

## **Competing for Resources: Middle East Divided between Arms and Development<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** In search to depict the problems which have forced the Middle Eastern nations to acquire conventional arms and the ramification of militarization on regional and international levels, the present article examines three categories of: Regional (driven by the need to fight wars or guarantee security against specified external threats); Systemic (driven by supplier-client relationships, technological factors, or the pursuit of status and hegemony); and Internal (driven by the need to secure the regime against internal threats or the desire to use military development as a vehicle for social and economic modernization) as the significant factors which force these nations to buy arms from various sources. It concludes that each category results in varying conclusions and these results vary in intensity with respect to each nation in the Middle East.

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<sup>1</sup> Views expressed in this article are of the author, without any indication or implication for the current policy positions of the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The IJIA also is not in agreement with several propositions of the author in the article in which the editor has footnoted his own comments. (Editor)

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## **Introduction**

Militarization of the Middle East, in the post World War II (WWII), era to the 1990s, has had long reaching affects on the Arab region, and ultimately the world. The acquisition of arms from various sources has created an area of the world that is considered to be volatile and unstable. (Ismael, 1986:3-14) Why is this region, considered unruly by the international community? "The US-Soviet arms race was essentially confined to the two superpowers, whereas the Middle East is a multipolar system, where military conflicts involve shifting coalitions among many states." (Steinberg, 1995:177) Inconsistency of alliances has led to the political instability in the region. This in turn has fuelled the hatred between states and their views toward the region and the international community. The past twenty years has seen the Middle East<sup>1</sup> experience some drastic changes to their foreign and domestic policies. However, the changes seen today can be traced back to events which occurred in years past.

The lands of the Ottoman Empire in 1453, under Sultan Mehmed II, are generally accepted as the present day geographic region or boundaries. (Pertez, 1988:3) This region has proved to be of great strategic importance throughout the evolution of history. However, present day strategic importance started with Napoleon. He first entered and conquered Egypt in attempts to create a base from which to limit the expanding British Empire. (Ochsenwal and Fisher, 2003:257-60) (Pertez, 1988:1)

World War I (WWI) and WWII elevated the importance of the Middle East as a strategic region. The end of WWI saw the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Although it was on the decline for nearly a century, the absence of a unifying power created much uncertainty in the region. Due to the power void and the presence of the British,

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French, Italian, and German soldiers, both the world and Middle East saw each other for the first time. This caused a heightened awareness of the strategic importance of the region and its resources. (Ochsenwal and Fisher, 2003:279-390).

The next important event which had a dramatic effect on the region was that of the Balfour Declaration. On 2 Nov 1917 Lord Balfour, in a letter to Lord Rothschild, stated that the British government was sympathetic to the Zionist movement and would use its 'best endeavors' to ensure the creation of a National Home for the Jewish People in Palestine. (Anderson et al., 1993:71-2) The Balfour Declaration has had dramatic effects on the stability of the Middle East during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Conflict and Arms**

The establishment of the regime of Israel on 14 May 1948 and the many conflicts between the Israelis and its Arab neighbors has been a driving force of conflicts in the region since then. However, one important ongoing conflict has been the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. This, of all the conflicts, has been the most detrimental to the region. The ongoing battle has drained the resources of all nations involved and Israel is finding itself, not only having to fight the Arab nations politically, but, it is losing its support internationally. Israel is realizing that a "military aid to modernize the Israeli defense forces will be the price of 'land for peace' (Armitage, 1994:58). However, this was not the only conflict facing the region.

The Suez Canal Crisis of 29 October 1956 saw, for the first time, an Arab nation standing against the Western powers. The actual

military operations of the French, British and Israelis failed to achieve their planned objective of the downfall of Gamal Abd al-Nasser. The failure of the Western powers in this particular case led to the further development of Arab Nationalism (Ismael, 1986: 94). The Suez Canal Crisis was not the only incident which drew worldwide attention to the Middle East.

The Organization of Oil Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which originally consisted of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, was developed to stabilize world prices and create reasonable profits for the oil companies. It was also set in place to ensure a voice in all oil decisions, guarantee that consumers would not be cut off from supplies, and to boycott companies which did not cooperate with OPEC (Fisher and Ochsenswald, 2003: 555). OPEC also understood the power it wielded when in 1973 they cut oil production in protest of American involvement in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. "The oil embargo gave new meaning to the term 'Arab'. The predatory imperialists of the so-called unconquerable West had been brought to their knees. Humbled, they would be made to pay for the psychological, political, and cultural dislocations they had inflicted on the Arab world." (Mackey, 1994: 233) Unfortunately, this embargo did not last and the West recovered to retain more influence in the Middle East region.

The rise of Ayatollah (Imam) Ruhollah Khomeini was a catalyst for the creation of an Islamic Republic in Iran. The removal of the Shah led to the seizure of American hostages in Tehran in November 1979 causing much distress in some parts of the international community. The Shah, who Iranians considered as a puppet for the Americans, fuelled an outward display of hatred towards the West. The creation of a new Islamic Republic led to the

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spread of an Islamic revivalist movement which is active in virtually all Middle Eastern nations today (Hiro,1989: 176-205). It followed by the Iraqi invasion of Iran and a war that lasted eight years.

The last major international event, which is to be discussed, involved Iraq and Kuwait. At 2 A.M. (local time) on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990 Iraqi troops crossed the Kuwaiti border and by the end of the day, controlled the entire country. Not all of Iraq's goals were achieved, but they were successful in shocking the world (Pimlott and Badsey, 1992:35) Western powers of amass, a huge military force, to virtually decimate Iraq into submission). This incident caused much distress to the international community. Not only did it force the Western powers of amass a huge military force, to virtually decimate Iraq into submission, but it also caused the Arab community to re-evaluate its present condition with respect to security. Although the rest of the world treated the Persian Gulf Crisis as an international concern, it continues to have permanent and significant effects on the region with respect to militarization (Pimlott and Badsey, 1992:266-267).

