



WILPF CALL FOR PEACE RESOURCE GUIDE #5 (Feb2024)

Your Tax Dollars at Work in the Middle East

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"Children stand on the rubble from a Saudi Arabian bombing raid in Yemen, where the U.S. is financing attacks on civilians contrary to international law, as well as a blockade of food and medical relief." From *Middle East Monitor* under Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0. Photo by Mohammed Hamoud.

A resource guide on how your U.S. tax dollars purchase weapons and enable wars in the Middle East & North Africa

Table of Contents:

Introduction

(1) Arms Sales to the Middle East and their influence on U.S. Foreign Policy

(2) History of Congressionally-approved Arms Sales to the Middle East

(3) Do Arms Sales Create Jobs?

(4) Increase in Arms Sales over the past few years

(5) A Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone

(6) Rethinking our National Priorities

(7) Various Actions WILPF members can choose to take

- Move the Money

- Divest from the War Machine

(8) Move the Saved Money to Projects in the Middle East

(9) Sample letter to your Congressional representatives

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

According to a November 2019 study conducted by the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs at Brown University, more than 801,000 people have died as a direct result of fighting since 9/11 due to wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan conducted since 2001. More than 335,000 of them were civilians. Another 21 million people were displaced due to the violence. The cost of this wanton destruction has been \$6.4 trillion since 9/11.

For some perspective on these figures, note that this is \$1 trillion more than all federal spending during the previous fiscal year. This adds up to approximately \$32 million per hour spent on war! The cost to taxpayers is more than \$8,000 per person spent on the Iraq war alone.

Recently, our tax dollars have gone to a coalition consisting of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, who used the money to fight in Yemen, where a dispute between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels escalated once these other nations became involved. The U.S. has been supplying weapons and logistical support to this coalition, while supporting a blockade against the importation of food and medical supplies, which caused the civilian population to develop food insecurity and suffer an outbreak of cholera and other contagious diseases.

Some of our tax dollars also go to support one single nation, Israel. This is despite the fact that Israel is one of the world's most affluent nations, with a per capita income slightly below that of the European Union, and with an unemployment rate lower than that of the United States. According to the organization If Americans Knew, Israel receives approximately **\$8.5 million a day** from our taxes. <https://ifamericansknew.org> Israel has a population of about 8.7 million people. Many have questioned why a nation that is so well off is entitled to receive "aid" from the U.S. Isn't our foreign aid supposed to assist those nations that are suffering financially?

And, although the aid is ostensibly for the economic benefit of the Israeli population, it is all "fungible" (a term which means that, once the money goes into the recipient's coffers, it becomes fully available for uses other than those it was designated to serve). The infusion of dollars is used for construction of illegal settlements on land that has been taken from its Palestinian Arab owners by force, and to purchase weaponry used to suppress that population, in violation of international laws about occupation of native peoples.

(1) Arms Sales to the Middle East and their influence on US Foreign Policy

Arms sales historically have been one important means for Congress to influence U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Arms sales are an important tool that states can use to exercise their influence. The Middle East has long been a key driver of the global trade in weapons, to a disproportionate degree relative to its population. Some states in this heavily militarized and contested region are major arms purchasers, empowered by partnerships with outside supporters and wealth derived from vast energy reserves. Others have relied on grants and loans from the United States and other partners to supplement their more modest resources and to meet defense goals. In part due to external relationships, some Middle Eastern countries have developed military-industrial bases that supply some of their own defense needs and/or generate profits through arms exports.

The United States is the single greatest arms supplier to the Middle East by volume and value, and has been for decades. However, other major producers like Russia, France, and China are also key players in the region, and their transfers of some sophisticated but smaller volume and value items, such as armed unmanned aerial vehicles and air defense systems, may have outsized effects on regional security. These countries' respective strategies and goals for arms sales appear to differ in some ways. A short article by USNI News is found here:

<https://news.usni.org/2020/11/24/report-to-congress-on-middle-east-arms-sales> , it highlights data from this congressional report:

Congressional report on arms sales

A 64-page report written for Congressional representatives by the Congressional Research Service entitled “**Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy** (2020) can be found here: <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/mideast/R44984.pdf>

Pages 14 to 24 of this report to Congress correlate recipient countries with the arms manufacturing companies or countries that supply them.

