

The Interventions and Rivalries of the Super Powers in the Middle East

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Abstract

The Middle East has been a major centre of world affairs; a strategically, economically, politically, culturally, and religiously sensitive area. Moreover, the world has become a far scarier place in recent years, largely because of threats and instability emerging from the Middle East and nearby regions. Conflicts in the Middle East are a recurring feature in international politics and superpowers also actively engage in these conflicts. This paper attempted to find the factors that have made the conflicts in the Middle East more intense. It argued that superpowers interventions and rivalries in the regional conflicts in Middle East often intensify crises instead of easing them. It also argued that the weakness of international organizations, especially UN, failed miserably in prevailing peace in Middle-East, resulting in protracted and pervasive conflicts.

Keywords: Middle East, superpowers, rivalry, conflict

Introduction

The Middle East is one of the most conflict-prone regions in the world. It lies at the juncture of [Eurasia](#) and [Africa](#) and of the [Mediterranean Sea](#) and the [Indian Ocean](#). It is the birthplace and [spiritual](#) centre of religions such as [Christianity](#), [Islam](#), and [Judaism](#). Throughout its history the Middle East has been a major centre of world affairs; a strategically, economically, politically, culturally, and religiously sensitive area. Moreover, the world has become a far scarier place in recent years, largely because of threats and instability emerging from the Middle East and nearby regions. Outside powers are eager to promote their interests there, but their policies often intensify crises instead of easing them.

The modern Middle East began after [World War I](#), when the Ottoman Empire, which was allied with the [Central Powers](#), was defeated by the British Empire and their allies and [partitioned](#) into a number of separate nations, initially under British and French Mandates. Other defining events in this transformation included the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the eventual departure of European powers, notably [Britain](#) and [France](#) by the end of the 1960s. They were supplanted in some part by the rising influence of the United States from the 1970s onwards.

In the 20th century, the region's significant stocks of [crude oil](#) gave it new strategic and economic importance. Mass production of oil began around 1945, with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Iraq, and the [United Arab Emirates](#) having large quantities of oil.¹ Estimated [oil reserves](#), especially in Saudi Arabia and Iran, are some of the highest in the world, and the international oil cartel [OPEC](#) is dominated by Middle Eastern countries.

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¹ Arthur Goldschmidt Jr, and Lawrence Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, [Colorado: Westview Press, 2010] 8. (Henceforth, Goldschmidt, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 2010)

During the Cold War, the Middle East was a theatre of ideological struggle between the two superpowers and their allies: [NATO](#) and the United States on one side, and the [Soviet Union](#) and [Warsaw Pact](#) on the other, as they competed to influence regional allies. Besides the political reasons there was also the "ideological conflict" between the two systems. Moreover, as [Louise Fawcett](#) argues, among many important areas of contention, or perhaps more accurately of anxiety, were, first, the desires of the superpowers to gain strategic advantage in the region, second, the fact that the region contained some two thirds of the world's oil reserves in a context where oil was becoming increasingly vital to the economy of the Western world.² Within this contextual framework, the United States sought to divert the Arab world from Soviet influence. Moreover, Conflict in the Middle East is a recurring feature in international politics. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most enduring conflicts anywhere; the region has also hosted two of the wars with the most international participants (Iraq in 1991 and 2003), as well as the bloodiest interstate war of that period (Iran-Iraq, 1980-1988). In recent years, Arab spring, Syrian crisis, ISSI issues have been risen and to be resolved yet. In addition, the Middle East lags behind in economic, social, and political development.³

International relations theory takes many forms and poses a wide range of puzzles that can be addressed using Middle Eastern cases. A level of analysis is a perspective of international relations. The level of analysis debate in IR began in the late 1950s when Kenneth Waltz (1959) published his classic text, *Man, the state, and war*.⁴ In it, he posits three 'images'—individual, state, and system— as independent variables to explain state behaviour.