These events which have occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not the only ones to have impacted the Middle East. Many insurgencies, internal conflicts, and totalitarian regimes have also added to the instability of the region. What are the actual causes of the continuous battles occurring in this oil rich region? Who or what would cause a region with such a rich common heritage<sup>2</sup> to continue combat with each other? The problem lies essentially with the solution method utilized by Middle Eastern nations in handling conflict. The acquisition of arms is the primary method. Militarization of the Middle East has been the cause for many of the conflicts which have occurred. However, to say that this is the only region in the world to

attempt to establish control of its resources through the purchasing of arms would be false.

The underlying problems which have forced all the nations of the Middle East to acquire conventional arms can be classified into three categories. These are:

1. Regional (driven by the need to fight wars or guarantee security against specified external threats);
2. Systemic (driven by supplier-client relationships, technological factors, or the pursuit of status and hegemony); and
3. Internal (driven by the need to secure the regime against internal threats or the desire to use military development as a vehicle for social and economic modernization (Krause, 1994:85).)

Each of these problems deals specifically with a group of problems which force nations to buy arms from various sources. It is these three reasons, regional, systemic and internal, which will be examined in this essay. The rudimentary causes of each category will be examined resulting in varying conclusions. As well, after the causes have been explored, the results of each factor will be outlined. These results, albeit similar, will all vary in intensity with respect to each nation in the Middle East.

The Regional aspect of militarization seems very straight forward. The acquisition of arms is relative to the wars fought in a region and the need to guarantee security against specific external threats. This statement has caused tremendous unrest in the Middle East during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first aspect of regional problems would centre on why wars are being fought in this region. These wars, since WWII, have generally been internal within the region. However, this is not to say that external forces, such as the British, French, Americans or Russians, have not had an influential affect.

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The first war which has had tremendous impact on the Middle East would be the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956. According to Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, given their [the governments of the Middle East and particularly Egypt] low degree of political institutionalization, their high level of political and social instability, [...]and most important, their dependence upon the outside world for almost everything from food to armaments, developing countries are highly susceptible to external influences (Hillal Dessouki et al., 1987:66).<sup>3</sup>

The Crisis which started with the Baghdad Pact of 1954(Fisher and Ochsenwald, 2003: 618)<sup>4</sup> had ill effects upon the security of the region when United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles refused to attend. His refusal had an important impact on the political stability of the Middle East. After the Baghdad Pact, Egypt turned to the other world superpower to purchase arms. "Egypt was to receive MIG fighters, Ilyushin jet bombers, Stalin Mark III tanks, Czech T34 tanks and other heavy equipment. This dramatically changed the balance of power in the Middle East."(Lloyd, 1956:28) The United States became very upset with Egypt. Nearly two years later, the United States and Britain withdrew their offer to finance the Aswan High Dam. The Aswan dam would have provided Egypt with enormous water resources and would have thus increased Egypt's economic stability, as more land could have been irrigated. As a result, there would have been enough hydroelectricity for the entire nation. Withdrawing the much needed funds enraged Egyptian President Nasser, thus forcing him to nationalize the Suez Canal on 26 Jul 1956. The nationalization of the canal was to raise money to fund projects that the West would not sponsor (Cleveland, 1994:292). This act by Nasser, threatened the economic stability of France, Britain, and Israel regime because of the importance of the Suez Canal to the economic stability of the European nations. The combination of these

two events was the main reasons for the Suez Crisis. The position of Egypt and their eventual refusal to buckle to the pressures of international politics, led to armed conflict around the Suez Canal.

The movement of an Israeli parachute force into Egyptian territory, at Mitla Pass, on the 29 October 1956 (Farnie, 1969:729) marked a new age for the Middle East. This attack, aimed at controlling the Suez Canal, was a well orchestrated plan between Britain, France, and Israelis. On 30 October 1956 France and Britain issued an ultimatum to both Israel and Egypt in which the two nations were to remain ten miles away from their respective sides of the Suez Canal<sup>5</sup>. France and Britain also communicated their intention of placing troops in strategic locations along the Suez Canal. The Egyptians, under President Nasser, refused to comply with such outrageous demands and mobilized their forces<sup>6</sup>. The French and British started with air raids in the region with their troops arriving in the area on the 5-6 November 1956. During this period, the Israelis continued their military operations (Gaffen, 1987:40). The end result of this battle was that Egypt retained control of the Suez Canal, the French and British lost face in the international community, and Israel regime retained control of the Gaza Strip until the United Nations (UN) intervened.

The causes for the Suez Crisis have been discussed over many years. However, three main problems always surface. The first was the involvement in the internal affairs of Egypt by the Americans and British. Initially, they had pledged aid in the construction of the Aswan Dam. This aide was not offered without strings. The Egyptians were expected to favor the Americans and British in all the dealings within the Middle East. This type of high political blackmail was not conducive to the political aspirations of Nasser. He wanted to

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have influence within the region without the West trying to dictate his actions. Therefore, the Americans and British withdrew support for Nasser's economic plan. Thus the Egyptians turned towards the USSR, and tried to exert their influence over the region (Fisher and Ochsenwald, 2003:696-701).

The second problem occurred when Egypt became relatively successful in convincing the other Arab nations to turn from the West and concentrate on destroying American-backed Israeli regime. Most of the nations rallied behind the Egyptians as they were involved in wars with Israel on three separate incidents. However, by the mid 1970s, Egypt's arms arsenal was considerably weakened by three major developments:

1. The failure of the Soviet Union to resupply the army adequately after the war of 1973 and the eventual severance of Soviet military link in 1976;
2. The time needed to shift procurement needs from the Soviet Union to the West and to forge a new link with the United States; and
3. The economic costs of massive rearmament (Hillal Dessouki et al., 1987:67).

From 1967 to 1975, the economically poor nation of Egypt spent approximately \$25 billion for rearmament. This figure was matched by the amount spent on war-related costs (Hillal Dessouki, 1987:67). From 1975 onwards, Egypt had become a poor nation which has not yet recovered today.

