

Pyrrhic defeat and American foreign policy in the Middle East: Achieving success through failure

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East from a political-military perspective. Using Pyrrhic defeat theory (success through failure), one could explicate the intentions and consequences of American involvement in the Middle East region. By taking into consideration the prevalence of U.S. involvement through decades of building and maintaining military bases, arms sales, and political intrusion and involvement in the region, a clear pattern has come to light. Examination of this pattern demonstrates that U.S. foreign policy revolves around a policy of failure for decades. That such failure, although originally unintended, works out to U.S. advantage, ensuring a lasting economic and political involvement based on military Keynesianism and a justification for U.S. political involvement.

Keywords: U.S. foreign policy, Middle East, military, military bases, military expenditure, defense contractors, defense department, pentagon.

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INTRODUCTION

Pyrrhic defeat theory—winning through losing or success through failure—is a concept developed by Jeffery Reiman in order to demystify the maladies of the American criminal justice system. His objective is to explain the reasons why the American criminal justice system has failed in reducing crime and in the disproportionate imprisonment of minorities, and the high rates of incarcerations without serious results. He argues that all institutions that make up the American criminal justice system, including the court system, are designed to fail; that such failure perpetuates the extant social stratification in both realms of political power and economic gain and maintains the extant class hierarchy (Reiman, 2006). Through my research on the subject of American foreign policy in the Middle East¹, I have encountered the same type of policy making as far as maintaining a rationale for United States to remain in the region as inevitably instrumental for stability. United

States foreign policy in the Middle East has failed over and over again in terms of creating long-term or short-term peace. Since 1958, when President Eisenhower deployed 14,000 troops to Lebanon, U.S. presence in this volatile region has correlated with more conflict, more violence, and more war. These clashes have occurred within countries, intra-nationally, e.g., Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt; or they were wars between countries, internationally, e.g., Iran-Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria-Lebanon; and a brewing conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan due mainly to the recent collusion of Afghan and Pakistani fundamentalists.

Whether the United States has enhanced or reduced the conflict through diplomacy, negotiations, financial loans, military involvement or sales of arms will be examined. Before we get into specific cases of war and discontent Pyrrhic victory, Pyrrhic defeat and achieving success through failure, will be explained.²

¹ For the purposes of this paper the Middle East includes: Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, Kuwait, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

² As will be explained in this paper, pyrrhic defeat is a concept developed by Jeffery Reiman to delineate the problems of the American criminal justice system.

Pyrrhic victory is defined as a victory in which the winning side has lost so much—military equipment, soldiers, high ranking officers, money, and allies—that it really amounts to a defeat because so many resources have been relinquished. For example, a territory was gained and the enemy was conquered, but nearly the entire winning army—soldiers and arms—were lost. Furthermore, it has cost the winning side a tremendous amount of resources to point of irreparability. It is essentially losing everything through a victory or success.

Pyrrhic defeat, however, is the opposite. In this case we have victory through failure. While it seems that American effort to create stability in the Middle East has failed, the effort however, has had tremendous gains in rationalizing American political and military presence along with enormous profits in arms sales. Therefore, the unresolved conflict between Palestine and Israel, war in Iraq or formerly Saddam's 'weapons of mass destruction', Iran's nuclear program, the Taliban in Afghanistan, Islamic radicalism, fundamentalism and extremism are all failures. In essence it is the U.S. failing in its mission to bring modernization and democracy to the Middle East. Policies to resolve these conflicts have failed, but the U.S. is unwilling to give up militarism as a solution because it has gained so much politically and financially. As Kolko (1994) puts it: the "same policies that to varying degrees have produced disasters for the United States are still considered the only way to relate to the continuous and growing problems of a world that was already far too complex for it to manage fifty years ago".

Furthermore, what is categorized as success is American military and political involvement correlated with U.S. control of politics and the arms market for the U.S. which is one of the most, if not the most, lucrative businesses in the world. American involvement is perceived to be so fundamental and crucial for bringing stability to the region that its hegemony is very seldom questioned. Seldom asked is the question what gives the United States the right to intervene in Middle Eastern affairs. Thus, through failure to create better democratic conditions the U.S. justifies its political and military involvement in the Middle East. It is not my contention that such policy is solely practiced by the United States, England and France have persistently followed the same type of policy. However, it is US foreign policy that effectively plays a major role in the Middle East. A simple comparison of the number of American military bases versus the British or French would clarify any doubt as to which especially prevails in military involvement.

There is no claim here that the U.S. has always conspired to cause war and violence in the Middle East to perpetuate its war economy. However, since the early 1980s, when arms sales to oil-rich countries were found to be very lucrative and maintaining bases gave the U.S. military political control of the region, American presence became a fundamental necessity for the region in the eyes of both U.S. and many nations in the Middle East.