The actual term "levels of analysis" was coined by David Singer in his 1960 review of Waltz (1959).⁵ Since at least as early as 1961, levels of analysis have been a prominent analytical concept in international relations (IR) discourse. Here, They would like to explain briefly three levels of analysis—individual, state, and international system or systemic level in IR. Firstly, individual level emphasizes the "great man in history" concept. In this view, the very personalities of leaders shape foreign policy, domestic and international affairs. Leaders are not simply mechanically responding to international or state systems, but taking an active role in determining international relations. It helps to explain how great leaders influence to make history. Secondly, supporters of state level analysis argue that the international system level tells only part of the story of international relations, but looking at the backgrounds of states -- type of government, economic performance, geography, history and cultural values -- can offer a more complete explanation. Thirdly, international or systemic level focuses on the interaction of the states themselves. It pays attention to states' geographic location, relative power positions in the international system and the interactions among them. Characteristics of the international system (anarchic nature) lead nations to behave in particular ways based upon how much power they hold.

² Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, 34.[Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013] (Henceforth, Fawcett, *International relations of the Middle East*,2013)

³ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2002 at <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/263/hdr_2002_en_complete.pdf (accessed June 3, 2018)

⁴ Owen Temby, "What are levels of analysis and what do they contribute to international relations theory?," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 28, no. 4, UK, [October 2015]: 721.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 723.

In this paper, international/systemic level analysis is mainly used as a useful tool in order to explain regional conflicts in the Middle East region. This paper will be portrayed by a regional case study—Arab-Israeli conflict. This research would like to present systemic level of analysis from the point of view of structural realist. For structural realist, international politics is, first and last, about power and self-interest. State egoism leads to international conflict, and possibly war, each state pursues its own national interest. Under the influence of Kenneth Waltz, 'neorealist' or 'structural' realists started to explain the behavior of states on the basis of assumptions about the structure of the international system and, in particular, the fact that, in the absence of world government, the international system is characterized by anarchy.⁶ From the realist perspective, states have primary responsibility for maintaining security, reflected in the notion of 'national security'. The major threats to security therefore come from other states. However, realists believe that conflict can be contained by the balance of power. Balance of power is embraced as a policy which uses diplomacy or possibly war, to prevent any state from achieving a predominant position and from pursuing hegemonic ambitions in the international system.⁷At the international/systemic level, there have been foreign interventions by powers outside the Middle East, each of which want to gain resources and allies in the region while damaging the other power's proxies and resource gathering efforts. The US, for example, backs Israel for high tech military tech and local intelligence, Saudi Arabia for oil and Egypt for Suez Canal access. Russia backs Syria and Iran for strategic reasons—valuable resources and military locations, plus strategic allies against America's proxies in the region. These outside powers will prop up leaders and even states which align with their interests, while funding and supplying efforts to destabilize countries that oppose those interests. Outside powers are eager to promote their interests there, but their interventions often intensify crises instead of easing them in Middle East region. Moreover, due to the lack of effective international organizations, conflicts in the Middle East have been worsened. Kenneth Waltz describes the third level of analysis as coming from *an international level*, that between states, there is no true "system of law" enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire. This notion can be seen in the UN that failed miserably in prevailing peace in Middle-East. In fact, [the United Nations is not more than a Debating Society](#).

(1) Arab-Israeli Conflict

The conflict between Israel and the Arabs is one of the most profound and protracted conflicts of the twentieth century and the principal precipitant of wars in the Middle East. There are two major dimensions to this conflict: the Israeli-Palestinian dimension and the Israeli-Arab dimension.