The third major problem which resulted from the heavy cost of militarization was the peace treaty signed between Egypt and regime of Israel. On 11 November 1973, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty

ending hostilities in the Yom Kipper War. Syria refused to sign and continued to increase their arms sales. Egypt, who was a leader in the Arab world, had become a weak nation with little or no influence in the Middle East. To make matters worse, Egypt signed a permanent peace treaty with Israel on 26 March 1979 (Taheri, 1988:171-179). This action of treachery by Egypt created instability as Anwar al-Sadat, the leader of Egypt after Nasser, saw the other Arab nations break diplomatic ties, the PLO refer to Sadat as a traitor of Arab nationalism, and Islamic fundamentalists regarded Sadat and Egypt as corrupt (Fisher and Ochsenswald, 2003:716). The instability which occurred after this event continued throughout the 1970s.

The resulting impact of an insurgency caused by outside forces can have long lasting effects in any region. The Suez Canal Crisis of 1956 was a prime example. The effects of this instability can be felt by all the nations of the Middle East. However, not all problems occur with the aid of outside powers. The Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s was an excellent example.<sup>3</sup>

### **Iraq-Iran war**

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<sup>3</sup> - The wars and conflicts in this region or at least some of them like Iraqi regime imposed war on Iran have had clear external origins. The intrigues and interference, specially the US instigation (among all measures, sending several envoys in early 1980s to Iraq and later on extending aids and political support for Iraqi regime) have been significant factors, in provoking Saddam Hussein to wage the 8 year imposed war against Iran. In the next part of article (about Iraq and Kuwait war) the author acknowledge the same fact as mentioning of "..... the involvement of outside forces and their attempts to influence the political and security issues of the Middle East....."(Editor)

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The Iran-Iraq war, 1980-1988, was strongly influenced by the history of the Islamic Republic. The causes of the war were several: the long rivalry between Iran and Iraq over questions of border; the competition of each for regional leadership; ideological, national, political, and religious differences; and perceived mutual interferences in each other's affairs (Fisher and Ochsenswald, 2003: 536-537), (Moss Helms et al., 1987:110-115). These causes had many long standing intra-nation conflicts, which enabled the war to rage for eight years.

This dispute started on 17 September 1980, when Iraq abrogated the 1975 Algiers Treaty which was a border agreement between the two nations (Moss Helms et al., 1987:110). Five days later, the Iraqis invaded Iran and advanced deep into Iranian territory (Fisher and Ochsenswald, 2003: 537). The first area of Iraqi concern was that of the land situated on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Being virtually land-locked, Iraq had an acute sense of their vulnerabilities. Therefore, Iraq's first target was to secure the Iranian region adjacent to Iraq along the Persian Gulf (Moss Helms et al., 1987:114). Unfortunately for Iraq, this war of attrition against an economically, demographically, and ideologically superior foe, proved to be devastating to their oil producing infrastructure. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Iraq was not as economically prepared as Saddam Hussein had thought. By the late 1980s, the war had become a serious drain. A conservative estimate put the number of casualties over 100,000 dead and 500,000 wounded. Additionally, each month of battle was costing the Iraqis \$1 billion dollars (US) (Peretz, 1992: 456). After the war, Iraq carried a debt of \$70 - \$80 billion dollars. The support received from the other Arab states, who expected to be repaid, soon disappeared. Owing \$35 billion to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait alone was a destabilizing factor for the Middle East (Mackey, 1994: 232).

Iraq's tremendous foreign debt was only one factor which led to the (Persian) Gulf War. Iraq's arsenal could put more battle tanks in the field than the UK and France combined and had more combat aircraft than Germany, France, or the UK. This "inflated Iraqi ambitions and fuelled the aggressive instincts of Saddam Hussein."(Sadowsky, 1993:1)

### **Iraq and Kuwait**

Throughout this entire war, both the Iraqis and Iranians were purchasing arms to defend their nation. Also, other nations in the region continued to build arms to ensure their own security. From the period of 1988 through 1990, Saddam Hussein was able to amass the 4<sup>th</sup> largest conventional army in the world (Sadowsky, 1993:1). The Saudis never expected Iraq to repay their debt and the Kuwait was invaded on 31 July 1990(Mackey, 1994: 233). Therefore, it can easily be seen how two nations combating in a region can lead to instability. In the Middle East, instability can usually be equated into militarization.

Reasons for militarization are not limited to wars or insurgencies. The next category relating to the buildup of arms is called Systemic. Systemic is defined as arms transfers that are driven by supplier-client relationships, technological factors, or the pursuit of status and hegemony. In this area, any foreign nations helping the Middle East extend or expand their economic influence in the region through the sale of arms, are a source of instability. H St J B Armitage, a retired diplomat specializing in Middle Eastern affairs, states that:

The end of ideological confrontation has reinforced competition in arms supply. Western pressures, in the

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(Persian) Gulf especially, have been irresistible, fuelling the surge in arms purchases which sovereign pride, or perhaps national shame, demanded as consequence of weakness exposed by Iraq's aggression against Kuwait (Armitage, 1994:56).

The above statement outlines the involvement of outside forces and their attempts to influence the political and security issues of the Middle East. As well,

Arms sales also permit them [arms suppliers] to expand their influence in the Middle East by bolstering their local allies or at least frustrating their adversaries. [...] Middle Eastern regimes often buy advanced weapons systems [...] as a way of demonstrating their strength of their ties to their superpower allies." (Sadowsky, 1993:8) [...] analysts cannot determine if the sudden spurt of weapons acquisition is an anomaly or a reversal of the apparent decline of arms purchases during the late 1980s (Krause, 1994:74).

### **Supply after War**

The three major arms dealers, are the United States (US), Russia (formally known as USSR), and the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). Non-regional nations have their own reasons for involving themselves in the Middle East, but, their own political ends are the driving factors towards instability.

The United States, exclusively, is the largest arms dealer in the Middle East (both past and present). Their increase in size of

purchases in the arms industry was partly due to an increase in participation of the US because they have “increasingly favoured the concept of unilateral intervention in Developing World affairs in which its own interests were involved, partly because of the Soviet withdrawal.” (Joffre, 1993:177) Thus, the US overtook the USSR/Russia in estimated value of agreements over the period 1985-1992 (Armitage, 1994:56). From Table 1 on page 20, the Americans have developed a 3 to 1 edge on arms agreements over its next competitor and 6 to 1 over the former USSR. These numbers have tremendous impact on the aggressive nature of American business in the arms market.

