; SIPRI.



Figure representing the distribution of the biggest global arms suppliers to the MENA region between 2015 and 2019. (“Western Arms Exports Fuel Conflict in Middle East, 2020”)

Tail: The Middle Eastern View

Security in the Middle East

The United States uses its military dominance to trade arms for control and resources only present in certain regions across the world. In return, the US provides the countries with the necessary arms, weapons, war machines and troops to carry out its governmental duties of enhancing national security and procuring defence mechanisms to fight off any spontaneously driven threats. The Middle Eastern hopes from arms trade and their accompanying treaties and alliances with the US are all directed towards establishing national and regional security. Whether that is through acquiring the right material and military power to fight off any aggressions like terrorist attacks or political regional tensions, US-Arab military agreements have always aspired to provide a solid basis for safety and security. Ultimately, the gained advanced technologies, military planning skills, training programs and heavy machinery are invested into creating stronger and more capable military lines for Arab countries. (Spindel, 2023)

On the regional level, the more significant influence of the US and its arms trades on guaranteeing peaceful lives amongst countries in the Middle East is its active contribution to the Israeli-Arab relations. Before these alliances were solidified, the US aid was primarily sent out to Israel to portray its strengths in wars against Arab

countries. But ever since they signed peace treaties, the US has been attempting to disseminate its own advanced technologies in almost all MENA countries' military bases. In 1979 for instance, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty, facilitated by the US and other countries, which softened the geopolitical relations between Egypt and the US. American policymakers decided to fund Egyptian military forces with continuous arm trades in order to maintain a somewhat peaceful environment in the region. While this peace treaty worked wonders in getting the two enemies to stop bombing and attacking each other, the civilised and mutual relation between them was actually built due to their cumulative efforts to fight terrorism in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. ("Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy", 8)

Furthermore, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, while the conditions of this settlement did not exactly indicate a sore in the US arm imports to Jordan, it still allowed for smoother transactions. In 1996, the Jordanian army acquired 1 squadron of F-16s alongside other smaller military weapons. Based on such agreements, the US offered Jordan a designation as "a major non-NATO ally" in 1996-1997. To prove the efficacy of this treaty and the dedication to maintain it, the State Department was quick to announce this by declaring: "this new designation recognizes Jordan's continued support for peace and underscores the strong relationship that is growing between Jordan and the United States. And you can trace it back, I think, to 1994 when President Clinton expressed his determination to support the courageous stand that King Hussein took in advancing the peace process." ("Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy",

8) ("Full Text of the Treaty of Peace Between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as Approved by the Knesset, October 25, 1994", 123)

A more recent example of the regional security establishment through US-facilitated agreements between MENA countries and Israel is the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, although to a lesser extent than its cousins. In order to sign the peacekeeping treaty Israel declared the importance of the UAE inclination to allow US arm trade on its lands. This trade included heavy war machines and most importantly, a respectable number of F-35 Joint Strike. This was later confirmed by Trump's office and the US Congress when they announced their intentions to sell over 50 F-35s to the UAE. ("Two Years on, What Is the State of the Abraham Accords?") ("The Abraham Accords - United States Department of State")

Leverage and Political Importance

The strategic relationship in the arms trade between the United States and Middle Eastern countries has far-reaching consequences that go beyond ordinary transactions. When Middle Eastern countries purchase advanced weaponry from the US, they are gaining power and influence on numerous fronts. For starters, these countries will have a bigger say in global affairs. Having cutting-edge military technology provides them negotiation power when it comes to international treaties or forging alliances. This effect extends to regional conflicts and discussions, allowing them to have a substantial impact on the geopolitical landscape. These armament purchases create a distinct economic dynamic. The Middle East's significant investment in American arms not only benefits the US defence sector, but it also fosters a sense of

interdependence. The region's role as a key buyer influences the kind of weapons produced and exported by the US. This purchasing power gives them negotiating clout and allows them to adapt deals to their benefit. Furthermore, purchasing modern military systems improves their security infrastructure. As a result, they have a stronger position in regional security debates and serve as a deterrence to external threats. The existence of superior military systems enables these countries to preserve regional stability and establish their foreign policies with more confidence. (Spindel, 2023)