The growing conflict and separation between Israel on one side and Palestine and Arab states on the other can be explained with a third level analysis. The origins to the conflict can

⁶ Andrew Heywood, *Politics* [United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013] 408-09. (Henceforth, Heywood, *Politics*,2013)

⁷Heywood, *Politics*,409.

be traced back to Jewish immigration and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs. European geopolitics in the earlier half of the 20th century in the wider Middle East region contributed to a lot of instability overall. The British Empire, especially, played a major role in the region. During World War I, in 1916, Sir Henry McMahon promised Arab leaders to revolt against the Ottoman Empire which was allied with Germany. In return, the British government would support the establishment of an independent Arab state in the region, including Palestine. But, in contradiction to this, and to also get support of Jewish people, in 1917, Lord Arthur Balfour, then British Foreign Minister issued a declaration (Balfour Declaration). This announced British Empire's support for the establishment of "a Jewish national home in Palestine." This project met with better opposition on the part of the Arab population of the country. The upshot was a clash between two national movements for possession of Palestine. Throughout the region, Arabs were angered by Britain's failure to fulfill its promise to create an independent Arab state.

Since the closing decades of the nineteenth century the British had expected their colonies to be financially self-supporting. One study of British imperialism has described the 'classical objectives of Victorian imperialism' as follows: 'the creation of a compliant local regime which would preserve Britain's political and strategic interests while relieving her of the trouble and expense of ruling directly over an alien and unpredictable society.'⁸ Moreover, the First World War left Britain impoverished and overburdened with an empire that had expanded without planning, beyond its ability to sustain. In Palestine, the windfall of Zionist-generated capital and revenues enabled it not only to maintain its administration in the country but also to expand its imperial presence in the region.⁹ At the same time, the British Exchequer, headed from 1924 to 1929 by Winston Churchill, acted with the greatest parsimony towards the Zionist project. This was hardly what the Zionists had anticipated from the authors of the Balfour Declaration, which had promised to facilitate the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish National Home. Sir Herbert Samuel, the first British high commissioner to Palestine, believed that government aid to Jewish industry would stimulate the general industrialization of Palestine on modern European lines.¹⁰ Therefore, Zionist projects and enterprises have been more strengthened in Palestine during the British mandate period. Britain's primary interest in Palestine was strategic. But, Zionists came into a unique windfall – significant imports of Jewish capital, donations to the Jewish National Home. During the whole period of the Mandate, the Palestine administration's entire budget never reached the level of Jewish capital imports.¹¹ There were never any foreign exchange shortages, and no barriers to large imports of capital, which was expended largely on Zionist enterprises. Later, Zionist factor have influenced not only on British administration but also in colonial office in Palestine. In the years after World War II, in Europe, hostility toward Jews intensified not only in Germany but in Poland and Romania, resulting in influx of Jewish emigration into Palestine state. As the scale of the Holocaust became clear, world opinion began to coalesce

⁸Michael J. Cohen, *Britain's Hegemony in Palestine and the Middle East, 1917-56 Changing Strategic Imperatives*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017) 48-49. (Henceforth, *Cohen, Britain's Hegemony in Palestine, 2017*)

⁹*Cohen, Britain's Hegemony in Palestine, 2017*, 47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹ *Ibid*

around the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. Initially, Britain prevented the Jewish immigration to Palestine, but later they faced difficulties in handling Jewish migration due to the US pressure. Finally, this led to the creation of Jewish home national by Balfour Declaration, resulting in the origins and the onset of conflict between Israel and Arab states. Therefore, it can be said that without Great Britain, there would not have been an Israel or a catastrophe – for Palestine's Arab majority and Arab states in the region.

After World War II, the British, who were retreating from imperial power, decided to end their mandate there and pass this problem to the United Nations—meaning, in essence e, United States.¹² Zionist leaders understood that their most urgent priority was to win President Truman to their cause. The U.S. supported Israel from its birth. On the one side, were pro-Zionists in the domestic political arena; on the other, the executive branch officials concerned with the global and regional implications of a US-supported Jewish state. Kermit Roosevelt, an American intelligence expert on the Middle East, criticized the Zionist lobbying effort, observing that support of political Zionist is directly contrary to our national interests, as well as to common justice.¹³ But President Harry Truman, influenced by Zionist friends and desirous of Zionist political support in the 1948 election campaign, decided that the US would support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁴ In addition, dozens of former U.S military pilots and more than one thousand veterans of the U.S Army, most of them Jewish, were recruited to fight in Palestine. Americans helped assure that when war came to the Holy Land, Jews would be ready.¹⁵ The Truman administration recognized the newly declared state of Israel on May 14, 1948 literally minutes after this unilateral declaration was made. In any case, Israel has established itself as a permanent fact of Middle East life. History, morality and realpolitik bind the United States to Israel, and always will.