The Bush Administration announced in 1991, a proposal to limit arms sales to the Middle East. The US suggested that the UN Security Council, whose six members sell 90% of the worlds weapons, and the ‘G-7’ nations to limit destabilizing arms sales to this highly volatile region. The US also called for effective export controls to ensure that all people were following the limit the total number of conventional weapons in the Middle East.

**TABLE 1 (Krause, 1994: 83) Middle East Arms Transfers Agreements, 1989-1992 (in millions of current US dollars)**

Region or Sub Region	Recipient	US	Russia	China	Western Europe	Other Europe	Others	Total
North Africa								

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	Algeria	---	500	---	---	---	---	500
	Libya	---	---	100	---	---	200	300
	Morocco	100	---	---	100	500	---	700
	Tunisia	100	---	---	---	---	---	100
	Total	200	500	100	100	500	200	1600
Core Middle East								
	Egypt	700 0	100	---	---	200	---	7300
	Israel	100 0	---	---	1200	100	---	2300
	Jordan	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Lebanon	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Syria	---	500	---	---	400	200	1100
	Total	800 0	600	---	1200	700	200	1070 0
Persian Gulf								
	Bahrain	300	---	---	---	---	---	300
	Iran	---	4300	1100	100	500	700	6700

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Iraq	---	200	---	500	100	900	1700
Kuwait	170 0	---	---	700	500	---	2900
Oman	100	---	---	600	---	---	700
Qatar	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Saudi Arabia	248 00	200	300	8000	2400	200	3590 0
United Arab Emirates	600	300	---	200	---	400	1500
Yemen	---	100	---	---	---	---	100
Total	258 00	5100	1400	9400	3000	2200	4980 0
Middle East							
Total	340 00	6200	1500	10700	4200	2600	6210 0

However, at the same time the US was pressuring other nations to limit arms sales, they announced a \$24 billion (US) sale of conventional arms to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel, thus undermining their proposal (Maddy - Weitzman and Inbar, 1997), (Inbar, 1995:191-193) The US attitude about asking other nations to

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reduce arms sales while they expanded their economic position, fits into the US drive to be the strongest economy in the world.

The USSR was another major player in the international sales of conventional arms. However, since the break-up of the former Soviet Union, Russia has not sold as many arms in comparison to the US. The situation of US dominance was not always the case. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the tight arms-transfer relationship had gradually created a bigger stake for the suppliers in the outcome of the political disputes in the area [Middle East], thus,...the Soviets and the Americans gradually slipped into a diplomatic stance of outright support for the side they were arming in the Arab-Israel conflict (Jabber, 1981: 15). During this period of time, the USSR had a tremendous impact on the Middle East. It supported many nations with arms and supplies. However, the break-up of the USSR has led to the “decline in the USSR [Russia] has rendered it technologically dependent on the United States and heavily in need of a stable international environment.” (Rioux, 1991) Combined with the lack of technological advancement, the Russian economy has proven itself incapable of competing internationally.

Starting in the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union’s economy has been, at best, described as mediocre. Its growth rate has dropped steadily from four percent to two point five percent per annum (Wilson, 1987: 358). Many factors can account for the declining Soviet economy. The decline in the birth rate, access to cheap European resources, and poor return on capital investments have been cited as reasons for the slowdown (Wilson, 1987:358). The reduction in the economic output of the USSR forced the Soviets to make some very difficult decisions. “By forcing the Soviets into a contest in which they are least qualified, strapping them for resources and undercutting any

plans they might have for exploiting their technological strides in the civilian economy, such a competition could prove highly favorable for the West." (Lambeth And Lewis, 1988:758) Therefore, the reduction in Gross National Product (GNP) left the Soviets with some strategic decisions regarding the allotment of already dwindling funds. Some experts indicate that by the Soviets;

.....increasing the share of GNP devoted to defense will confront the Soviets with the difficult choice of reducing the growth in investment, which was critical to modernizing the industrial base, or curtailing growth in consumption, which was an important factor in the Soviet drive to improve labor productivity (Yost, 1988:203).

The problem with the Russian economy has led to a frightening conclusion. With an economy in such a dismal state, and having nuclear technology, one could conclude that Russia may sell its knowledge to a nation in the Middle East. This act alone would change the strategic position and destroy the delicate balance between the Arab, Persian, and Israeli societies. No longer may a large supplier of arms, Russia to turn to other methods of exploiting the petroleum rich Middle East region.

The last aspect of Systemic reasons for the increase in arm sales to the Middle East must deal with PRC. This country is not new as an arms supplier. As one of the top five nations to export arms to developing countries, the PRC has been characterized as a "rogue elephant in the arms trade, supplying arms virtually without consideration of political or security implications." (Gill, 1992:379) The PRC has consistently sold arms to whoever would purchase them. Being a major exporter to Iran, as seen in Table 1 on page 20, China

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has kept a subtle influence in the Middle East region. The interest in this region has strictly been for arms sales. They have no claim or intention of expanding their political influence into a region as volatile as the Middle East.

The PRC's indiscretions can be clearly noticed by their lack of regard to who they attempt to sell nuclear technology. During the 1980s, the PRC did feasibility studies in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia to establish nuclear capability. In all three cases, the PRC and respective nations denied this possibility. However, in 1981 Israel launched a sneak attack into Iraq to destroy a perceived nuclear facility (Kuniholm, 1987). All indications point to the fact that the PRC is willing and has attempted to sell all or any conventional or non-conventional weapons to the Middle East. In 1997,

Weeks after winning a Chinese pledge to halt assistance to Iran's nuclear programs, the Clinton administration discovered and protested secret negotiations between the two governments for hundreds of tons of material used in enriching uranium to weapons grade, according to officials with access to U.S. intelligence (Washington post, 1998).

This type of agreement between nations forms an unstable region and a technologically advanced nation can lead to severe problems if some sort of arms control can be implemented.

The sale of arms by aggressive suppliers can lead to problems within any region. However, a region rich in a natural resource, such as oil, will have additional funds to purchase military equipment. This in itself is a dangerous mixture. However, to add advance technology in a non-conventional capacity could prove to be deadly. Therefore,

one could conclude that if responsibility for the results of arms sales does not filter back to the supplier, the region of the Middle East will not, in the foreseeable future, become a stable region.