Politically, access to superior military equipment implies that these countries may actively participate in peacekeeping and conflict resolution operations. Their capacity to meaningfully contribute to regional peace initiatives raises their worldwide reputation and solidifies their influence in regional politics. In essence, the arms trade between the United States and the Middle East involves far more than just guns. It's a strategic dance in which both parties benefit. Gaining leverage - the ability to impact global diplomacy, the economy, security debates, and regional politics - is important for Middle Eastern governments. These arms purchases serve more than simply immediate defensive demands; they also act as tools for securing their interests and maintaining a prominent position on the global scene. On top of that, the US uses its political dominance to officially announce its support for Middle Eastern countries as well as their interest in maintaining smooth diplomatic relations. This further fortifies these countries' stances and their ability to influence international affairs. (Spindel, 2023 398) (Byman and Mollar, 2016 5)

The chief focus for such exchanges between the Middle East and the US has been Saudi Arabia for a while now, which has benefited from the mutually advantageous deals, for leverage, security, and financial reasons.

US Arms Trade to Saudi Arabia

The U.S.A is famous for its dominant presence in the political landscape, possessing simultaneously the biggest military and economic power of all. This power was in fact acquired slowly, and through a series of progressively growing trades, America became home to one of the, if not the, biggest arm trades entity in the world. This power soon reached the Middle East and North African Region (MENA) and exploited their political regimes and resources in the name of offering military support. Some trades were even labelled self-defence and conducted as attempts to maintain peace and serenity so it wouldn't affect the U.S citizens, policies and interests. In fact, President Clinton at the time, in his first year in office, executed an enormous arms sale trade of around 28\$ billion in military weapons and tools all sent to the Middle East and East Asia. (Hartrung, W.D., 2008, 139) Soon after, many similar trades took place between the U.S and MENA region, proving the importance of this region to the U.S military and economic interests.

It is well known that the Middle Eastern region is a valuable economic ally as some of its countries possess an incomparable wealth, making it one of the U. S's most significant arms and weapons recipients. Some Middle East nations, namely those present in the Gulf area, have been preoccupied with mass purchases of American arms, because of defence concerns and national security reasons. Their wealth and financial capacities allowed them to acquire a remarkable number of weapons. For

instance, the Middle Eastern total military burden reached a peak of 6.3% of the gross domestic income (GDP) in 2001, which is over double the percentage of the second highest region with 3% for North America. This military spending has been mostly directed to American revenues due to several political and economic agreements, and definitely influenced by the U. S's history and top-rated weapons. (Smyth, R., & Kumar Narayan, P., 2009)

With steady growth and with the reliance on passed down wealth, Saudi Arabia became one of the largest U.S arms recipients after signing arms deal with the United States a few years ago. The deal signed in May of 2017 confirmed the purchase of 110 billion dollars' worth of weapons to be shipped to Saudi Arabia, this included tanks, ships, radar systems, missile systems and more large-scale weapons. The military and economic relationship between these two countries only grew in the following years due to the increasing political tension in the region, including but not limited to Palestinian-Israeli conflicts and continuous tensions, as well as the deteriorating relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, amongst other countries too. In 2021 for instance, the U.S exported over 600 million dollars' worth of arms and weapons to Saudi Arabia, this accumulated with previous U.S exports to this country constituted around 14% of general U.S military transport globally. ("U.S. Trade with Saudi Arabia," 2021)