Jewish claims to this land are based on the biblical promise to Abraham and his descendants, on the fact that the land was the historical site of the ancient Jewish kingdoms of Israel and Judea, and on Jews need for a haven from European anti-Semitism. Palestinian Arab claims to this land are based on their continuous residence in the country for hundreds of years and the fact they represented the demographic majority until 1948.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli war was the climax of the conflict between the Jewish and Palestinian national movements which had been three decades in the making. As the mandatory power in Palestine, Britain had repeatedly tried and failed to find a solution that would reconcile the two rival communities in the country. In February 1947, the British cabinet decided to refer the problem to the United Nations and the struggle for Palestine entered its most critical phase. The United Nations, on 29 November 1948, passed its famous resolution which proposed the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the partition plan; all the Arabs states and the Palestinians rejected it

¹² Stephen Kinzer: *Reset Middle East: Old Friends and New Alliances: Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Iran*, [New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011] 151-53. (Henceforth, Kinzer, *Reset Middle East*,2011)

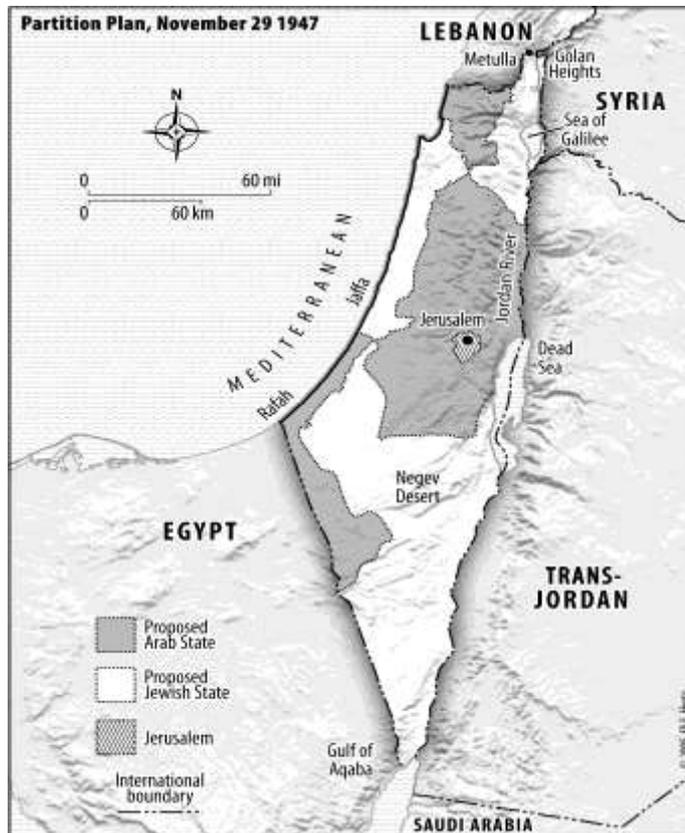
¹³ Fawcett, *International relations of the Middle East*,2013, 361

¹⁴ Kinzer, *Reset Middle East*, 2011, 151-54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-56.

vehemently.¹⁶ The Palestinians launched a campaign of violence to frustrate partition and Palestine was engulfed by a civil war in which the Jews eventually gained the upper hand. At midnight on 14 May 1948, upon expiry of the British mandate, the Jews proclaimed the establishment of an independent state which they called Israel.