There are consistencies and patterns within the U.S. foreign policy practices in the Middle East that, once analyzed, certain conclusions can be made. It is the task of social scientists to find patterns of behavior and explain them. As Reiman correctly states: "When we find patterns, particularly patterns that serve some people's interests, we are inclined to think of these patterns as intended by those whose interests are served, as somehow brought into being because they serve those interests" (Reiman, p. 5).

American foreign policies were not intentionally designed to fail, but have gradually developed into lucrative failures. The result has been a foreign policy that not only fails to stabilize the Middle East but also serves the interests of America's powerful political and economic sectors. Consequently those who could change this policy do not feel the necessity to do so and therefore it continues.

This study utilized the theories of Simmel (1955) and Coser (1956), to explain how conflict in the Middle East has led to some favorable consequences of social cohesion and consensus among Americans. Put more simply, conflict with an out-group creates in-group cohesion. The threat of communism during almost fifty years of Cold War and, more currently, terrorism have both served to create cohesion and solidarity in the U.S. in the face of a powerful, sometimes mysterious enemy. As Simmel argues:

A state of conflict, however, pulls the members so tightly together and subjects them to such uniform impulse that they either must get completely along with, or completely repel, one another. This is the reason why war with the outside is sometimes the last chance for a state ridden with inner antagonisms to overcome these antagonisms, or else to break up definitely (p. 87).

The enemy does not have to be real, but rather a mere perception. As long as the belief of a threat exists the possibility of unity is stronger. The threat of an enemy "may or may not exist in objective reality, but the group must feel that they do. Social perception of an outside threat may be distorted, but its effect on the in-group may be the same as that of undistorted perception of objective threat" (Coser, 1956:104). Using W.I. Thomas' famous quotation, "if men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences," Coser states: "if men define a threat as real, although there may be little or nothing in reality to justify this belief, the threat is real in its consequences—and among these consequences is the increase of group cohesion" (p. 107). Like the threat of a Soviet (communist) invasion during the Cold War in the past, currently terrorism has created a consensus that American military involvement is justified world-wide.

One may think of American militarization of the Middle

East in the same light as military buildup and nuclear standoff of the Cold War. Both policies, although not intended to become a focal point of the economy, consequently became too rewarding and profitable to give up. The Cold War era has given way to the 'War on Terror,' or as Tom Nairn put it: "Armageddon has been replaced by the ethnic Abyss" (Nairn, 1997).

Oil is often claimed to be the rationale behind the U.S. obsession with the Middle East, but U.S. interests are far more complicated than just a commodity, albeit a scarce one. Japan, China, and most of Europe get the majority of their oil from the Middle East, but no measure of such involvement is seen by any of these nations. It is a simple matter of paying for the oil the nation needs. Anyone familiar with the relationship between OPEC and U.S. oil companies will know how the former bends over backwards to accommodate the latter.

Nonetheless, there is certain political power that is derived from controlling such a scarce commodity, which is what interests the United States. Yet political power is still not the main reason for American involvement. The argument is this: the U.S. economy in general and more specifically, defense contractors, both small and large, have a lot to gain from the violence and constant warfare sweeping the Middle East. For that precise reason, all American administrations, starting with President Dwight Eisenhower, have rationalized their presence and involvement in the Middle East through one main argument: that the people (Arabs and Muslims) in the Middle East are against democracy, modernization, equality, justice, and freedom; and that they are willing to kill and be killed to ensure that none of these Western achievements spread in the Middle East. In the words of General Anthony Zinni, "Arabs are a people obsessed by injustice." With current conflicts fomented by ISIS and other similar organizations in the Middle East, this assessment to the public seems more and more true. As we observe what is purported on the surface the global view of the Middle East becomes more consistent with General Zinni.

Although the United States holds a strong political presence in the region—dating back to the 1950s—political involvement would be virtually impossible without its equally strong military presence. The sales of arms to the region and a direct American military presence existed in the 1960s and 1970s, but increased vastly during the Reagan administration. In 1983 his administration began to supply Saddam Hussein with satellite intelligence on Iran's deployments. As much as \$5.5 billion in fraudulent loans was channeled through an Italian bank to help Iraq buy arms. Weapons were also sent via CIA fronts in Chile and Saudi Arabia directly to Baghdad (Johnson, 2004:224). Meanwhile the same White House was transporting weapons to the Islamic Republic of Iran to fight against Saddam. These transactions became known later as the Iran-contra affair (Honegger, 1989).

Through media images the Middle East is constantly

portrayed as exotic, mysterious, enigmatic, irrational, sinister, barbaric, undemocratic, dark, and anti-modernization, with men who shout and wave either their fist or a Kalashnikov in the air, and powerless women who are covered from head to toe who cry incessantly and scream in despair. In response to Edward Said's comment that the West and Islam are very intertwined, Richard Lowry, the editor of *National Review* said, "The line seems pretty clear, developing mass commercial aviation and soaring skyscrapers was the West's ideas; slashing the throats of stewardesses and flying the planes into the skyscrapers was radical Islam's idea."³ According to Mark Steyn, "stability is Arabic for the 'mess we're in.'" Therefore, coming to the aid of those who cannot bring democracy to their own region, has been the main rallying cry of all American administrations. Once the stigma has been internalized by Americans, the world, and ironically many in the Middle East, the rest is easy. These conditions undoubtedly demand the involvement of a superpower which will bring democracy to the region.