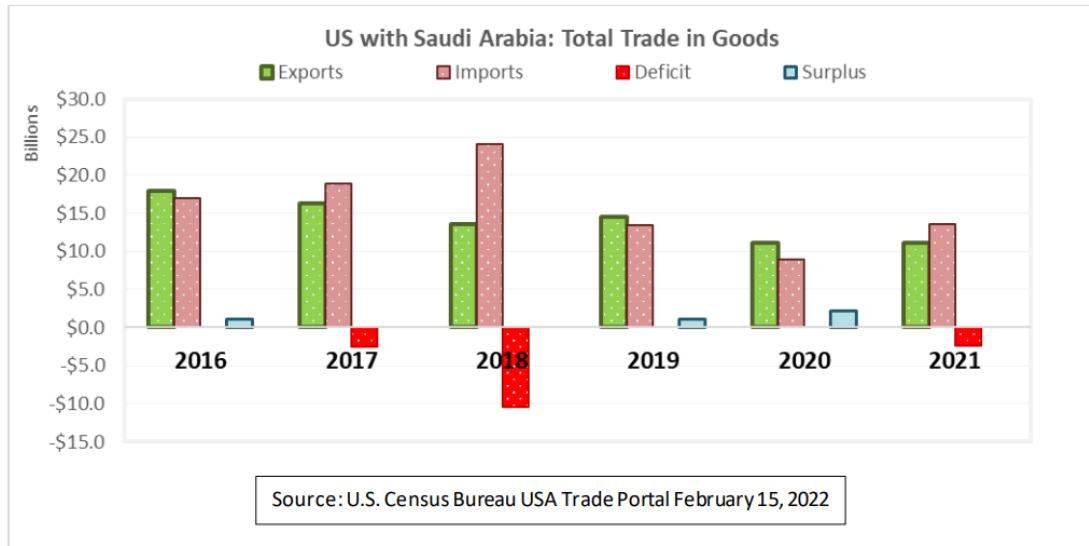


Figure representing the distribution of the total trades between the US and Saudi Arabia between 2016 and 2021. (“U.S. Trade with Saudi Arabia,” 2021)

This export-import relation between the US and Saudi Arabia dates back tens of years with a powerful offset in the 1960s. Initially, the first Saudi purchase of US trades included Lightning and Strikemaster aircrafts from the line of British Aircraft Corporation. In 1985, heavier American weaponries were sent to Saudi Arabia in the form of Peace Shield, an air defence force with ground bases. These arms included the Airborne Warning and Command System (AWACS) (Vittori, 2019, 29).

Over time, the Gulf region and especially Saudi Arabia has become more financially, economically and militarily valuable to the U.S as their shared interests and political bonds solidified. From the graph above we can see a mutual economic relationship, the U.S is interested in the wealth and resources of Saudi Arabia which mainly consist of the much-needed oil and petrol, while Saudi Arabia benefits the most from the military stock shipped by the U.S. The U. S’s exports to Saudi Arabia have not fallen below 10 billion dollars since 2016, a hard proof demonstrating the ever-increasing

interest in one of the richest countries in the MENA region. Actually, in 2021 alone, the U.S sent 1.63 billion dollars' worth of "PLANES, HELICOPTERS, AND/OR SPACECRAFT", and in return, Saudi Arabia sent around 7.76 billion dollars' worth of "CRUDE PETROLEUM" or 2,29 billion dollars' worth of refined high quality petrol. These numbers bear witness to the expanding economic and resourceful importance of Saudi Arabia in the U.S as their imports from Saudi Arabia increased by an annual 1.88% since 1995 (7.39 billion Dollars) and up until 2021 (12.9 billion Dollars). This is mutual as the exports from the U.S to Saudi Arabian lands have also increased, with a slightly higher rate of 2.55% annual growth, from 1995 (6.03 billion Dollars) up until 2021 (11.6 billion Dollars). In July 2023, these trades persisted where the U.S sent many "TANKS AND ARMOURED VEHICLES" with a worth piling up to 42,3 million dollars and "PARTS OF SPACECRAFTS AND AIRCRAFTS" reaching as much as 35 million dollars. (*United States (USA) and Saudi Arabia (SAU) Trade | OEC, 2023*)

The growth in value of the exports from the US to Saudi Arabia can also be seen in the following graph:

