

MIDDLE EAST - KEEP \$TIRRING IT UP

One third of US arms exports over the past five years have gone to the war-stricken Middle East, with Saudi Arabia consolidating its place as the world's second biggest importer, a report has shown. The Middle East, a region where in the past five years most countries have been involved in conflict, accounted for 32% of global imports of weapons. Arms imports to the region doubled between 2013 and 2017 and in the five-year period before that. The US, the UK, and France were the main supplier of arms to the region, while Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE were the main recipient countries.

"Based on deals signed during the Obama administration, US arms deliveries in 2013-17 reached their highest level since the late 1990s," said Dr Aude Fleurant, the director of the Sipri's arms and military expenditure programme. "These deals and further major contracts signed in 2017 will ensure that the USA remains the largest arms exporter in the coming years."

The UK, which rolled out a red carpet for the Saudi crown prince on his visit to London, exported nearly half of its arms to the Saudi Arabia, which has increased its imports by **225%**. Saudi Arabia uses its imported weapons in large-scale combat operations, particularly in Yemen. The Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, which has cost hundreds of civilian lives, was launched in 2015, aiming to counter the advances of Iran-backed Houthi rebels controlling the capital, Sana'a. Saudi Arabia's shopping list included 78 combat aircraft, 72 combat helicopters and 328 tanks. Despite U.S. intelligence support and training for the Saudi-led coalition meant to minimize civilian casualties, a recent United Nations report said the coalition was responsible for most of the **16,700 civilians killed or injured** in Yemen over the last three years.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo backed continued U.S. military support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen over the objections of staff members after being warned a cutoff could jeopardize \$2 billion in weapons sales to America's Gulf allies, the Wall Street Journal reported. Citing a classified memo and people familiar with the decision, the newspaper reported Thursday that Pompeo recently **certified** that the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are *"undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians."* The move — which came a month after a Saudi-led airstrike in Yemen hit a bus filled with children — has inflamed lawmakers opposed to U.S. involvement in the conflict. The certification, which allows the U.S. military to continue its assistance to the Saudi-led coalition fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen, also received backing from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. That aid includes arms sales and aerial refueling of coalition fighter jets, which carry out airstrikes in Yemen. Pompeo — in certifying Riyadh and Abu Dhabi were doing all they could to avert civilian casualties in the war — sided with a legislative affairs team that argued suspending support could **undercut plans to sell more than 120,000 precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia** and the United Arab Emirates, a net \$2 billion in weapons' sales.

When the states of the world are ranked by military spending per capita, six of the top seven are in the Middle East. The top ten countries in military spending per capita are: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Brunei, Kuwait, United States, Soviet Union and France. By the end of the 1970s, the region was spending between 13 and 15 percent of its gross national product for the military, compared with 8.3 percent for the Warsaw Pact countries. The next highest is Russia, the world's second biggest exporter, which saw a decrease of 7.1% in its overall volume of arms exports. US exports were 58% higher than those of Russia. France, Germany and China are among the top five exporters. The UK is the sixth biggest weapons exporter. Despite its commitment to Assad's regime in Syria, **Iran did not even make the list of the 40 largest importers – only accounting for 1% of arms imports to the region**, a fraction of what its Arab neighbors spend on weapons.

Conflicts between states in the MidEast have been the major element in the regional arms race. The state of

war between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries is only the most visible of these. Iran under the Shah embarked on the largest military buildup in the region. The Shah's grab for the role of regional gendarme, and the messianism of the Islamic Republic after 1979, have been one key factor in the arms race in the Gulf. Here US policy has played the paramount role: The provision of F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers to Iran, for instance, required the dispatch of AWACs and F-15s to Saudi Arabia several years later.

Within the Arab world, Syria has faced both Iraq and Jordan as potential military antagonists. Libya, arming rapidly after 1970, contributed heavily to the arms race in North Africa. Algeria and Morocco, Ethiopia and Somalia, and North and South Yemen have been belligerents arming against one another. In virtually every case, these locally rooted conflicts became part of global superpower competition. This process has been intensified by the region's oil resources and critical geopolitical location. Local military establishments have



also grown in response to internal political conflicts. The United States, Iran and Israel supported the Kurdish movement in Iraq in order to harass the regime in Baghdad. Libya and Algeria support the POLISARIO in Western Sahara. Several Arab states supported the Eritrean movement against Ethiopia.

The political influence of the military within the states of the region has also fostered militarization. Some regimes are directly based in the military, including Syria, Libya, Egypt and Sudan. In the case of Iraq, the civilian-led party rests on the support of its officer members to control the state apparatus. Among the monarchies like Jordan, Morocco and Pahlavi Iran, the close identity between the throne and the top officers makes the armed forces the major institutional pillar of the regime. The monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are still another case. Here the military establishments are quite new, and heavily dependent on mercenary forces at all levels. These countries, along with Libya, have accounted for some of the largest military expenditures in this effort to build up their military forces from a very low level.