As mentioned before, American gain through violence in the region has increased manifold since the Reagan administration, owed especially to arms sales during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq. To the point where between the mid-1980s and 2008, military sales to the Middle East increased from 48 percent to 78 percent of all U.S. arms exports in the world. According to Jim Lobe of the *Dissident Voice* by mid-2003, US sales to Middle Eastern clients had accounted for 76 percent of its total arms sales since 1999, and about the same percentage of all sales to the region in that period (Lobe, 2003). Militarism and military production has proved to be a way of economic life and survival for the United States, a phenomenon that has grown out of proportion. Between 2002 and 2008, the military budget, not including appropriations for Iraq and Afghanistan, has increased by more than \$600 billion cumulatively. This increase is significantly faster than the rate by which defense spending has risen over the past forty years (Stiglitz and Bilmes, 2008). Such an increase can be demonstrated in just the realms of military production. It involves academia and other institution. As James Carrol demonstrates this prevalence:

In the twenty years after WWII, the Pentagon spent nearly \$100 billion, ten times the federal expenditures devoted to all aspects of health, education, and welfare in the same period. By 1965, nearly six million Americans were employed in the enterprises administered from the Pentagon. If business was transformed by defense contracts, so was academia, with the great American universities taking on, being enriched by, and becoming dependent on large research projects for the military establishment. Indeed much of the postwar boom that institutionalized the wealth of the United States was driven by engines in the pentagon" (Carrol, 2006:129).

³ Quoted in Steyn, p. 138.

Currently though, most of American military expenditure is appropriated for conflicts concerning the Middle East which expands from Morocco to Afghanistan, and recently to former Soviet Republics in Central Asia. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the main advisor to President Obama in Middle East foreign policy, "I think we have to be aware of the fact that right now, the whole region is very flammable. And we have to be very careful how we become engaged (Brzezinski, 2014).

MIDDLE EAST AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Without doing an exhaustive literature review of American foreign policy, the author has chosen a compelling paper written by Richard Haas, a 12-year president of Council on Foreign Relations and Director of Policy Planning for the United States, and Martin Indyk, the Vice President and Director for Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. Their paper depicts a rather realistic attitude and view of what US foreign policy has been trying to achieve in the Middle East for the past few decades. It does not, by any means, represent the variety of views among politicians and academics. But what it does is an examination of US foreign policy in the Middle East, its failures and dilemmas, and possible solutions for such conflict.

In their article in *Foreign Affairs*, Haas and Indyk (2009) counted the challenges in the Middle East faced by the new American administration. They are:

1. Iraq's violence and straining U.S. military
2. Iran's nuclear program
3. Israel/Palestine peace process
4. Weak Lebanon and Palestine challenged by strong militant fundamentalism
5. U.S. position weakened by years of failure and drift

Haas and Indyk should include Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although not officially in the Middle East but the two countries are parts of and politically connected to the rest of the region. In Afghanistan, there is more conflict and violence exasperated by a corrupt government. Furthermore, there is an unstoppable growth of fundamentalism in Pakistan, constantly pounding on an unstable nascent government. The governments of Kabul and Islamabad are two of the weakest anywhere, according to Niall Ferguson. More recently the fundamentalists of both nations have joined forces against the U.S. and governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴ Among the biggest risks the world faces this year is that one or both will break down amid escalating violence (Ferguson, 2009). What Haas and Indyk neglect to mention is that all of the above challenges could also be dubbed as American failure. It is the process of

overcoming these failures that justifies American interference, intervention, and military presence in the Middle East. In fact, the authors expect exactly that, more American involvement. More American involvement requires more military production, aid, and sales.

For Haas and Indyk, the more significant issue lies with Iran and the reduction of Iran's seemingly ambitious political objective in the region. Optimistically, they suggest that the Obama administration will reduce the number of U.S. troops in Iraq, end or limit their combat role, and shift responsibility to Iraq forces. This will allow the U.S. to pay closer attention to Iran. Here is where it gets real complex. Haas and Indyk suggest that President Obama should engage in direct talks with Iran without preconditions and incentives to divert them from developing a sophisticated nuclear program. And to weaken Iran, Israel should engage in direct talks with Syria which is a close Tehran ally. Doing so would deteriorate Iran's regional influence, reduce external support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and improve the prospects of stability in Lebanon. Although negotiations with Iran seems to be somewhat fruitful and in accordance with what Haas and Indyk suggested there seems to be less peace and more war at the moment. At the moment Iran is getting more involved in fighting ISIS as the 'main' cause of terrorism and violent conflict in the region.