Map (1): UN Partition Plan for Israel and Palestine



Source: <http://www.israelifrontline.com/2011/11/un-resolution-181-partition-plan-4.html>

The following day the regular armies of the Arab states intervened in the conflict, turning a civil war into the first full-scale Arab-Israeli war, a war which ended in defeat for the Arabs and disaster for the Palestinians. The 'Balfour Declaration' is still held responsible among Arabs for enabling the creation of the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, and thus generating the Arab-Israeli conflict. British withdrawal from Palestine after World War II precipitated the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49, out of which Israel emerged as an independent state and the Palestinian lands were taken by Israel and Jordan. That, first, Arab-Israeli war was caused by the default of the colonial power, Britain, while Israel enjoyed the active support of external patrons, both the USA and the USSR, but it was prompted above all by a regional conflict. The Zionists believed that Britain was behind the Arab states,

¹⁶ Avi Shlaim, "The Middle East: The Origins of Arab-Israeli Wars" in *Explaining International Relations since 1945*, ed. Ngaire Woods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 219-20.

especially Jordan and Egypt, whilst the Arabs felt the USA and the Soviet Union were manipulating the Israelis.

The first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 had resulted in a clear Israeli military victory. But this had not been translated into the signature of peace treaties between Israel and any of its Arab neighbors. Therefore, in 1956, the second Arab-Israeli conflict, also named the Tripartite Aggression in the [Arab world](#) and Operation Kadesh or Sinai War in Israel, was broken out between [Egypt](#) on one side and [Israel](#), the [United Kingdom](#) and [France](#) on the other. The [Suez Canal](#) was opened in 1869, after ten years of work financed by the French and Egyptian governments. The building of Suez Canal, which opened a new sea route from Mediterranean to the Red Sea, was French, and later a British, business venture.¹⁷ The canal instantly became strategically important, as it provided the shortest ocean link between the [Mediterranean](#) and the [Indian Ocean](#). The canal eased commerce for trading nations and particularly helped European colonial powers to gain and govern their colonies.

Britain's military strength was spread throughout the region, including the vast military complex at Suez with a garrison of some 80,000, making it one of the largest military installations in the world. The Suez base was considered an important part of Britain's strategic position in the Middle East; however, increasingly it became a source of growing tension in Anglo-Egyptian relations. Added to this anti-British fervor was the role Britain had played in the [creation of Israel](#). As a result, the actions of the Egyptian government began to mirror those of its populace and an anti-British policy began to permeate Egypt's relations with Britain. Traditionally, most of the equipment in the Egyptian military had come from Britain, but Nasser's desire to break British influence in Egypt meant that he was desperate to find a new source of weapons to replace Britain. Nasser had first broached the subject of buying weapons from the Soviet Union in 1954. Most of all, Nasser wanted the United States to supply arms on a generous scale to Egypt. In Britain, the increase of Soviet influence in the Near East was seen as an ominous development that threatened to put an end to British influence in the oil-rich region. For France, starting in 1949 owing to shared nuclear research, France and Israel started to move towards an alliance. Following the outbreak of the Algerian War in late 1954, France began to ship more and more arms to Israel.

Therefore, Nasser's response was the nationalization of the [Suez Canal](#). On 26 July, in a speech in [Alexandria](#), Nasser gave a riposte to Dulles. During his speech he deliberately pronounced the name of [Ferdinand de Lesseps](#), the builder of the canal, a code-word for Egyptian forces to seize control of the canal and implement its nationalization. He announced that the Nationalization Law had been published. That same day, Egypt closed the canal to Israeli shipping. Egypt also closed the [Straits of Tiran](#) to Israeli shipping, and blockaded the [Gulf of Aqaba](#), in contravention of the [Constantinople Convention of 1888](#).¹⁸ This was also a violation of the [1949 Armistice Agreements](#). As a result, on 29 October, Israel invaded the Egyptian [Sinai](#). On 5 November, Britain and France landed paratroopers along the Suez Canal. The Egyptian forces were defeated, but they did block the canal to all shipping. After

¹⁷Fawcett, *International relations of the Middle East*, 2013, 383-84.