The USNI news article cited earlier concludes by considering a number of arms sales-related issues of congressional interest. Both the executive and legislative branches have constitutional prerogatives regarding U.S. arms sales, and congressional action related to arms sales has influenced U.S. policy in the Middle East. Congress requires the executive branch to ensure that sales to regional states not adversely affect Israel's military advantage over its neighbors (or qualitative military edge, QME), and arms transfer policy has figured prominently in debates over several countries and crises, such as the Saudi-led coalition's military efforts in Yemen since 2015. Congress also continues to consider arms sales in the context of broader policy issues, such as human rights. *The report discusses a number of options available to Members of Congress to influence arms sales to the region, including*

those related to oversight, reporting requirements, checks on executive action, and conditions on transfers or funding.

(2) History of Congressionally-approved Arms Sales to the Middle East

Since the end of World War II, the Middle East has at times featured prominently in congressional deliberations over U.S. arms sales. Members' questions over specific arms sales to states in the region have helped frame the terms of the arms sales debate, and have shaped the broader, sometimes contentious relationship between the executive and legislative branches over U.S. foreign policy. In the aftermath of World War II, **the provision of arms became a major area of competition in the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.** Through arms sales, the two superpowers sought to reinforce nations within their spheres of influence, and to entice nonaligned states to support them.

The Middle East has consistently been one of the most contested regions, with the United States providing weapons to partners like Saudi Arabia and pre-revolutionary Iran, and Soviet weapons flowing to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Some policymakers, reflecting currents within public opinion, reacted to this postwar military buildup with calls for a more measured approach, leading to the passage of the Arms Control and Disarmament Act in 1961, which began by declaring "a world ... free from the scourge of war and the dangers and burdens of armaments" to be the fundamental goal of U.S. policy. To achieve this goal, Congress created the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), an independent agency charged with coordinating research on international arms sales and managing U.S. participation in international meetings and negotiations convened to discuss arms control. After the Nixon Administration acted unilaterally with regard to specific arms transactions with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 (P.L. 93- 559), which laid the basis for the system that still exists in its essential form today." From <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/mideast/R44984.pdf> (page 13)

(3) Do Arms Sales Create Jobs?

One argument often presented for maintaining the status quo is that more jobs are supported by arms manufacturing than would be in the private sector. Is this true? According to a report on the Forbes website, Clarke Cooper noted a figure of 5,700 jobs for every \$1 billion in arms sales in July 2020. As cited by an outside analyst, Commerce Department data estimates that \$1 billion in arms exports supports approximately 4,000 jobs, fewer than those supported by other export industries. These figures can be found at the Forbes website link below.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2019/12/16/arms-sales-middle-east-soar/?sh=4af4618cfea8>

(4) Increase in Arms Sales over the Past Few Years

Globally, U.S. arms sales had increased by 42% up to 2019, to a total of \$69.7 billion, the highest level since 2010. But sales to the Middle East outpaced the overall trend and accounted for more than a third of the worldwide total.

Here are two examples of what arms sales look like:

- 1) The biggest customer for American arms in 2019 in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region was Morocco, which agreed to deals worth some \$10.3 billion, almost all of it going to the Royal Moroccan Air Force. In all, Morocco agreed to \$10.3 billion worth of defense deals with the U.S. in 2019.

In March, the State Department announced a deal to sell \$3.8 billion worth of F-16 aircraft and associated equipment to Rabat, (Morocco) to be built by Lockheed Corporation. Since then it has also firmed up plans to upgrade Morocco's existing fleet of F-16 fighter jets at a cost of \$985 million and an order of 36 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters was placed, at a cost of some \$4.25 billion. In all, Morocco has agreed \$10.3 billion worth of defense deals with the U.S. in that year (2019).

- 2) Most of the rest of the spending has come from the Gulf countries, with the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait between them agreeing to \$14.2 billion worth of deals.

Among the largest sales during the year were a \$2.5 billion agreement to supply Bahrain with a Patriot missile system, a \$2.7 billion deal to provide the UAE with Patriot missiles and a \$3 billion deal to sell 24 Apache attack helicopters to Qatar. These are recent arms sales that help us understand the type of sales that are made. It is hard to discover recent figures, but the figures below give us a pretty good idea.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the U.S. is the world's **largest arms exporter**, racking up more than a third of all international arms deals between 2014 and 2018. See here <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2018>

Forbes also indicated that Saudi Arabia was the primary recipient of American arms, which added up to 22% of all U.S. defense exports during those years. A total of some \$25.5 billion in deals were signed in that time period with nine Middle Eastern nations. Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2019/12/16/arms-sales-middle-east-soar/?sh=4d41dd49fea8>

(5) A Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone

We need to remember that our aim in the Middle East is to create a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. This also means for the region to be free of nuclear weapons. For this to happen, all countries must be bound by a strong treaty that will authorize checks in full transparency. It means peace treaties and some justice on the ground so all can prosper. It means serious reconstruction and assistance to the countries that have been bombed with impunity.