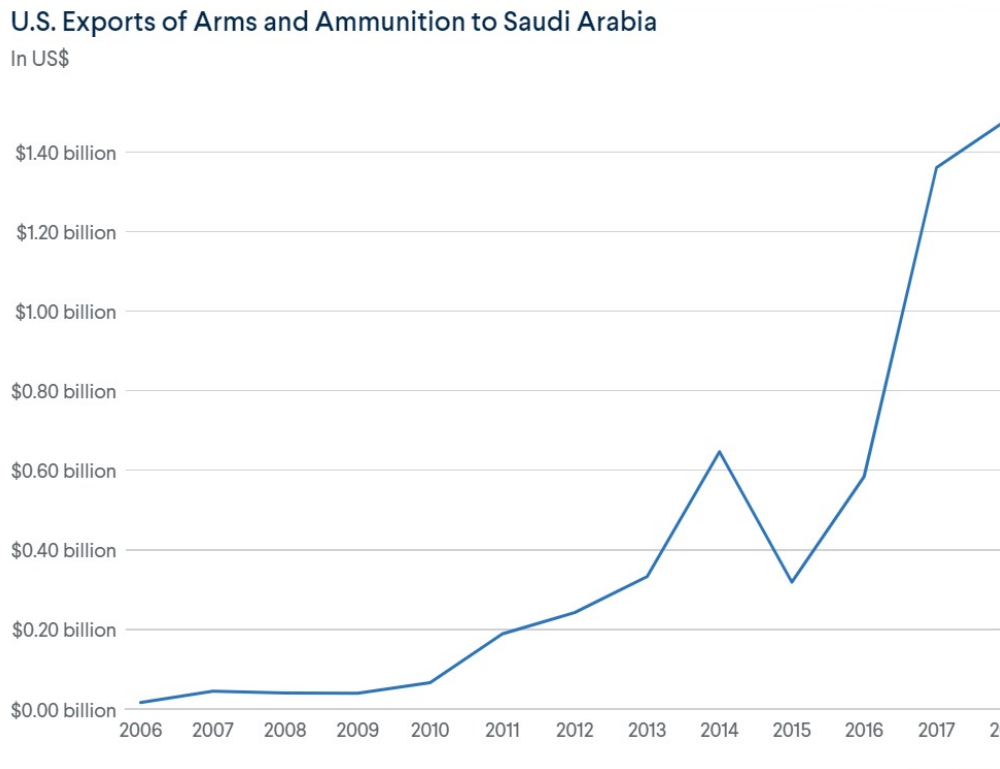


Figure representing the growth in value of the exports from the US to Saudi Arabia (“U.S. Trade with Saudi Arabia,” 2021)

This shows the soar in the exported arms from the U.S to Saudi Arabia following the 2017 agreements where Saudi Arabia signed on the immediate purchase of 110 billion dollars’ worth of arms and over 350 billion dollars’ worth of weaponry over the following 10 years from the U.S. This further demonstrates the financial influence of Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia on the U. S’s list of alliances and associates. (“U.S. Trade with Saudi Arabia,” 2021)

This trading agreement between the US and Saudi Arabia is only one of the many examples of the trading relationship between the entire MENA region and the U.S. Although the sailing wasn’t smooth, gathering mixed reactions from several world leaders including Arab politicians and African representatives, the association

between these countries has been ascending for various reasons. Some analysis hints at a necessary alliance even if both parties' values and historical beliefs do not entirely align, lining up besides the most potent nation could overrule the significance of said principles.

