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End the Endless War: The Destabilization of the Middle East by the U.S.

The U.S. has been active in the Middle East in a military sense since 1958, leading to a seemingly endless war in the region (Riedel). The continued U.S. interference and involvement in the Middle East has led to continued conflict and a destabilization of the region. This is why the U.S. should withdraw the military from the Middle East because continued military action in the region can contribute to the continued destabilization of the region, loss of soft power and economic costs.

U.S. actions prove that despite what the U.S. may say, it does not prioritize the peace and stability of the region or the protection of democracy, but rather the protections of its political and economic interests in the Middle East. The U.S. has orchestrated coups to install favorable puppet governments in Middle Eastern states to protect U.S. interests. For example, in 1953 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated a coup to overthrow the democratically elected leader of Iran, Mohammed Mosaddeq and reinstate Mohammad Reza Shah as leader (Jones 211). Despite being a democratic country, the U.S. had great economic incentives to restore the former Shah, Mohammad Reza, after Mossadeq nationalized the oil industry so that western nations could no longer control it. When Mossadeq's government refused to allow the UK and the U.S.

any involvement in its nation's oil industry (Wu.). The U.S. installed Iranian government was Pro-American until 1979, when the Shah was removed from power by protests and revolts (Onion). This proves that the U.S. was more worried about its political and economic interests than upholding and spreading democracy.

A contributor to the continued destabilization is the pattern of militarism in the region that started in the 1970s, as the U.S. continued to support the “deliberate militarization of brutal and vulnerable authoritarian regimes” (Jones 210). For example, the U.S. quietly supporting Saddam Hussein’s brutal regime in Iraq through financial credit and military assistance, until the invasion of Kuwait (Zunes). Or how between 1975-1979 Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia purchased 56% of the weapons being sold in the Middle East and by the mid- 1970s security in the Persian Gulf was based on “the ability of oil producers to purchase the machines of war.” (Jones 213). Furthermore, continued military intervention in the Middle East has led to the continued political destabilization of the region. After the war in Iraq destabilized the country and created an insurgency that led to the rise of ISIS, and the U.S. intervention in Libya spiraled into a civil war (Ashford 128) the region has continued to be politically unstable. This pattern has continued into the 21st century, for instance, in 2011 Saudi Arabia agreed to purchase \$29.4 billion worth of aircrafts and military upgrades, and the United Arab Emirates agreed to purchase over \$10 billion worth of U.S. equipment (Byman 5). If the U.S. continues to militarily intervene in the Middle East and act as a security guarantor, ideological factors will block countries from creating ties and ally ships (Ashford 138).

The United States’ continued military intervention in the Middle East has real political effects. If the U.S. continues to operate unsanctioned and make politically unpopular decisions in the region, trust in the U.S. will decline and the U.S. will lose soft power. The more U.S. actions

and policies are seen as legitimate, the more soft power and influence the U.S. has (Nye 256). Soft power is important because it is what a country uses to coerce and influence another country to align more with the U.S. interests and decisions. If the U.S. loses soft power, the U.S. loses influence and an important source of power when it comes to negotiations of all types on the international field. The U.S. is losing soft power especially in the Middle East, where anti-American sentiment has been increasing for the past decade. For example in Turkey, favorability towards the U.S. dropped from 52%-19% between 2000-2014, and in Egypt U.S. favorability dropped from 30% to 10% between 2006-2018 (Ashford 135). Some policies that led to the decline of the U.S.- Turkey relationship, are foreign policy disagreements over Kurdish conflicts and US allyships with Kurdish forces against Syria (Ward). This is concerning, because if the U.S. and U.S. policy are seen so negatively in those states, leaders will be less likely to cooperate and make concessions with the U.S., in order to seem more favorable to their public (Nye 257). Especially since 2001, when the U.S. entered the Middle East without UN approval, made other countries reluctant to share the burden, and also reflected poorly on U.S. policy, squandering soft power and making the war more costly for the U.S. (Nye 259).

The U.S. has many economic interests in the Middle East, most notably is oil. The biggest motivation for the U.S. in the region is protecting oil interests and making sure the market stays stable, even in such an unstable region. However, the U.S. does need to militarily interfere to protect against such a situation, and also because after the 1970s oil shock there is now a system in place in the American economy to mitigate and minimize such economic losses (Ashford 133). Furthermore, the costs of continuing to be militarily active in the region overshadow the profits of ensuring the stability of the oil market. The financial costs of military activity in the Middle East are staggering. U.S. taxpayers have already spent nearly \$2 trillion on

just the Iraq war, about \$8,000 per taxpayer, despite the original estimate of the cost per taxpayer being \$3,907 (Cachero). Furthermore, much of this money wasn't just taxpayer money but borrowed money, meaning that the cost of the Iraq war, including funding appropriated by the Pentagon, State department spending, veteran care, and interest is approximately \$1,922 billion. The U.S. has gone into debt to pay for the war, and a large amount of the costs are paying off the interest on the debt, which the U.S. will be paying off over the next several decades. The estimated U.S. government debt from all post 9/11 wars is a \$2 trillion debt with cumulative interest payments of \$925 billion (Cachero). U.S. involvement in the Middle East is proving to be extremely costly.

According to the Washington Institute's David Pollock, the U.S. needs to stay in the Middle East to enable burden sharing with other Gulf Allies and to get more support from European Allies (Pollock). However, burden sharing with Gulf Allies is likely not possible, as these states public opinion of the US continues to decline and state leaders find it harder to convince the public to cooperate with U.S. forces (Ashford). It is also unlikely that the U.S. will find support from European Allies, as U.S. military force in the Middle East is seen as more controversial, since such intervention is not sanctioned by International Organizations such as the UN, and make European allies such as Germany wary of the potential costs of cooperating and supporting the U.S. (Nye 259). The U.S. should militarily withdraw from the Middle East because the political and economic costs of staying in the region are too high. There are better ways that the U.S. can protect interests in the region without becoming militarily involved. The U.S. should start offshore balancing, reverting to similar policy as it did at the beginning of the Cold War. This would remove the need to keep thousands of bases in the region. Furthermore, forces would only be deployed in small amounts for emergencies such as UN approved relief

operations (Ashford 143). The U.S. should maintain diplomatic and economic connections with the Middle East but should withdraw the military to help stabilize the region, regain soft power, and offset the economic costs of military involvement.

Continued U.S. involvement in the Middle East is ineffective for both the U.S. and the Middle East. Continued military support is sending the U.S. into debt, and reducing the amount of influence the U.S. has on the international stage. Furthermore, continued militarization and military involvement is keeping the Middle Eastern region destabilized. Therefore, the U.S. should withdraw the military from the Middle East because continued military action in the region can contribute to the continued destabilization of the region, loss of soft power and economic costs.

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