

War and Militarization: US Arms Sales to the Middle East

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“The United States is selling 30 billion dollars worth of F-15 fighter planes to Saudi Arabia.” “Saudi Arabia will buy 84 new planes and 70 jets from the United States.” “About a year ago, the US Congress approved a 10-year contract worth 60 billion dollars with Saudi Arabia according to which Riyadh will buy F-15 fighter jets, helicopters, various missiles, bombs, early warning radars, and night vision equipment from the United States.” “The United States has agreed to sell F-16 fighter jets, tanks, military helmets, and off-road military vehicles to Iraq.” “The United States and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will sign a contract worth 3.5 billion dollars for arms sales to UAE.”

All the above sentences were, in fact, news titles revealing developments which have already taken place or will take place in the future and all of them are about selling arms to the countries in the Middle East. Apart from proving a contradiction between the proclaimed policy of the United States and its actual behavioral model, they have drawn attention from experts. The proclaimed policy of the United States is based on promoting democracy and civil values while its behavioral model pursues the use of all means of hard power, including the military power, to promote and secure the United States’ national interests and expand its areas of influence. As a result, this paper is meant to provide in-depth analysis of the final goal and mission of the United States’ diplomatic apparatus which is pursued through selling arms to the Middle Eastern countries. To do this, five scenarios which can be used to explain Washington’s policy for arming countries in the Middle East will be discussed and some of them will be rejected here.

Discussion and Rejection of US Scenarios

1. An Effort to Revive the Past Defense Policies in the Region

According to this scenario, selling arms to the Middle East is nothing new. It has been both done in the past, and will continue to be done in the future. A glance at political equations of the Middle East in 1960s and 1970s with a focus on the Middle East and the arrangement of US political pawns in the region in line with Washington’s hegemonic balance policy will be helpful in revealing the main reason behind selling arms to regional countries.

Existence of a pre-revolution Iran and Saudi Arabia as two regional power poles, which worked under domination of the Western superpower to maintain stability in the region, has been considered good evidence in favor of this proposition. One country constituted the military pole with the other one serving as an economic pole which, in line with the former

US President Richard Nixon's policy, formed two pillars of stability in the region where increasing power of one pole, helped to increase the power of the other pole. After Iran detached itself from that system, the United States replaced it with the Zionist regime of Israel as its military arm in the region and, of course, as a substitute for Iran to maintain hegemonic stability in the Middle East. As Iran's military and economic might started to rise, the United States had to do more for arming pro-American powers in the region and also to reproduce its defense policies in the Middle East.

Although this scenario has had historical background, it falls short of analyzing the existing conditions in regional equations. Firstly, arming Saudi Arabia is a potential risk because as much as the monarchy can help promote US policies in the region (due to its subservience to Washington), it can also pose a threat to regional interests of the United States (due to possibility of power transfer to Saudi people which has not been ignored by the American think tanks). As a result, it is also a potential threat to Israel.

Secondly, this scenario could have been more realistic if the United States had sufficed to selling arms to Saudi Arabia without doing the same for other regional states. However, the United States is also selling arms to Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar (as was pointed out in the introductory part of this article).

Thirdly, and most importantly, arming Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, will finally disturb strategic balance in the Middle East, which is the main focus of this scenario, and this will not make Israel happy. However, the fact that Israel has remained silent toward such arms deals is, per se, enough evidence to prove that the final goal of such arms deals goes well beyond simple defense policies of the United States.

2. Creating Arms Race in the Region and Making the Region Unstable to Reduce Oil Price

Another possible scenario which has been proposed to explain US behavior in the region is that Washington aims to intensify military rivalries in the Middle East, so that, member states of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will not be able to reach a consensus on increasing the oil price. There is no doubt that the US industrial cycle is based on oil and if exporters of the black gold could reach an agreement to increase its price, it would be detrimental to Washington. This scenario is also unacceptable because although it may explain part of the truth, it falls short of explaining all of it. There have been many instances of military conflict and arms race, which have taken place when oil prices have been quite high an example of which, was the Arab – Israeli conflict. In addition, recent threats by Iran about possible closure of the strategic Strait of Hormuz through which 40 percent of the world's total crude oil passes, on the one hand, and inattention of the US government to that threat, which was proven through signing of the sanctions law against Iran's central bank by the US President Barack Obama, on the other hand, prove that oil is not an prime concern for the US foreign policy.



3. US Effort to Create International Crisis in order to Prove its Presence

"The logic of stability is based on upper layer hegemony or the full (and of course visible) half of the new world order in which international calm exists. The hidden layer and hidden half of this policy is behind the doors of the American think tanks and the country's intelligence services and this is against the United States' proclaimed and primary policy."

This proposition will be explored here. I think that encouraging civil and international unrest in different countries is one of the US goals because pursuing “the logic of creating unrest” at international level is considered a way to establish hegemonic stability. It will also help to explain US presence in various parts of the world as well as Washington’s effort to increase arms sales to the Middle Eastern countries.

Selling arms to Arab countries is a reason why people and civil institutions in these countries consider their governments as US stooges. The first idea that occurs to one’s mind is that insecurity in countries buying US arms is in favor of Washington’s interests because it will give legitimacy to US presence in those countries as an “agent of order” in the international system of power distribution. Meanwhile, in case of international stability, there will be no need to US power. This is also another factor, in addition to the usual US logic about existence of external enemy, which can foster national unity in a country which has been already swept by anti-Wall Street (or anti-Capitalism) civil movement.

4. Justification for Strengthening Military Power of Israel

According to the next scenario, the United States is arming Middle Eastern countries in order to find a justification for selling more arms to Tel Aviv. Since selling arms to regional states is considered by the world’s public opinion as a threat to Israel and its military system, Washington will be then seem justified to sell more arms to Israel as well. The United States has no theoretical logic or paradigm in its effort to boost military power of Israel and the only means it can justify that is through militarization of other Middle Eastern states. In other words, to convince the world’s public opinion to sympathize with Israel and accept its effort at military buildup, the United States needs a powerful reason. An arms race among neighboring countries of Israel will provide good grounds to justify more weapons sales to Tel Aviv.

5. An Effort to Save Stagnant Economy of the United States

The US economy is currently grappling with one of the worst instances of stagnation in its history and some analysts have even drawn an analogy to the severe economic crisis in 1929. Therefore, in order to reinvigorate its economy by generating wealth and increasing gross domestic product as well as to solve such dire social problems as unemployment, poverty, and civil unrest, the US government needs to give its national economy necessary impetus to get out of the current critical situation. Injecting money into the US ailing economy is a factor which can relatively help it to cope with the existing problems.

It is only due to lack of diplomatic finesse or subservience that the political elites in regional countries have easily ignored this issue which is perhaps one of the main goals behind the US effort to encourage arms race in the Middle East. By pursuing this policy, the United States has not only been spreading instability in the region under the pretext of bolstering stability, but also been covering up the dire situation of its national economy as an arms race in the Middle East is a good way out of the current critical conditions for Washington.

The remarks of the White House spokesman after announcement of the arms deal with Saudi Arabia can further corroborate this scenario. He said, the military contract with Saudi Arabia will create more than 50,000 jobs in the United States and contribute 3.5 billion dollars a year to the US economy. It, therefore, goes without saying that the United States may use any excuse to encourage regional countries buy more weapons. That excuse may be a hypothetical threat from Iran, the necessity of creating stability and new world order,

bolstering military strength of Israel, instilling hegemonic stability in the world, a regional arms race, or any other conceivable excuse.

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