The last, but equally important factor to consider in the high arms sales to the Middle East region, deals with internal political problems. Conflicts are driven by the need to secure a regime against internal threats or the desire to use military development as a vehicle for social and economic modernization. There could be many reasons why a government would use force to maintain control within a nation. The reasons provided by these totalitarian type governments range from: best interest of people, religious, or historical rights. Regardless of the reason, generally, the citizens of the nation in question are the ones who suffer.

The creation of a new Libyan government occurred on 1 September 1969 as Muammar al-Kaddafi seized power in Libya. This conflict has been professed by Kaddafi as Libya's finest hour. It was considered as Libya's, and the world's, 'first Islamic revolution' (Davis, 1987:44)<sup>7</sup> and not a *coup d'état*. The use of the word revolution and not *coup d'état* was very important to the new leader's world order because a *coup* signifies a transfer of power and a revolution not only conveys a change of power, but a recasting of society according to a new philosophy (Simons, 1996:209). Initially, Kaddafi envisioned his revolution occurring in two stages. The first step was to take total control of every aspect of Libyan society. This stage entailed the complete seizure of all economic and social sectors pertaining to the lives of Libyans. The first stage was called Nasserist because Kaddafi's methods were similar to the technique employed by Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt during the 1950s. The second step was considered the period of the socialist *jamahiriya* or 'Era of the Masses'. During this

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phase, Libya and Egypt would unite, thereby creating a strong Arab and Islamic nation. However, the second stage of Kaddafi's revolution did not come to pass and Libya was left to forge its own view of an Arab and Islamic nation and government (Simons, 1996:209-210). The pursuit of a just nation had been driven by an idealistic notion. However, the actual implementation of this whole process was done through military force. Even though Libya was being controlled by a cruel dictator, arms sales to Libya continued to soar, as the U.S.S.R mainly provided the nation with ammunition. It was not until the US tried to assassinate Kaddafi that he curbed his arms purchases. As well, Libya is the first nation to find their oil reserves dwindling. Today, although Libya is not as radical internationally, it still controls its citizens with an iron fist and is capable of doing so by arms sales from the Western and Eastern powers.

The case of Kaddafi is not limited to one nation in the Middle East. One of the most obvious dictators is Saddam Hussein. The Iraq dictator is one of the most ruthless in the region. An indication of a nation's concern for its people can usually be found in its distribution of funds throughout society. In the 1980s, Iraq spent seven times more on military than it had on health and education. (See Table 2) This is an appalling figure.

Iraq, under Ba'athist influence, has been marked with a series of actions to ensure that they remain in control. Saddam Hussein has set up a Ba'athist state such that all aspects of society are designed to control every aspect of Iraqi life mostly through notorious security services. Politics in Ba'athist Iraq soon became a series of plots and conspiracies (Pimlott and Badsey, 1992).

It is clear that Saddam Hussein has used all means at his disposal to ensure that he controls every facet of Iraqi society. After Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein exercised more military might by crushing a two pronged rebellion by the Shiite Kurds of the North and the Shiite groups to the South. In both cases, the Iraqi military slaughtered all people who were associated to either group. It took intervention from the international community to ensure that the senseless slaughter was stopped (Mackey, 1994: 419). Iraq is not the only nation who feared giving the Shiite majority an active role in the political system. Saudi Arabia is also concerned about their Shiite population, if the Iraqi Shiites were to make any political power gains. The Saudis, albeit not as aggressively as the Iraqis, keep their Shiite population under control so that the Royal Saud family can still maintain power in Saudi Arabia (Safran, 1992:400). The sale of arms to countries such as Libya and Iraq indicate that militarization of the Middle East can be caused by dictators trying to prop-up their regimes. To prevent such actions, arms suppliers could start by taking responsibility for their actions. However, as long as dictators are willing to purchase arms, suppliers will be willing to sell, regardless of the consequences.

The causes of alarming levels of arms sales have been examined. However, to investigate only the causes would not have the effect required to understand the implications of the Western and Asian powers actions. The next portion of this essay will examine the results of continuous arms sales in the Middle East.

The first important aspect of how the Middle Eastern society is affected by militarization would have to deal with the arms sales themselves.

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Table 2, below outlines the purchases of arms in relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Imports.

**Table 2**(Human Development Report, 1994)

Country	HDI Index	Military Expenditure (% of GDP)		Military Expenditure % of combined education and health expenditure		Average annual imports of non-nuclear arms	
		1960	1990-91	1960	1990-91	1988-92 <sup>8</sup>	1991 <sup>9</sup>
Israel	19	2.9	8.6	85	106	486	0.6
Kuwait	51	---	6.5	---	88	249	---
Saudi Arabia	67	5.7	14	150	151	1738	6.8
Syria	73	7.9	16.8	329	373	524	17.4
Libya	79	1.2	7.8	29	71	140	2.8
Iran	86	4.5	2.1	141	38	726	3.3
Jordan	98	16.7	10.6	464	138	73	2.9
Iraq	100	8.7	16	128	271	993	---
Lebanon	103	---	3.5	---	---	13	0.05
Egypt	110	5.5	4	117	52	659	8.4

Additionally, it compares the amount of money spent on the military compared to health and education. Lastly, it outlines, in \$US, the amount of money actually spent on arms and the percentage of its share with respect to other imports. Comparing the military expenditure of the nations in Table 2 to the developed nations indicates that Middle Eastern nations spend 8.34% of their GDP on arms and Developed Nations spend 3.4% of their GDP on arms (Human Development Report, 1994: 170)<sup>10</sup>. If the Middle East is spending twice as much money on arms than Developed Nations, then many important areas such as health and education are being neglected. However, today, Iran has one of the lowest GDP ratio percentages. Not even ten years ago, Iran was a main contributor to the instability in the Middle Eastern region. <sup>4</sup>

This change started in 1990 when Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iranian president, announced a \$394 US billion five-year plan for economic restructure. From this point forward, the Iranians have started to concentrate on improving the woes of their society." (Sadowsky, 1993:65). As well, "Iran cannot be, then, a driving force in the Middle East arms race ...Iran may not contribute much to abetting arms control, neither is it likely to hinder it, because regional arms control arrangements are likely to leave Iran more secure." (Sadowsky, 1993:65) This is just one nation who has made attempts to change its

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<sup>4</sup> - The author provides no evidence of how Iran has been a force of instability in the region. Therefore, this proposition could be regarded as an alleged accusation, mainly because Iran has been working hard to bring peace and stability in its neighborhood since long time ago. Iran's peace building measures go beyond of two decades ago in Caucasus and Central Asia (with regards to Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute as well as Tajikistan) and well as Afghanistan and later on in Iraq. This was the fact while the US has been an eminent destabilizing force in all vicinity of Iran throughout the Middle East....."(Editor)

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paradigm of purchasing arms for the sake of security. Iran has realized that this is not the way of securing prosperity for itself or its people.