Thus far, it is known that Israel has somewhere between 200-400 nuclear warheads, and that Iran is approaching nuclear capability, and also that Saudi Arabia is interested in the development of nuclear weapons.

This is not the direction in which we should be moving. We need to move into the phase of democratic reconstruction with checks and balances so corruption is not rampant and people can rebuild their lives. We hope that eventually the Middle East could develop a booming economy.

What is a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone?

For a full explanation of how this works, see these websites:

- <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mewmdfz>
- <https://www.un.org/disarmament/update/the-launch-of-the-middle-east-weapons-of-mass-destruction-free-zone-project/>

(6) Rethinking Our National Priorities

US taxpayers currently are paying \$32.08 million per hour for the total cost of war since 2001 of more than \$5,334,595,982,678.

- **US taxpayers have been paying \$10.5 million per hour for war debt since 2001.**
- The world is spending almost \$3 trillion a year on arms.

That's the estimate of the U.S. government. The State Department's World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers (WMEAT) report examined global military spending for 2007 to 2017.

- **Here's What You Need to Remember: The United States accounted for 79% of the global arms trade, or an average of \$143 billion per year, followed by the European Union at 10%, Russia at 5% and China at less than 2%.**

“From 2007 through 2017, in constant 2017 U.S. dollar terms, the annual value of world military expenditures appears to have risen about 11 percent to 33 percent, from about \$1.51 trillion to \$2.15 trillion in 2007 to about \$1.77 trillion to \$2.88 trillion in 2017, and have averaged between \$1.72 trillion and \$2.61 trillion for the 11-year period,” according to the State Department’s Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, which compiled the report.

Sources: <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/cost-of-war/?state=00>

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/world-war-humanity-spending-nearly-3-trillion-weapons-annually-177859?fbclid=IwAR2Cjuob1-KPQW586L2UYRIqM4BqgMIHCFFtUhfkxzfZ58SttISSgDpPig>

Another excellent source for information on funding human needs can be found at:

<https://moneyforhumanneeds.org/downloads/>

(7) Various Actions WILPF Members Can Choose to Take:

There are two major types of actions that we could participate in to reduce the amount of money being used by the US Government to provide Middle East North Africa (MENA) countries with weapons and to prevent US weapons manufacturing companies from selling weapons to MENA countries.

A) Move the Money

Moving the money means moving the money from the Pentagon to social spending. It is our tax dollars and we should have control over how that money is spent. Our taxes go into covering the cost of US military bases, costs of conventional weapons, atomic weapons, offensive and defensive weapons, etc.

We want to move the money to social spending for schools, health care, creating local food stores, aid for drug rehab, aid to new immigrants, low income housing, job creation, rehabbing the ecology, cleaning up toxic sites, rebuilding infrastructures and so on. All of these types of spending would be of benefit to Americans if the money were to be redirected to domestic uses; or to help the people in the Middle East who are suffering badly from the wars we are enabling there – see further down.

(i) One example:

To learn about how this was done in New York, as an example that can help you, go to this Facebook description: <https://www.facebook.com/MTMnyc/>

Some of what that report says is quoted here:

“WHAT IS MOVE THE MONEY in New York?” We are a coalition of some 60 New York City organizations— labor, peace, community, lay, civil rights, tenants—who have come together to urge passage of **NYC Council Resolution, 747A**.

The resolution was introduced in February 2019 by Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez ... MTM-NYC has collected over 3,000 postcards addressed by constituents to their Council members, urging passage of the resolution.” It was passed in 2021.

(ii) Another example:

The American Friend Service Committee (AFSC) has a complete tool kit on Move the Money AFSC: <https://www.afsc.org/resource/move-money-action-toolkit>

Download fact sheets that provide information about cutting military spending, raising taxes on the wealthiest Americans, job creation, and protecting those in the greatest need

1-They have fact sheets, which can be found at:

<https://www.afsc.org/document/move-money-fact-sheets>

2-They also have resolutions and much more, which are at:

<https://www.afsc.org/document/move-money-resolutions>

B) Divest from the War Machine

Are your savings invested in guns or military contractors?

Search to find the weapons stocks within your investments

<https://www.divestfromwarmachine.org/>

- 1) Most of these weapons go to brutal military campaigns that harm and kill civilians. In fact, the U.S. now supplies military assistance — in the form of military or weapons training, military arms financing, and weapons transfers — to 73% of the world’s dictatorships.
- 2) This means **that if we have pension funds invested in corporations** that produce weapons or military gear, **we need to take our funds out and invest them towards** a green economy or towards corporations or other funds that support life and not wars. U.S. military contractors fuel global warfare through the international arms trade.