This was quite a complex relationship which required clever diplomacy on the part of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who until a few months ago wanted to "obliterate" Iran to save Israel. The question still remains, what convinces Haas and Indyk that the United States is seeking stability in Lebanon, Israel, Syria, or anywhere else in the Middle East? According to Haas and Indyk, it was the Bush administration that fanned the flames of war and conflict in the entire region; that with the right approach, especially by the United States, stability is imminent:

Some might argue that these efforts are not worth it, that the Bush administration paid too much attention to and invested too much American blood and treasure in an ill-advised attempt to transform the Middle East and that the Obama administration should focus its attention at home or elsewhere abroad. But such arguments underestimates the Middle East's ability to force itself onto the U.S. President's agenda regardless of other plans...From terrorism to nuclear proliferation to energy security, managing contemporary global challenges requires managing the Middle East (Haas and Indyk, 2009: 42-43).

Their argument is that U.S. hegemony in the Middle East should increase and that only in the past decade has U.S. influence declined due to the Iraq war and a failure to achieve peace between Arabs and Israelis. They

⁴ *New York Times*, March 25, 2009.

believe that the decline in position of the United States could be regained by President Obama. Their plan to bring peace to the Middle East follows Milton Friedman's liberalization and privatization of the market—production of more consumer goods for a people who cannot afford to buy the products, and deregulation to allow the flow of foreign goods to create billions of dollars of trade deficit—the same agenda that brought the United States and Europe and others to their economic knees. So peace in the Middle East should be “gradual, and an evolutionary process of liberalization should be promoted, one that emphasizes the building of civil society, the opening up of political space, and the strengthening of democratic values, including the rule of law, judicial independence, freedom of the press and association, women's rights, and government transparency (Haas and Indyk, 2009:44).”

The former Secretary of defense, Robert Gates, was concerned with dominance and security, but is cautious: “The United States cannot take its current dominance for granted and needs to invest in the programs, platforms, and personnel that will ensure that dominance's persistence” (Gates, 2009). To ensure this dominance, Gates argues, that the United States “needs a military whose ability to kick down the door is matched by its ability to clean up the mess and even build the house afterward (Gates, p. 31).”

The question for Gates is not whether the U.S. military should expand, invade, and occupy, but whether it has the required capabilities and plans to reconstruct the ensuing destruction. Gates believes that the United States has justified such expansion because “both Russia and China have increased their defense spending and modernization programs to include air defense and fighter capabilities.” In addition to modernization, Gates sees justification for defense in “the potentially toxic mix of rogue nations, terrorist groups, and nuclear, chemical, biological weapons (Gates, p. 32).”

But are the proposals made by Haas, Indyk, and Gates all that new? Are they a way out of the conflict and crises in the Middle East? After the end of the Cold War during Bill Clinton's presidency, the Pentagon's Defense Planning Guidance of 1992, pushed for the United States to continue to dominate the international system by “discouraging the advanced industrialized nations from challenging our leadership or even aspiring to a larger global or regional role.” It was through this dominance that the United States would ensure a market-oriented zone of prosperity that encompasses more than two-thirds of the world's economy (Parenti, 1995).

For the United States, the early 1990s seemed to be an entirely different epoch when militarism, due to the end of the Cold War, appeared to be an imminent issue for a superpower. But what renders more militarism today? Recent views emphasize a stronger American military around the world and especially the Middle East, although with a more humanitarian approach. How different is Robert Gates' approach from that of the

previous administration? Neo-conservative think-tanks such as the Project for New American Century—whose guidelines were closely followed by the Department of Defense and the Bush administration—suggested that the United States must enact regime change in Iraq through a policy of military strength and moral clarity.⁵

In September 2000, under the auspices of the Project for the New American Century, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, and Lewis Libby drafted a document stating their vision of America's role in the Middle East, which included an attack on Iraq. They called it “Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces, and Resources for a New Century,” which argued that the United States must have a permanent military presence in the Persian Gulf (Parsi, 2007). Military bases are necessary to ensure liberalization of the market in the Middle East. In fact, according to this plan Iraq was supposed to have represented the first democratic country in the region for others to follow. This plan was in no way different from what Haas, Indyk, or Gates are proposing.

Gabriel Kolko's examination of U.S. foreign policy post-WWII sees a pattern of errors based on the shortsighted belief that superior military technology guarantees victories. He aptly concludes that terrorism, radical Islam, and Islamic fundamentalism are causes of conflict rather than responses to Third World poverty and immiseration (Kolko, 1994).

Two main U.S. objectives stand out amidst the turmoil in the Middle East. They are oil and the political control of that still precious commodity, and the U.S. military presence. To many, the former may cause the latter. According to Anthony Simpson, “Western oil interests closely influence military and diplomatic policies, and it is no accident that while American companies are competing for access to oil in Central Asia, the United States is building up military bases across the region” (Simpson, 2002).