To rectify problems associated to arms sales, modernization would be the answer of the future. Modernization is very important to the development of any nation. One definition considers modernization as a "process of economic and social change so much more rapid than that taking place in primitive and traditional societies that societies characterized by that process of change, that is, modern ones, are qualitatively and not just quantitatively different from the primitive and traditional ones." (Kautsky, 1980: 20) In spite of the different definitions that exist for the concept of modernization, there is one overriding notion which is common to all definitions: change. Regarding change, there must be a starting point, a transitional period, and an ending point. In all cases of modernization, the process is relatively the same. There must be a transitional process or phase in which all the aspects of the traditional society are examined where decisions must be made to determine which components should be changed quickly and which will be changed as a result of influence from other parts of society. An important question must be, has any or all of the nations in the Middle East started this transition into a modern society? Has arms sales prevented any movement? The best way to identify a transitional nation would be to analyze some of the indicators related to society.

### **Arms, Resources, and Social Indicators**

Examining the Arab states against Israel, which is a developed industrialized country in the Middle East region, it is easy to

understand that the Arab States need to improve their modernization within their country.

**Table 3 (Human development Report, 1994) - Societal Indicators**

Country	Life Expectancy		Adult Literacy Rate (%)		Real GDP per Capita		Infant Mortality Rate <sup>11</sup>	Total Expenditure on Health <sup>12</sup>	Total Expenditure on Education <sup>13</sup>	Radios per 1000 people	News Papers per 1000 people
	1960	1992	1970	1992	1960	1991	1992	1990	1991	1990	1990
Israel	69.5	75	---	---	3958	13460	---	4.2	6	47	17
Kuwait	59.6	74.6	54	74	---	---	15	---	---	33	21
Saudi Arabia	44.4	68.7	9	64	7612	10850	31	4.8	6.2	30	4
Syria	49.8	66.4	40	67	1787	5220	40	2.1	4.1	26	8.7
Libya	46.7	62.4	37	66	---	---	70	---	---	22	1.5
Iran	49.6	66.6	29	56	1985	4670	41	2.6	4.1	23	2.6
Jordan	47	67.3	47	82	1328	2895	37	3.8	5.9	25	5.6
Iraq	48.5	65.7	34	62	---	---	59	---	---	22	3.6
Lebanon	59.6	68.1	69	81	---	---	35	---	---	83	11.7
Egypt	46.2	60.2	35	50	557	3600	58	2.6	6.7	32	5.7

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For example, except for Kuwait, the life expectancy of an average person in most Arab countries is middle to low sixties. However, Israel's population life expectancy averages in the mid 70s. This disparity indicates that Israel has made the effort to ensure some resemblance of longevity for its people. To evaluate only the Arab nations, they have made huge gains by extending the life of their people on average over 20 years in only thirty years' time. This is a good indication that modernization is occurring. How much of this improvement is due only to oil revenues and not genuine care for their people remains to be seen.

Longevity is not the only social indicator which has important implications to the Middle East. Adult literacy is also very important. All the nations have made tremendous gains in this area. Saudi Arabia has made the greatest improvement, increasing its literacy rate from 9% to 64% in only twenty years. The only conclusion one could draw from this point is that most Arab nations are realizing the way to improve their nation is to invest money into society. Unfortunately, these positive figures are overshadowed by one very important statistic: the military expenditure vis-à-vis health and education.

Health and education are probably two of the most important social indicators which all countries are judged. In this case, the Arab nations must re-evaluate their position. In 1990, the industrialized nations, usually considered the West, spent, on average, 3.4% of their GDP on military arms and approximately 13.5% on health and welfare. The Middle East, as seen in Tables 1, 2, and 3, spent 12.5% of their GDP on military arms and 8.5% on health and education. The disparity of these figures indicates that the arms sale is still an important aspect of the Middle Eastern way of life. As well, the modernization which occurs may actually be more of a bi-product of

oil revenues as opposed to a concentrated effort to change. However, nations like Iran and Egypt, who spend 1/2 to 3/4 less on arms than on education and health are a shining example of an approach which will eventually be the norm in that region.

The concerns of each society vary depending on the country; however, there are some concerns which are very similar to each nation. The female-male gap is an example. In most of the Middle Eastern nations, the female literacy rate is approximately 65% that of the male literacy rate. As well, the percentage of women in administrative and managerial positions is very low. Only 4% of such positions are held by women in Kuwait, UAE has only 1%, Jordan has 14%, and Syria has 33% (Human Development Report, 1994). These numbers indicate that women have a second-class status. The numbers indicate that women are treated unfairly in Middle Eastern societies.

The last area of concern which has important implications regarding the modernization and effective growth of a nation deals with Rural-Urban gaps. In the case of the Middle East, most nations have a huge disparity. For example: Iran has 42% of its population as rural society, of those 70% have complete access to health facilities, 16% have access to water and 9% have access to sanitation. Saudi Arabia has a 26% rural population, 100% of these people have access to medical facilities, 74% to water and 30% to sanitation. Kuwait has only a 4% rural population, 100% access to medical facilities, 100% access to water, and 98% access to sanitation. These figures are deceiving because of the nomadic nature of the rural people. However, with the type of revenues that these countries make from their petroleum industry, one would think that if more money was spend on societal needs, the entire region would be 100% modernized.