US Arms Trade to Israel

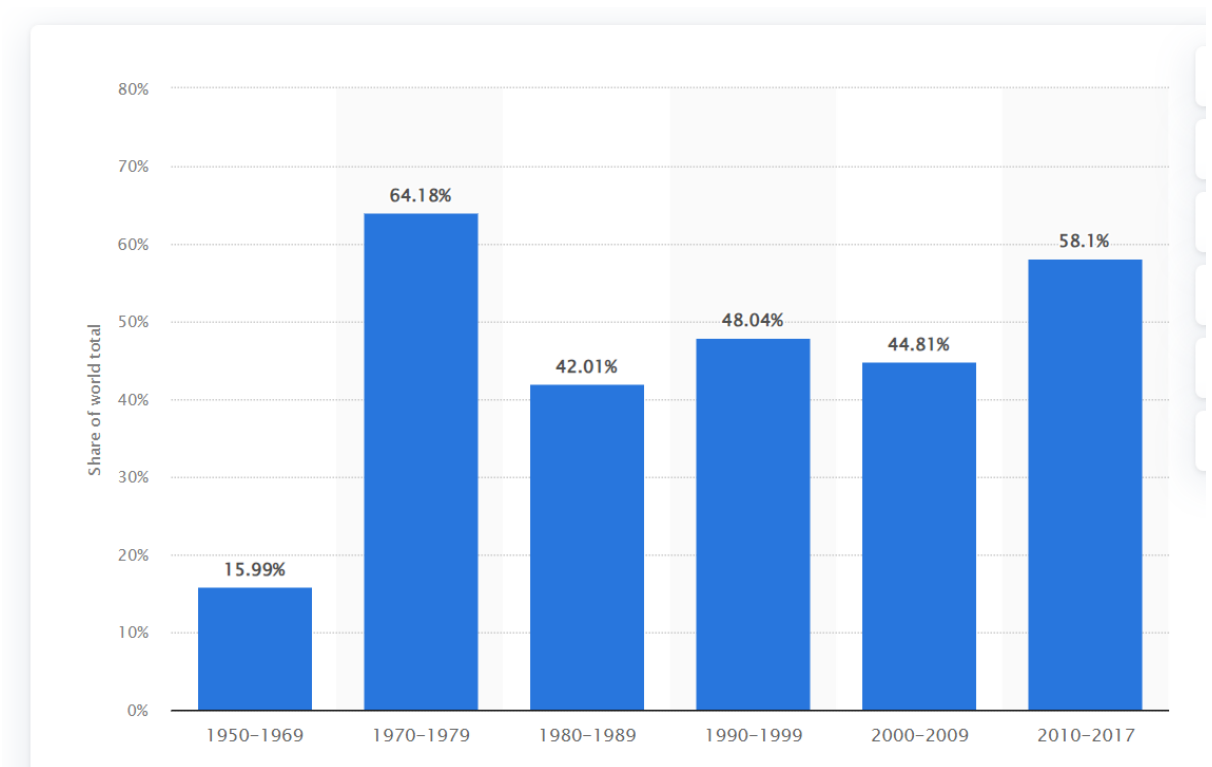


Figure representing the share of total United States arms agreements in the Middle East and North Africa region from 1950 to 2017 (MENA: Share of US Arms Agreements 2017, 2023)

As detailed in the graph above, the US's arms trades and agreements to the MENA region have always been high and only continue to increase through the years and

events. Between the years 2010 and 2017, the trade numbers escalated tremendously from 44.8% to 58.1%, totalling around 163.4 billion Dollars. (*MENA: Share of US Arms Agreements 2017, 2023*) This is particularly due to the 110 billion Dollars agreement with Saudi Arabia as well as the persistent support to the Israeli forces in occupied Palestine. Over the last decade, the U.S has been immersed in Israeli conflicts and military plans, selling them over 7 billion Dollars' worth of weapons and war equipment, the sum is divided into \$750 million stemming from direct commercial sales (DCS) and around \$6.5 billion coming from foreign military sales (FMS). The U.S has equipped these forces with some of its more advanced and destructive machinery; this army now owns the second biggest collection of F-16's, ranking right below the U.S itself. Other expensive machines and weapons include 30 F-15Is, fighter planes, helicopters and missiles. The huge military aid being constantly pumped into Israeli forces is not shocking, but interesting. It's well known that the Israeli government is a strong ally of the U.S, mostly due to its strategic position in Palestine, right at the heart of the Middle East. Bordering several Arab nations, Palestine constitutes a tactical portal to impose control over the entire MENA region. Therefore, aiding the ruling forces in this country is guaranteed to offer the U.S access to resources and lands they need to establish dominance in the MENA area. (Odlum, 2002)

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations

The research question and general topic of the thesis are intriguing to say the least.

However, the research surrounding the more specific building blocks of each segment

are limited, and when present are tougher to interpret than the usual journal articles. Most empirical evidence is extracted from websites rather than books and journal articles, primarily due to the lack of statistical and numerical evidence present there. Additionally, the dense information seems to be restricted to older pieces of literature like book sections or reviews, which hinders their relatability to the current global political situation. Finally, access to charts was almost non-existent in journal articles, so the paper relied on other trusted sources.

Conclusion

In the complex and ever-changing realm that is international politics, US arm trades to the Middle Eastern countries stands as one pivotal dictator of the futuristic approaches, directions and manners of international relations. This thesis explored some striking moments in the history of the US foreign policy as well as the concept of international liaisons in a military setting where two opposing worlds unite in a symbiotic web. Throughout this paper, we uncovered the global definitions of foreign policy and the evolution of the American one from attitudinal international agreements to full blown amendments, guidelines and descriptive rules by investigating three consequent eras: Post Cold War, Unipolar Moment and Competition with other powerful countries. After that, we followed a historical string all the way back to World War One to study the evolution of Middle Eastern and Arabic affairs considering all the political changes that era. We also observed the Arabic conflicts in the MENA region and the contribution of external forces, mainly US decisions and aids, in the unfolding of many resulting wars.

The build-up of political tensions dragged a heavy military burden alongside it, which called for quicker and more advanced military machines and weapons. The US was amongst the very first nations to receive this call loud and clear and harness its echo to fulfil its own interests. Other countries followed in the American footsteps and competed over the financial trophies of dominating the military grounds, mostly Russia. Evidently, the surge in demands erupting from the MENA region wasn't purely urged by the American interests, but held Arabs' security, safety and benefits at heart. Finally, we discovered the smaller corners of US arm trades in the Middle East by studying the case of Saudi Arabia and mentions of the American- Israeli funds.

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