Although the relationship between the control of oil and American military presence in the region may have originally been causal they each have taken on a life of their own. While oil diplomacy certainly necessitates a military build-up on the part of the United States, arms sales to the region, is an entirely independent phenomenon which functions autonomously as an objective of the Military Industrial Complex. Even if the U.S. becomes the sole proprietor of Middle Eastern oil, or on the contrary, becomes completely independent of Middle Eastern oil, its military bases, arms exports to the region, and military build-up in the Middle East will not cease. Here is the rhetoric: “The U.S.-led war against terrorism was nothing less than a choice between the dignity of life over the culture of death, of lawful change and civil disagreement over coercion, subversion, and

⁵ *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*, The Project for the New American Century, September 2000.

chaos, and that the United States will succeed with courage defeating cruelty and light overcoming darkness” (Bush, 2001). So when the enemy is undeniably a terrorist or a despot, the American self-perception is not that of imperialists but as liberators of oppressed people (Zunes, 2003).

Furthermore, as Brzezinski, a more moderate theoretician, recently argued:

We can't leave the Middle East entirely because if we leave it entirely, it's quite possible that the worst elements will prevail. One of the things which our aid to the Mujahedeen, in resisting the Russians, accomplished was that there were many, many more Muslims friendly to the United States as a consequence. And we saw that, for example, in the opposition to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, and more generally in the region as a whole...But simply withdrawing from the region also raises the possibility of the region falling into really dangerous hands. In fact, al-Qaida came into being years after the conflict in Afghanistan – that's something that people tend to forget.⁶

This very logic proclaims that failure justifies more involvement, and as Brzezinski would argue the reason for more US involvement is in fact the existence of groups and organizations such as ISIS.

UNITED STATES MILITARY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

U.S. political involvement, covert and overt, dates back to 1953 (Kinzer, 2006). In addition to coups, plots of assassination, and secret operations, comes American contribution to the export and sales of arms to local governments, Egypt, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, etc... and direct military involvement with the establishment of bases, invasion and occupation, e.g., Iraq and Afghanistan. The size of the Defense Department's holding world-wide amounts to 29,819,492 acres, according to Johnson (2006:140), and a considerable portion of that is in the Middle East. Currently the United States holds bases in Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and up to 13, 546 troops afloat in the seas of the Middle East (Johnson, 2006:140). There are bases and garrisons in Afghanistan, Iraq (106 garrisons as of May 2005), Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, and Uzbekistan. Despite Jordan's denial of having any special military arrangements with the U.S., no bases, and no American military presence, the United States has deployed up to five thousand troops in bases on the Jordan-Iraqi and Syrian borders

(Johnson, 2006:141).

The importance of the Middle East for the U.S. is nothing new and goes back more than a few decades. In 1957, four years after a CIA-sponsored coup in Iran, the U.S. congress approved a presidential resolution known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, which designated the Middle East as an area vital to the national interest of the United States.⁷ As with the Monroe Doctrine and Truman Doctrine, the United States government granted itself the remarkable and inexorable right to intervene militarily in yet another part of the world. When any U.S. administration says “our” interests must be protected abroad they tend to refer to mean some insecure condition in which our interests are endangered. This insecurity can be manufactured, however. Insecure social and political conditions in a country previously unknown to most Americans can suddenly cause it to become vital to our interest. To protect our sons and daughters we have to participate in overseas military ventures, and our taxes are needed to finance these ventures (Parenti, p. 46). What better place than the Middle East where social relations, cultures, and political institutions remain ‘barbaric,’ ‘savage,’ ‘uncivilized,’ or ‘mysterious’ and ‘puzzling’ at best?

From the 1950s to the 1970s American military presence in the Middle East was minimal. But the days of the Nixon doctrine—let the locals fight their own wars—have passed. The last time the United States removed its forces from anywhere was in October of 1983 when Reagan ordered American Marines to leave Lebanon after a suicide bombing took the lives of 241 Marines. The notion of direct military involvement however, commenced with President Jimmy Carter on January 23, 1980, when he claimed that “Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force,” which he called Rapid Deployment Force. On January, 1, 1983, the Reagan administration converted Rapid Deployment Force to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the first regional command created in 35 years.

American military bases continued to grow in size starting with the 1991 Gulf War and George H. Bush's declaration of a New World Order. The United States military has been gaining power and territory in the Gulf region ever since. Today there are more than 70 American military bases of all sizes in the Persian Gulf region alone. When retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski was asked about the U.S. intentions in Iraq and the reasons behind the occupation, she replied, “one reason has to do with our relations with Saudi Arabia, particularly the restrictions on our basing...

⁷ The main idea in Eisenhower doctrine was that the U.S. is prepared to use armed forces to assist any Middle Eastern country requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism.

