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Imperial Interests in the Arab Region



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The Arab region is a cornerstone of global capital accumulation.

With the help of its so-called *'special relationship'* with Israel, the US secures lucrative profit flows from the region and fortifies global imperial hegemony.



Oil has long been at the core of US interests in the Middle East.

It pumps through the veins of the global economy, delivering handsome profits along the way – so long as its supply is limited enough to keep prices high and people who live in oil-rich areas don't seek to democratise the production of oil.

Therefore, the US has historically tried to control the supply of oil and extinguish any dissenting social forces.

Source: *Ajl, Historical Materialism (2012)*

Central to this process was the establishment of the *petrodollar system* in the early 1970s. This is an arrangement in which oil-producing nations agreed to sell oil in US dollars (USD) and reinvest subsequent profits into USD-denominated assets.

This forced oil-poor countries to pay for oil imports in USD, creating high demand for dollars. As a result, the dollar was stabilised as the global reserve currency, securing a constant flow of value into the US economy and boosting its global economic and political power.

Maintaining this steady stream of profit also requires US-friendly leaders in oil-producing nations, often autocratic rulers who enrich themselves off oil money and the exploitation of working people.

Source: *Ajl, Historical Materialism (2012)*





Ministerial Meeting of the GCC and the United States, (2023)

Most important are the wealthy member states of the *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).* Together, they hold nearly a third of the world's oil reserves. All six are monarchies and are among the most unequal societies worldwide. They are critical accomplices in US capital accumulation and the oppression of the global working class.

Note: The GCC was established in 1981 as a political, economic, and military alliance between Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These nations are notorious for their human rights abuses, particularly of migrant workers, many of whom are subject to forced labour.

Sources: *Ajl, Historical Materialism (2012); European Union, Energy, Climate change, Environment (n.d.); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2022)*



U.S. and Saudi Arabia military members train with tanks, The Intercept (2022)

Rulers that want to prevent the liberation of their national working classes, such as those of GCC countries, have an interest in repressing populist movements throughout the region.

This brings us to a second major source of US accumulation in the Arab region: arms sales. The US is the largest exporter of arms in the world. Between 2019 and 2023, the US was responsible for 42% of global arms exports sales. Saudi Arabia is the US' top arms importer, accounting for 15% of the US' total arms exports. This process of petrodollar recycling leads to an even higher proportion of oil profits, ultimately enriching the US.

Note: The US also has its own immense military presence in the Middle East.

Sources: *Ajl, Historical Materialism (2012); Wezeman et al. SIPRI (2024)*

Indeed, the recent history of the Middle East has been extremely violent, with chronic war killing and displacing millions of people, destroying civil infrastructure, and reversing welfare advancements. In other words, imperial war is ultimately a program of *de-development* for Arab countries unaligned with the US' imperialist interests.

Israel has been an indispensable partner in securing US interests in the region. By crushing radical Arab nationalist governments that sought to introduce progressive policy programs, it not only hampered regional development, but also helped quell populist sentiments amongst the broader Arab populace.

This ongoing ideological warfare against the popular classes aims to instil a broad sense of defeat and kill working people's drive for self determination.

Sources: *Ajl, Agrarian South (2024); Watson Institute, Costs of War (n.d.); Kadri, The Accumulation of Waste (2023); Roy, The Gaza Strip (2016); Ajl, Historical Materialism (2012)*

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In summary:

"Israel, pound for pound, is the best investment the US has ever made. Israel is the purest expression of Western power, combining militarism, imperialism, settler colonialism, counterinsurgency, occupation, racism, instilling ideological defeat, huge profitable war-making and hi-tech development into a manticore of destruction, death, and mayhem."

Source: *Ajl, Agrarian South (2024)*

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This is important context to understand the US-funded genocide in Gaza. If Israel is not victorious, it will destabilise the balance of power in the region by legitimising popular resistance supported by Iran, which is the main power in the broader region challenging US hegemony.

The ongoing conflict is thus a question of US hegemony and imperial dominance.

We are living in a moment of world-historical importance in which the power to determine the future is increasingly up for grabs.

Source: *Ajl, Agrarian South (2024)*


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