While Saudi Arabia and the city-states of the Gulf were importing their armed forces almost entirely from outside their borders, other states of the region were developing their own military industries. Israel and Egypt are the most important cases, with Israel already a leading arms exporter. Iran under the shah made major agreements with Northrop, Bell and Vickers to assemble warplanes, helicopter gunships and tanks, but these and more ambitious plans crumbled with the Pahlavi dynasty. Turkey, with the largest industrial base in the region and the second-largest standing army in NATO, has long produced light arms and munitions. A 1979 agreement with West Germany expanded factories for rifles, machine guns and missiles, and naval shipyards. Agreements for licensed assembly of submarines and patrol boats were signed in 1980. Current negotiations for the purchase of 160 F-16 or F-18A advanced fighters include second-phase co-production arrangements to assemble the warplanes in Turkey and eventually to produce many of the parts there. In order to provide Turkey with badly needed foreign exchange for this deal, both Northrop (F-5G) and General Dynamics (F-16) have competing "guns for butter" proposals to market around \$2 billion worth of Turkish agricultural and manufactured products in third countries where they have interests.

In the United States, the "nation-building" potential of the military is a persistent theme in the literature of "modernization" theory. Pentagon officials have argued that "modernizing the equipment of the Egyptian forces and establishing close relations between the US and Egyptian military" are essential to "the profound shift in Egypt's orientation." Arms sales bring advisers and technicians, often by the thousands.

Neither the leverage nor the motives are always subtle. In the heated political fight over the Saudi AWACs sale, National Security Adviser Richard Allen argued that the sale "assures the presence of the United States in Saudi Arabia's security future." On the basis of extensive interviews and a review of internal Pentagon documents, Scott Armstrong concluded that the deal was conceived as the linchpin of "an ambitious plan to build surrogate bases in Saudi Arabia, equipped and waiting for American forces to use." Oman, Turkey, Morocco and Somalia are other cases where US base access is a primary factor motivating arms sales.

Arms sales are also related to a state's capacity to perform mercenary functions for the supplying power. In spite of all the talk in Washington about "Soviet proxies," the US has developed this aspect of military proxies with particular success. The shah intervened in Oman to crush the revolutionary movement in Dhofar in 1975, using US equipment and training and Iranian troops, exemplifying the Nixon Doctrine in action.

On a less visible but more sustained level, Pakistan supplies officers and troops to most of the Arabian Peninsula states. Pakistan's president-general, Zia ul Haq, acknowledged in early 1981 that Pakistan had military and training "missions" in 28 different countries. Three out of five Omani infantry battalions in Dhofar province are Pakistani Baluch, and there are credible reports that thousands of Pakistani troops are currently stationed in Saudi Arabia in exchange for Saudi financial aid amounting to more than \$1 billion per year. Pakistani pilots provide critical support for the air forces of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Jordan, as an Arab state, plays an even more critical

role in the Gulf, supplying officers (even the chief of staff of the UAE armed forces), military intelligence personnel and infrastructure and training missions throughout the peninsula. Crown Prince Hasan complained recently that the Hashemite contribution to US interests in the Gulf was "poorly understood" in Congress. Jordan's role is no doubt better appreciated in the Pentagon.

The countries of the Middle East have also served as arms conduits within the region. In 1976, Iran shipped US warplanes to Jordan, which in turn transferred them to Morocco; Saudi Arabia supplied Somalia in 1977-1978; Egypt has provided US-financed arms to Afghan opposition forces since late 1979; Libya has shipped Soviet equipment to Syria; Israel's supply of spare parts and equipment to Iran in its war with Iraq probably had US approval; the Reagan administration supported Egypt's sale of 35 F-4 Phantoms to Turkey; Jordan's weapons shipments to South Africa almost certainly involved US equipment. Less often, governments transfer weapons against the wishes of the supplier: Libya's transfer of Mirages to Egypt during the October War of 1973, and US small arms to Saudi Arabia which turned up in PLO hands in Lebanon are cases in point.

A complete and detailed picture of the arms race in the Middle East is impossible to construct, but its most significant and broad features are there for all to see. **First**, the huge buildup in the sheer quantity and sophistication of weapons comes as a result of forces and pressures internal to the region **and** of the economic and political needs of the major suppliers. **Second**, this buildup has contributed directly to hundreds of thousands of casualties among the peoples of the region, most of them civilians, and the destruction and waste of vast amounts of economic and social resources. **Third**, the unique local beneficiary of this competitive process, in purely military and strategic terms, has been Israel. **There is nothing like a "military balance" in the region, where Israel continues to augment its unchallenged supremacy.**

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