⁶ Brzezinski, MSNBC Interview, Sep. 10, 2014.

So we were looking for alternate strategic locations beyond Kuwait, beyond Qatar, to secure something we had been searching for since the days of Carter—to secure the energy lines of communication in the region. Bases in Iraq, then, were very important.” Later in the Spring of 2005, Kwiatkowski stated that the Pentagon was trying to protect Israel from Syria and Iran, giving the United States more reason to stay regardless of the Iraqi’s desires (Johnson, 2006:158).

The National Security Strategy of the United States claims that “The presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitments to allies. The United States demonstrates its resolve to maintain a balance of power that favors freedom. To contend with uncertainty and to meet the many security challenges we face, the United States will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces” (Johnson, 2006:151).

ARMS SALES TO THE MIDDLE EAST

In 2003, 72 percent of U.S. foreign aid allotted to the Middle East was used for military purposes, as opposed to 28 percent for economic development, according to Stephen Zunes. The \$3.8 billion in military aid is well over 90 percent of what the United States gives the entire world, (Zunes, 2003:42). In 2001, more than half of the world’s total purchase of arms from the United States went to the Middle East totaling \$6.1 billion. Since 1992, the U.S. arms exports to the Middle East totaled \$90 billion, more than all other countries combined (Johnson, 2006:158). Although seemingly contradictory for shipments of arms to continue to flow to a region already saturated with war, violence, and insecurity, the United States perseveres in its relentless arming of the region.

The new civilian leadership at the Pentagon, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Zalmay Khalilzad, and Stephen Cambone, for example, came into power with two major objectives, according to Scahill: “regime change in strategic nations and the enactment of the most sweeping privatization and outsourcing operation in the U.S. military history—a revolution in military affairs. After September 11, 2001, this campaign became unstoppable.”

Based on reports by the Center for Defense Information (CDI), there is a long-standing tenet of U.S. arms export policy that arms transfers should not undermine long-term security and stability, weaken democratic movements, support military coups, escalate arms races, exacerbate ongoing conflicts, cause arms build-ups in unstable regions, or be used to commit human rights abuses. However, the Bush administration and those before it have demonstrated a willingness to provide weapons and military training to weak and failing states and countries that have been repeatedly criticized by the

U.S. State Department for human rights violations, lack of democracy, and even support of terrorism (Myerscough and Stohl, 2007).

Using U.S. government data, CDI has documented that, in the five years after Sept. 11, total U.S. arms sales (Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales) to some 25 countries—mostly in the Middle East region—were worth four times more than those concluded in the five years prior to Sept. 11, and these countries received 18 times more total U.S. military assistance (Foreign Military Financing and International Military Education and Training) after Sept. 11 than before.⁸ Furthermore, 72 percent of the countries in this series received more military assistance and 64 percent conducted more arms sales with the United States during the five years after Sept. 11 than during the entire period between the end of the Cold War and Sept. 11, from 1990 to 2001.

While total U.S. Foreign Military Sales between 2002 and 2006 totaled approximately \$9 billion less than between 1997 and 2001, the United States has increased sales to new post-Sept. 11 allies, and has made several large arms deals, including a multi-billion dollar sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan. Total Foreign Military Sales projections for 2006 through 2008 are higher than any other year since the end of the Cold War.

According to David Houska, threats from Iran, Syria, and various terrorist groups, justified the Bush administration to offer more than \$60 billion in new weapons and military assistance to Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other U.S. allies in the Middle East. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the latest U.S.-Middle East arms sales campaign July 30, 2008, just before she and Secretary of Defense Gates traveled to the region. Although Rice characterized the proposals as the continuation of long-standing U.S. policy, she said that the deals were intended to “help bolster forces of moderation and support a broader strategy to counter the negative influences of al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran.” Former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns underscored the threat from Iran, saying that the future sales will “provide deterrence against Iranian expansionism and Iranian aggression in the future.” With this new agreement the United States supplies \$3 billion and \$1.3 billion of military aid to Israel and Egypt, respectively, each year for 10 years starting in fiscal year 2009, which began Oct. 1, 2008. The new plans represent a 25 percent increase in aid to Israel and a continuation of Egyptian aid at present levels. Burns signed the agreement with Israel on Aug. 16, 2007 (Houska, 2007). The sales do not end with Egypt and Israel as they were extended to the old Soviet Republics.

⁸ The 25 countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya.

Since Sept. 11, Armenia, Azerbaijan, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro) have all been removed from U.S. sanctions lists and are eligible for U.S. military assistance. This occurred despite reports by the State Department that all of these countries have committed human rights abuses. It also neglects to consider India's and Pakistan's ongoing nuclear programs and continued conflict. The United States is sending unprecedented levels of military assistance to countries that it simultaneously criticizes for lack of respect for human rights. Consistently, failures are rewarded through sales of arms that in turn exacerbate the failures.