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Present day problems with arms sales have still caused some enormous problems with the security of the region. For example, Lebanon's efforts to promote economic and regional stability with respect to Israel. Statements by senior Israeli military figures have indicated that the chances of war with Syria have increased, thus, undermining Beirut's peace efforts. Israel has offered security arrangements concerning Lebanon to prevent any arrangement being signed with Syria. However, these moves are seen by the Arabs as trying to drive a wedge between Beirut and Damascus (Lowry, 1997: 7). There have been allegations "that Iran was sending at least three Boeing 747 aircraft full of arms and humanitarian supplies to Syria every month for transfer to Hezbollah (Lowry, 1997: 9)." The old ideals of mistrust are still alive in the Middle East today, however, as recent events have indicated, such as Iran establishing warm diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia, the process of change has begun. If nations could continue down this path, the possibility of another Saddam Hussein would lessen.

Another example of arms sales causing problems in the Middle East would be Mikhail Timkin, first deputy general director of Russia's state-owned arms exporter, Rosvoorouzhenie, announcement of contracts worth \$1 billion had been completed with Iran (Hashim, 1997: 5). The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) is the largest non Arab regional naval force in the Persian Gulf. However, structurally, the IRIN consisted of an obsolescent surface fleet. Iran's destroyer, frigate and hovercraft fleet have seen no noticeable growth in capabilities in the 1970s and 1980s. In comparison to the West, Iran's surface fleet was archaic with regards to electronic warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and air defense assets. The fact that Iran had limited resources in the 1990's, the cost of new ocean vessels, the arms limitations enforced by the West, and a large fleet would be an easy

target for the Americans, the purchasing of a new navy seems unlikely. However, before Iran admits defeat, the IRIN will manage to wreak havoc with the oil suppliers using the Straits of Hormuz (Hashim, 1997: 5). The conflict between Middle Eastern and Western concerns is still prevalent today. The West, primarily the US, is still interfering in the affairs of the regions governments. Claiming strategic importance, the conflict between an international source and regional power will destabilize the region further. It is important that the Western concerns not overshadow the regional concerns for a change in both arms sales and security to become important realities.

Lastly, the end of the Cold War has observed the rise of military and arms relationships between seemingly unlikely allies such as: Turco-Israeli, Sino-Russian and Indo-Israeli relationships. Indo-Israeli military relations have taken off dramatically since 1992, when the two countries established formal diplomatic relations. Many countries, such as India, which had traditionally supported the Arab side in the Arab-Israeli conflict, secretly keep ties with Israel. The collapse of the Soviet Union left a void in availability of arms for India. As well, India was alarmed by the growing extent of Sino-Israeli arms transfers. It realized that it could not get Israel to desist from this market, but, it felt that it could obtain some of the same weapons and technologies that Israel was providing to China, a traditional adversary of India (Hashim, 1997:7). The arms sales in this case were important because of the parallel this type of situation has to the Middle East. Most of the Arab nations realize that it is virtually impossible to compete with nations such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, or Iraq with sheer numbers. However, to have some of the same technology would definitely increase their chances to counter any type of military threat that it would pose. The fact that Israel, or

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nations such as Syria, Iran<sup>5</sup>, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, also involve themselves in arms sales detracts from the important issues of peace and prosperity for the region's people. This is not to say that free enterprise is bad for the region, but, concentration of resources should be shifted from the military to more important societal issues such as health and education.

### **Eternal Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The varying degree of problems in the Middle East is not limited to those presented in this essay. Many important issues which, in themselves are complicated topics. The most obvious would be the Israeli-Palestinian issue. This 'peace process' has been a roller coaster ride over the last five years. The issues of land and sovereignty for the Palestinians will be a topic of heated discussion for many years to come. The Israelis stance has proven to cause great instability in the region. All Arab nations support the Palestinians; however, they are virtually powerless to act. The sale of arms caused by this issue has in itself been very lucrative. However, for security and reduction of arms regarding this issue to have any impact, the Israeli and Palestinian positions must change and a softer stance must be put forward. To fully understand the problems of the peace talks, a quick outline of the stalled peace talks is important. They are as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> - Based on the very same figures provided by the author in table 2 of the article, Iran is the sole country in the region with the least percentage of GDP appropriation to military expenditure, Therefore Iran should be excluded of any comparison with other actors in the Middle East terms of involvement in arm races or in outnumbering the rate of its military costs over the health and other welfare indexes. (Editor)

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Sept. 13, 1993: Israel and the PLO sign Declaration of Principles at the White House after secret negotiations in Oslo. It provides for gradual Israeli withdrawal from much of Gaza and the West Bank and limited transfer of authority to a new Palestinian Authority, with April 13, 1999, as the target date for completion of the process.

May 4, 1994: PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sign interim accord that brings the first pullout of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and Jericho and transfer of limited self-rule in those areas to the Palestinian Authority.

July 1, 1994: Arafat returns to Gaza for the first time since before the 1967 Middle East War to head the Palestinian Authority.

Sept. 28, 1995: Rabin and Arafat sign further interim accord providing for Israeli withdrawal from six more West Bank cities and calling for staged transfer of villages and rural areas to Palestinian

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administration and election of a  
Palestinian Council.

Nov. 4, 1995: Rabin is assassinated while leaving a Tel Aviv peace rally by a right-wing Israeli Jew who opposes the peace process. Shimon Peres succeeds him.

Dec. 27, 1995: Israel, under Peres, completes transfer to Palestinian control of Ramallah, the last of the six West Bank cities included in the Sept. 28 accord.

Early 1996: Yehiya Ayash, said by Israel to be the mastermind behind suicide bombings, is killed Jan. 5 when his cellular phone explodes. The militant Hamas faction vows revenge and suicide bombs in Israel kill 59 people, turning much of Israeli public opinion away from the peace process and imperiling Peres's government.

May 5, 1996: "Permanent Status" talks formally open, covering the most difficult issues, such as final borders and the status of Jerusalem, but make little headway.

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May 29, 1996: In national elections, Binyamin Netanyahu narrowly defeats Peres for prime minister; opponents of the peace process allied to Netanyahu take control of parliament.

Jan. 14, 1997: Agreement is reached on Israeli troop withdrawal from most of Hebron and other parts of the West Bank.