¹⁸Fawcett, *International relations of the Middle East*, 2013, 266-67.

the fighting had started, political pressure from the [United States](#), the [Soviet Union](#) and the [United Nations](#) led to a withdrawal by the three invaders. The episode humiliated the United Kingdom and France and strengthened Nasser. That of 1956 war would have been impossible without the direct involvement of two external powers, Britain and France, on the side of Israel. In addition, the US and the Soviets were heavily involved in supplying arms to Arab and Israel. The fight over the canal also laid the groundwork for the [Six-Day War](#) in 1967 due to the lack of a peace settlement following the 1956 war and rising of tensions between Egypt and Israel.

1967 Arab–Israeli War, or Third Arab–Israeli War, was fought between 5 and 10 June 1967 by [Israel](#) and the neighboring states of [Egypt](#), [Jordan](#), and [Syria](#). Later wars are often the continuation of earlier rounds and 1967, no exception, was a product of dissatisfaction of the outcome of the 1956 Suez War which was, itself, a continuation of the unfinished business left over from 1948.

Map (2): Geopolitical location of Suez Canal



Source: <https://www.pinterest.nz/chemi7/suez-canal/>

The third Arab-Israeli war derived from the water dispute which had plagued Arab-Israeli relations ever since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. But late or not, it quickly became a key regional problem, contributing much to the unfolding of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The water dispute between Israel and the Arab states was centered on the question of who had the right to exploit the waters of the Jordan River and to what extent. Three rivers feed the Jordan River: the Hasbani in Lebanon, the Baniyas in Syria, and the Dan which runs through both Syria and Israel. Israel believed its survival was dependent on its

ability to exploit the River Jordan.¹⁹ Indeed, ever since 1948, it had had plans to exploit the River for irrigation purposes. The water dispute between Israel and its Arab neighbors, which erupted in early 1964, presented the Soviets with a golden opportunity to realize their expansionist ambitions. It allowed them to curry favor with the Arab world and carve themselves a position of power in the region similar, if not greater than that enjoyed by the Western powers.

Britain was also admirably placed to secure the unimpeded supply of Gulf oil to Western Europe. Other than the United States, the Middle East was at the time, the largest oil-producing region in the world, commanding 60 per cent of the world's known petroleum resources. Britain assumed that not only would the Middle East remain Western Europe's principal source of oil, but that, in absolute terms, there might even be, in the future, an increase in the amount of oil Europe imported from the region.²⁰ Britain still had some 30,000 troops in the region scattered in military and naval bases throughout the area, including in the states of Bahrain, Aden, and the Trucial Coast. Thus, Britain was well placed to prevent the Soviet Union pushing southwards first towards the Persian Gulf and then the Middle East and extending its influence in the region.

Egypt's arming of displaced Palestinians in Gaza, who launched incursions into Israel in the early 1950s, had precipitated disproportionate retaliation against Egyptian positions and sparked an arms race between Egypt and Israel.²¹ Moreover the Soviet Union and Egypt under the leadership of General Gamal Abdul Nasser threatened Britain's position and Western interests in the Middle East. The Egyptian President had from the start hoped to expel the West from its Middle East strongholds. But, his over-riding ambition was to eject Britain from the region. Brandishing the flag of Arab nationalism and socialism, Nasser was anxious to liberate the Arab people from the yoke of Western imperialism. He was convinced that Britain, which still ruled over vast stretches of land in the area, stood at the head of and inspired all Western imperialist forces bent on exploiting the Arab nations for their own selfish ends. No less seriously, Nasser assumed that Britain, which he believed to be a personal and bitter enemy, was determined to overthrow the Nasserist regime at the next given opportunity.²² Thus, he saw Britain's presence in the Middle East as constituting a multiple threat: it threatened his position in Egypt, his standing in the Arab world and his regional ambitions. Both strands of Britain's Middle East policies were, he believed, a product and reflection of Britain's traditional imperialism, which sought to exploit the Arab nations for the benefit of rapacious Western interests.