As Rachel Stohl, a military analyst in the Center for Defense Information, wrote on December 30, 2008, "foreign policy concerns—such as the global war on terror—contributed to increased U.S. arms sales to allies assisting with the global effort. Regional tensions – either real or perceived – have also led to increased purchases, particularly in the Middle East and Africa." According to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, military expenditures in the Middle East countries came to 54.8 percent of combined central government expenditures, just over 20 percent of the GDP. Force ratios—representing the number of people under arms per thousand—stood at 13.5 percent for the Middle East. Such spending is twice that of industrial countries and well over three times that of most developing countries.⁹

Bill Buzenberg reported in an article for the Center of Public Integrity on November 19, 2007, reported that from 2004 to 2006, KBR Inc, previously a Halliburton subsidiary, was awarded more than \$16 billion in U.S. government contracts, for work in Iraq and Afghanistan. The cost of war so far, according to National Priorities Project is between \$1 trillion and \$3 trillion (Stiglitz and Bilmes, 2008).

In 2007, private security guards working for Blackwater or Dyncorp were earning \$1,222 per day, which amounted to \$445,000 per year. An Army sergeant, on the other hand, was earning \$140-190 per day in pay and benefits, a total of \$51,100 to \$69, 350 per year (Stiglitz, p. 12). In August 2005, Lawrence J. Korb, an assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration, claimed that the Raptor (F-22), a Lockheed Martin product, which cost \$360 million each, was "the most unnecessary weapon system being built by the Pentagon" (Scheer, 2008:14). However, after September 11, 2001, even though the F-22 had no conceivable role in the preventing future attacks by terrorists, the stealth plane and every other weapons system rendered obsolete were suddenly repackaged as anti-terrorist weapons. Another example of such spending was the B-2 bomber, a product of Northrop Grumman, at a cost of

\$1.2 billion each. This bomber was originally designed to penetrate the Soviet air system a tactic that became useless with the end of the Cold War. It was in fact tested for the first time in the summer of 1989, coinciding with the end of the Cold War. However, after the declaration of war on terror it was abruptly found useful. The B-2 was designed to avoid sophisticated defense systems that neither the Taliban, Saddam Hussein, nor al-Qaeda possessed (Scheer, p. 18).

Additionally there were the Virginia-class attack submarines, at the cost of \$2.5 billion each, and the Boeing's V-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft that combines the vertical takeoff and landing of a helicopter. The plane's production continues at a cost of \$55 billion (Scheer, p. 19). In October of 2001, Lockheed Martin was given a contract by the Pentagon for what became a \$300 billion project to construct the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, a multiservice combat plane. As Scheer puts it, "the business of the military, particularly the expenditure of huge sums of taxpayer money on weapons systems, is by design an opaque subject having more to do with bureaucratic prerogatives and corporate profits than the actual use of these weapons in waging war (Scheer, p. 33)."

The privatization of war on behalf of the United States has heavily contributed to private companies and think tanks to research and justify the furtherance of armed conflict anywhere in the world. There is a connection between defense contractors' push for war, war profiteering and policy making. From 1998 to 2003, Halliburton's contribution to the Republican Party totaled \$1,146,248 while \$55,650 went to the Democratic Party. For this contribution and probably other unknowable amounts, Halliburton received at least \$19.3 billion in single-source, no-bid contracts (Stiglitz, p. 15).

While the profits of private contractors could be measured in specific numbers, the way contracts are panned out by the government remain a mystery. According to the Government Accountability Office: "Neither DoD nor the Congress reliably knows how much the war is costing and how appropriated funds are being used or have historical data useful in considering future funding needs" (Scahill, 2007:13).

In 2007, according to National Income and Product Accounts, the military budget exceeded \$1 trillion (\$1,002.5 billion), which was 7.3 percent of the GDP. For all remaining countries, including Russia, China, U.K., and France, it was \$1.3 trillion. America has been transformed in recent decades by the absence of the Soviet Union, giving the United States more immediate power (particularly in the military realm), together with a global hegemonic economic decline. It is this dual reality of a temporary increase in U.S. power along with indications of its long-term decline, according to James Cypher, that has led to urgent calls throughout the power elite for a "New American Century." Likewise, it has led to attempts by Washington to leverage its enormous military power to regain economic and geopolitical strength in

⁹ U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfer, 1991-1992*, (Washington D.C. 1994), p. 6-7, 22-23.

areas like the Persian Gulf (Cypher, 2007). Through this process the United States has built a lasting physical presence around the world that allows for perpetual control.

Many, like Scheer, perceive the recent American adventure in the Middle East and the U.S. military expenditure as inconsistent with a history of American militarism, therefore perceiving the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as deviant inclinations of a particular administration with particular ideology. According to Scheer, September 11th proved to be too good of an opportunity for Bush to pass up. He surrendered his presidency to those who identified national security with a wildly expansive U.S. presence in the world (Scheer, p. 3). But the recent venture is not an inconsistency or break from American foreign policy in the past decades?