March 17, 1997: Israel begins construction of a vast new Jewish housing development in largely Arab East Jerusalem. Arafat and other Palestinian leaders condemn the move as an affront to the peace process. Arab League nations freeze relations with Israel (Hockstader, 1998).

As one can see, the problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians are deep-rooted and the process must not be abandoned. It is vitally important for the security of the region that all involved parties make a concerted effort to solve this ever-increasing problem. Until this problem is solved, there will be no peace in the Middle East for any nation.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the only destabilizing factor in the Middle East. A vicious circle has risen over the past twenty years. This circle deals with the pressures felt by nations as a result of their neighbors purchasing weapons. For example: Saudi

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Arabia has purchased \$26 US since the end of Desert Storm (Sadowsky, 1993:19-24). The arms purchases have put pressure on the Iranians to purchase arms to counter this action. Then the Syrians feel threatened and they do the same. Next, the Israelis must counter the Syrians and Iranians. This in turn puts pressure back on Saudi Arabia and the circle starts again. The only way to stop this circle of destruction is for two of the nations, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia today, to change their political views.

### **Perspectives**

The sale of arms has and is still having tremendous impact on the Middle Eastern region. The various reasons for exorbitantly high arms sales stems from three main reasons: Regional, Systemic and Internal. These three reasons have caused the arms sales in the 100's of billions of dollars over the last 20 years. It has had long reaching effects on the stability of the region and the international community.

The involvement of the international community has not been purely reactionary. The end of the Cold War has seen the US step-up its activity in the Middle East. As the world's only global policeman and largest arms dealer, a conflict of interests occur. However, the only conflict which seems to occur is if the interests of the US are threatened. The US has the ability, and usually exercises this ability, to force nations to adopt them as an ally against their enemies. Recently, with the influx of new arms suppliers, the US has lost some of its influence in the region. There are two simultaneous, yet contradictory, forces working in the Middle East: a peace process and an arms race. But with the peace process at an impasse, the purchase of arms has filled the void. For now, Israel is the main power in the Middle East,

with Iran and Egypt attempting to gain similar status.<sup>6</sup> However, nearly every country in the region is striving to modernize its forces, with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia; actively shopping for weapons again. (Rodgers, 1997) This has added pressure on suppliers to take more responsibility for their actions. However, not only the arms suppliers should take an active role by limiting arms sales, as well,

The United Nations has an important role to play in the field of international arms transfers and the eradication of illicit arms trafficking in accordance with its overall purposes and principles. The cooperation of the international community, however, is essential for the United Nations to be successful in those endeavors<sup>14</sup>.

However, the new arms dealers, under the watchful eye of the UN, must ensure that they do not become so aggressive as to sell a nation such as Iraq the knowledge required to develop weapons of mass destruction (nuclear weapons for instance).

Finally, the requirements of the society should have an impact on the purchasing of arms. To date, most Middle Eastern nations spend twice as much on arms than they do on healthcare and education. This type of political ideal does not enhance the development of any society. Each nation should address the concerns of their people, such as women's rights, literacy, sanitation, etc., to

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<sup>6</sup> - The facts on the ground do not support this claim since Israeli regime's army despite its sophisticated military hardware and a history of being triumphant in its wars with some Arab states of the region was bugged down and lost the war with Lebanese Hezbollah in summer 2006. To many analysts Iran is the main actor in the region due to its ever-increasing power and social capital as well as ideational outreach. (Editor)

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truly expand their nation. Actions such as interstate collaboration in social and development areas will only enhance the relations between the Middle Eastern nations. Economic relations would benefit all the nations to a great degree than military wariness. Eventually, the oil reserves will disappear, and if the nations of the Middle East do not expand and develop their societies, they will find themselves reverting back to the days of imperialist rule.

The Middle East is a vast and complex entity. To fully understand all the varying concerns, one would have to concentrate on the topic which affects all aspects of society. That is of militarization in the Middle Eastern region. Militarization does not necessarily have to stop completely for the security and societal concerns to be addressed; however, concentrating on more productive means to reduce the problems of that region would benefit the nation, region, and international community.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East will be used in this essay, however, it is important to note that the term Near East is starting to overshadow the term Middle East. The term Middle East was officially accepted by the international community after WWII.

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<sup>2</sup> The Arab world does have much common heritage. It can be traced back further than the creation of the Ottoman Empire. However, for this essay the actual similarities will not be dealt with due to its short length. However, it is an important unifying point for all Arab nations even though these nations do find it difficult to interact internationally.

<sup>3</sup> Ali e. Hillal Dessouki is a well known author who worked for the Minister of Information, Egypt (1975-1976) and is a professor in the Faculty of Economics and Political Science and director of the Centre for Political Studies at Cairo University.

<sup>4</sup> The Baghdad Pact was an agreement between Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. It was also signed by Britain. This Pact was to curb the Soviet influence within the region. The fact that the Americans did not send a representative and Egypt feeling that this Pact may undermine its influence within the Arab League had a tremendous affect upon the stability within the region. Egypt realized that the balance of power was shifting in the area and did not want to become a puppet state like the others in the region (in their view), therefore, Egypt turned and embraced the USSR for its future military requirements.

<sup>5</sup>*Britain, France Veto Ceasefire*, (The Globe and Mail, 1956).

<sup>6</sup>*Defend Dignity, Nasser Tells Britain, France*, (The Globe and Mail, 1956).

<sup>7</sup> The revolution has been considered to be the first Islamic revolution in the modern world by Western commentators and that it set the trend later to be followed by (Imam) Khomeini in Iran.

<sup>8</sup> In US\$ millions

<sup>9</sup> As % of national imports.

<sup>10</sup> This report is published for the United Nations Development Programmed.

<sup>11</sup> Infant Mortality Rate per 1,000 live births in 1992

<sup>12</sup> Total Expenditure on Health as % of GDP 1990

<sup>13</sup> Total Expenditure on Education as % of GDP 1991

<sup>14</sup> General and Complete Disarmament: Consolidation of Peace Through Practical Disarmament Measures, 52<sup>nd</sup> session, Item 71 (I), Report of the Secretary-General from internet site:  
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/Firstcom/SGreport52/a52289.html>