(8) Move the Saved Money to Projects in the Middle East

Another aspect of this restructuring of the use of our tax dollars could mean that we take responsibility for the death, destruction, and dislocation that have been caused by this arms trade. The redirection of our tax dollars could take the form of reparations to the countries which have been damaged because of the weapons we have been financing.

There are a multitude of projects that could be undertaken to restore infrastructure, rebuild homes, businesses, and other structures damaged by warfare, and provide medical aid and needed food assistance in the nations where the arms we financed have wreaked havoc. This is especially true where the persons most affected have been civilians. The most obvious places where the monies could be redirected are Iraq and Afghanistan. But our tax dollars have been used (perhaps more to the point, abused) by Israel to bomb such places as the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. And both of those areas suffer greatly from restrictions and/or embargoes on food and medical supplies.

Although we would like to be able to break the costs of such recovery efforts into a dollar amount, this is not possible due to the effects of rapidly fluctuating rates of exchange, inflation, and other factors. Instead, we will say that the U.S. dollar can do a great deal of good, as it remains strong against the currencies in most of the nations that have been greatly damaged as a result of the use of U.S. armaments in both wars and military operations that have been carried out against civilian populations.

Among the potential uses for these redirected funds might be the rebuilding of schools and hospitals, the purchase of medical and food supplies, small business loans, the decontamination of rivers and other water supplies, and the stabilization of banking and the monetary sector for the benefit of both business and personal use. In most areas where widespread bombing has taken place, the re-establishment of electricity, gas, and water infrastructure will lead to stability where none exists at present.

There is a side-effect of such a change in priorities. Where the U.S. is viewed as a destabilizing actor, an enemy, or the cause of much misery at the current time, such acts of reconstruction could go a long way toward reducing the animosity which is currently fueling ongoing conflict. It can be hoped that the re-ordering of priorities and the shift away from military spending could lead to the cessation of hostilities, which would diminish any perceived need to continue with the arms trade.

(9) Sample letter to your Congressional representatives

If you believe that such a change in U.S. priorities would be beneficial, please write to your Representatives and Senators. Here is a sample letter, but we also suggest that you use your own words after reading the information in this resource guide:

Dear

As your constituent, I am writing to request that you support legislation that will reduce the amount of money being spent to further the international arms trade. I am appalled by the wanton destruction caused by the use of my tax dollars, and I feel that the money could be better spent elsewhere.

There is no reason that we should be allowing our tax dollars to destroy other nations' infrastructure, to kill both combatants and civilians, and to create situations in which large segments of society are inadequately housed, clothed, fed, and treated in health care facilities. What is happening in the Middle East is perhaps the best example of this abuse of my tax dollars.

I realize that there is a strong lobby that wants to continue support of the arms suppliers, but there is no reason to do so. We were once a nation admired for its humanitarian work, and I prefer that my country be admired. I feel less safe when my nation is feared rather than admired. What is being done in my name is a constant source of shame, and I would rather be proud of my country, knowing that my tax dollars are spent creating a better world.

Sincerely,

Remember: Between 2012 and 2016, U.S. arms producers were responsible for a full one-third of major global arms exports.

How do Subsidies Work?

It is important to remember that even if US weapons are sold to other Middle East countries, for the most part they are sold with "subsidies" that are coming out of our taxes; the subsidies make the weapons much cheaper. So the weapons are built with our tax dollars and then are sold with subsidies that make these arms the cheapest on the market, and that assures us the predominance of the market.

Example: We used to give subsidies to land mines factories. We sold landmines cheaply, and we also attempted to repair the damage they did, so our weapons systems are a loop in which the tax payers are the complete losers.

We will be writing another report on subsidies.

Conclusion

As a nation, the U.S. spends more money than any other to create destruction in the Middle East and North Africa, an area known as the MENA region. Our tax dollars are spent on furthering wars around the world, but the MENA region has suffered more than any other area. This is a result of the arms trade in which the U.S. engages.

Whether it is the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere, or in domestic disputes such as the Israeli-Arab conflicts (between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and its neighboring states), the result is the same: Death, destruction, injury, and displacement.

We call for an end to the arms trade and for the creation of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone.

The U.S. WILPF Middle East Peace and Justice Action Committee encourages an end to this abuse of our tax dollars. We urge you to use the information in this guide and to write to your representatives in government, requesting that the arms trade be halted, or at least reduced. Our government needs to know that a majority of citizens want this to happen. Once they are convinced that this is important to us, they will hopefully make the needed changes, and help us to create a more peaceful world.