CONCLUSION

In the United States, the institutionalization of profiting from military involvement and production goes back to the late 1940s, after the Second World War. In just six years under the influence of the war the U.S. economy expanded by 70 percent (Foster et al., 2008). Since the early Cold War era we have witnessed a “military Keynesianism”: the view that by promoting effective demand and supporting monopoly profits, military spending could help place a floor under U.S. capitalism (Foster et al., 2008:3). In essence, the U.S. government is not just spending money on the military and producing destructive weapons, or engaging in wars and interventions that at times seem too bellicose and too ambitious; it is also building a lasting physical presence around the world that yearns for conflict, control, subversion, and rapid deployment (Johnson, 2006). American physical presence in the Middle East specifically revolves around a general failure; failure to bring stability, peace and democracy to the region. The more we fail the more our involvement is justified.

By the time George W. Bush left office he had spent trillions of dollars on what he and his administration called the global war on terror. According to Robert Scheer, the United States proceeded to go to war not against the enemy that existed but rather the one desired by the Military Industrial Complex (Scheer, p. 13). This is a powerful sector that encourages more government spending than any other. To rationalize the spending a new official doctrine of preemptive war has been adopted. It is embodied in the concept of ‘war on terror’, an unending war against an abstract concept.

In no instance since 1947, when the United States started to use its military and political power, have democratic governments come about as a result. In many cases democracy developed in opposition to American interference. Here are some examples, as cited by Chalmer Johnson: After the collapse of the regime of the CIA-installed Greek colonels in 1974; after the demise of

the U.S.-supported fascist dictatorship in Portugal in 1974, and Spain in 1975; after the overthrow of Marcos in the Philippines in 1986; after the ouster of general Chun Doo-Hwan in South Korea in 1987; and after the ending of thirty-eight years of martial law on the Island of Taiwan in the same year. In addition, the United States helped to install and supported dictators such as the Shah of Iran, General Suharto in Indonesia, Batista in Cuba, Somoza in Nicaragua, Pinochet in Chile, and Sese Seko Mobutu in Congo (Johnson, 2006:19).

Many sectors of the economy would not encourage government spending: real estate interests oppose public housing; private healthcare interests oppose public healthcare; insurance companies oppose public insurance programs; private education interests oppose public education. The big exceptions to this are highways and prisons within civilian government spending, together with military spending (Foster et al., 2008:5). One reason for U.S. and world military spending is to buttress the unstable and shaky structures of capitalism. The extant reasons given—the need to contain rogue nations, defeat the terrorists, or winning the ‘war on terror’— are not the reasons behind such huge spending.

The one thing that Johnson and analysts like him neglect to question is why despite America’s awareness of the causes of chaos and conflict in the Middle East its failing policies persistently continue? To an objective observer it would truly seem enigmatic when a military and economic superpower, despite its peaceful objectives, militarizes and arms a region to such extent.

The continuation of this policy simply does not make sense. What does make sense, however, is that the United States neglects to pay attention to causes of conflict in the Middle East by continuing its policies of militarization and war. If one were to design a foreign policy that would guarantee failure one would design the American foreign policy in the Middle East without any major changes. It is the only policy that maintains the status quo, a volatile region that seems on the verge of explosion. The more conflict, the more reason for the U.S. to intervene, invade, occupy, change regimes, build bases, export experts, arm the ‘good’ versus the ‘evil’, and support despots. Stability and democracy in the Middle East would render the United States involvement obsolete.

U.S. intervention has become a foreign policy that is consistent with the desires of both Democratic and Republican parties. Despite the recent Democratic Party’s rhetoric this policy is unailing for both Parties. Both parties continue to finance the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan as well as the Department of Defense. Bellicosity has been bipartisan.

In fact, in the process of convincing Americans and the world of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, no Democratic policy expert was more effective bolstering the war than Kenneth Pollack in the Fall of 2002, in his book, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*. This book became, as Robert Scheer puts it, “the guideline for

Democrats eager to go to war.” Pollack and Martin Indyk co-wrote in an article in the Los Angeles Times, on December 19th, 2002:

As former U.S. government officials who had access to the most sensitive U.S. intelligence on Iraq, we are well aware of Iraq’s continued efforts to retain and enhance its weapons capabilities...Thousands of tons of precursor chemicals for chemical warfare agents, thousands of liters of biological warfare agents...¹⁰

As Scheer so truthfully states, “the rush to war with Iraq was a bipartisan affair, and as we have witnessed repeatedly in the postwar period, deceit in the pursuit of militarism is an all too easily rewarded stance (Scheer, 2008:136).

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¹⁰ Quoted in Robert Scheer, *The Pornography of Power*, p. 130.