The end of the Suez Crisis saw the beginning of an uninhibited race to acquire arms. The arms race between Israel and its Arab neighbors was soon to reach new and giddy

¹⁹ Moshe Gat: "The Great Powers and the Water Dispute in the Middle East: A Prelude to the Six Day War" *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 6, (November 2005): 915-16 (Henceforth, Gat, the Water Dispute in the Middle East, 2005)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 912.

²¹ Raymond Hinnebusch, *The international politics of the Middle East*, [UK: Manchester University Press, 2003] 164-65 (Henceforth, Hinnebusch, *The international politics of the Middle East*, 2003)

²² Gat, "the Water Dispute in the Middle East", 2005, 912-13.

height. Between 1960 and 1967, Egypt and the Soviet Union concluded several arms deals. In June 1963, they signed what is widely considered the most important arms deal concluded before the six day war. From that point onwards, the Soviet Union would begin to supply Egypt with an ever growing number of highly sophisticated weapons. Egypt, as a result, was able to modernize its air force and replace its obsolescent British planes with state of the art Soviet MIGs. By 1967, on the eve of the six day war, Egypt possessed close to 1200 tanks and 500 aircraft, including over 120 MIG- 21s-the very cutting edge of Soviet aeronautical technology.²³ Not surprisingly, Nasser was heard to boast that Egypt's arsenal of weapons was more than a match for anything Israel possessed. The heady combination of an abundant supply of Soviet weapons, generous Soviet financial aid and Soviet political support boosted the Egyptians government's self-confidence, thus contributing much to the unfolding of events, would eventually lead to the war.

U.S. support includes massive military and financial aid as well as diplomatic support in terms of protecting Israel. Following Suez, the forging and cementing of a special relationship with the United States became one of Israel's principal, if not overriding, foreign policy goals.²⁴ Under President Kennedy, American-Israeli relations underwent a fundamental change. In 1962, the United States agreed to supply Israel with Hawk surface to surface missiles. This benchmark decision marked a revolution in the United States' arms policy, signaling a clear reversal of American policy on supplying Israel with weapons and military equipment.²⁵ With Israel's battlefield victories over much larger countries, it suddenly looked like a country that could provide security. John Foster Dulles called it "the milestone around our necks" and it had become a dominant regional power.²⁶ This unprecedented commitment, was repeated, both publicly and privately, by American officials, who at the same time made a special point of the underlining the sixth Fleet's presence in the Mediterranean, which would, they implied, allow the United States to come immediately to Israel's assistance if and when necessary. Meanwhile, Israel and the Arab states, the happy recipients, respectively, of American and Soviet diplomatic support and military aid, became bolder and more confident by the day, and allowed themselves to adopt increasingly uncompromising stands on the water dispute. The Arab states, determined to prevent Israel from becoming stronger and more powerful, were bent on diverting the Jordan River's headwaters, whatever the cost. The Israeli government was equally resolved to foil the Arab counter-diversion, even if it meant war.

To sum up, it was the Soviet Union, which, in line with their policy of encouraging tension in the Middle East just short of an explosion, and in the hope of ingratiating themselves with the Arab states, ultimately came to Syria's aid. It accused Israel of warmongering. Western interests, be they oil, trade or containing the Soviet Union, demanded

²³ Gat, "the Water Dispute in the Middle East", 2005, 914.

²⁴ Devon Douglas-Bowers: "The U.S. Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *Foreign Policy Journal* at <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2013/12/02/the-u-s-role-in-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/> (accessed July 20, 2018)

²⁵ Gat, "the Water Dispute in the Middle East", 2005, 915.

²⁶ Kinzer, *Reset Middle East*, 2011, 160.

a stable Middle East.²⁷ Therefore, United States and the Soviet Union/Russia will have been the chief external factors determining the future in the Middle East, as they still are in world politics as a whole.

The recent Arab-Israeli conflict has broken out on the Jerusalem question in 2017. On December 6, 2017, [US President Donald Trump](#) announced the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the [capital](#) of Israel,²⁸ and ordered the planning of the relocation of the [U.S. Embassy](#) in [Israel](#) from [Tel Aviv](#) to [Jerusalem](#). The announcement disqualifies the United States from peace talks, while [Hamas](#) called for a new [intifada](#) following Trump's declarations.²⁹ The United Nations Security Council vote on 7 December to condemn Trump's decision failed due to a veto by the United States, despite the support of the remaining fourteen members of the Council.³⁰ The emergency meeting was requested by Bolivia, Britain, Egypt, France, Italy, Senegal, Sweden and Uruguay. US envoy [Nikki Haley](#) called the United Nations "one of the world's foremost centers of hostility towards Israel".³¹ Britain, France, Sweden, Italy and Japan were among the countries who criticized Trump's decision at the emergency meeting. On 18 December, a Security Council resolution calling for the withdrawal of the recognition was vetoed by the United States.

Conclusion

Undeniably, the Arab-Israeli conflict has made the Middle East the most dangerous front. A source of instability and war in the Middle East is the involvement of the Great Powers in the affairs of the region. In order to understand the conflicts in Middle East, from the realist perspective, two aspects of the international political system could be highlighted as particularly important. First, there was no sovereign world government. The closest thing to a world government is the UN. According to the UN Charter (1945), only UNSC resolutions are binding on states. Binding resolutions are unlikely ever to be passed one of the five permanent members of the Council. The Security Council has taken no significant steps to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the absence of the world government, states can choose to attack others. In doing so, their aims—the immediate causes of war—" may be endless varied", but the ultimate cause of war is international anarchy. Therefore, according to structural realist theory, the anarchic structure of the international political system is the ultimate cause of war. Second, from the realist perspective, states have primary responsibility for maintaining

²⁷ Middle East: What stakes for great powers in the Arab-Israeli conflict? *Foreign Policy Association* at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43740216> (accessed September 8, 2018)

²⁸ Presidential Documents, Proclamation 9683 of December 6, 2017 at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2017-12-11/pdf/2017-26832.pdf#page=1> (accessed August 30, 2018)

²⁹ Dan Williams & Nidal al-Mughrabi: Hamas calls for Palestinian uprising over Trump's Jerusalem plan, *Reuters*, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-israel/hamas-calls-for-palestinian-uprising-over-trumps-jerusalem-plan-idUSKBN1E11BR?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews> (accessed June 29, 2018)

³⁰ Farnaz Fassihi, "Fourteen of 15 Security Council Members Denounce U.S. Stance on Jerusalem," *The Wall Street Journal*, (December 2017), under "Settings," <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fourteen-of-15-security-council-members-denounce-u-s-stance-on-jerusalem-1512777971> (accessed August 23, 2018)

³¹ "[Jerusalem: Trump's envoy Haley berates 'outrageous UN hostility'](#)". *BBC News*. 8 December 2017

security. The major threats to security therefore come from other states. In this way, the threat of violence and other forms of physical coercion are intrinsically linked to the prevention of such wars; usually through the built-up of military capacity to deter potential aggressors. This can be contained by the balance of power. Within this contextual framework, the United States sought to divert the Arab world from Soviet influence. US regional interests go well beyond the security of Israel, of course, and include counterterrorism and energy security—areas in which strong ties with Arab countries are vital. Therefore, regional conflicts in Middle East are protracted and pervasive as it is the intensification of the rivalry between two super powers, especially the USA and Russia. Having global agenda, all of them want to increase their respective spheres of influence in the Middle East which is strategically so important that any loss or gain of influence in this region will determine their relative global power equations. The conflicts in the Middle East will continue as long as outside countries in general, the United States as the most influential player in particular, continues to act as it has in the past.

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