

Discussion 4: Markets, Cartels, and Consumers

- Within the past 20 years the US has gone from practically no presence in the Middle East to being almost "in over our heads" or stretched pretty thin.
- How reasonable is it for the US to maintain this involvement? How does it affect the US?
- What is the effect of US military presence in ME on oil?
- What should the US do? Should they remove their military power from the region and leave it to the local powers and continue to offer support from afar?
- How may that affect the price or supply of oil?
 - Depends on how you look at it
 - For the insurgents - the lack of American troops may reduce their aggressions which are often fueled by anti-American sentiments
 - Or will the process of removing our military force may strengthen their power and belief that they (the insurgents) have succeeded in driving the western man out
- How could the US offer support from afar?
 - Air support - but how effective is air support?
- What other countries would potentially come in to fill the void we would leave?
 - Russia, China, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia
- What happens if we pull out our troops? Who would stand between Saudi Arabia and Iraq?
 - We stand as a pacifier between the nations in the same way that the US did in Western Europe except that by enforcing "peace" between the countries we incur a lot of aggression against ourselves.
- How big is Saudi Arabia's army?
 - Pretty large, nicely stockpiled, however not very effective. Iran's army is not as sophisticated but good at tactics.
- We fear that political influence from China moving into the region.
- Why do we not want China to be friends with the Middle East?
 - Our access to Oil and hoping that we don't want China to start developing alliances and becoming another world power - we like being the only one
- Some people perceive our international presence as a demonstration of our global power.
 - They see extracting international troops as decreasing our international standing and power.
 - Also by leaving a country, we have less of a chance of being to go back in.
- Factors against pulling out
 - Reputation – does this matter? Keeping our word - who cares?

- External powers (China Russia)
 - Israel - US roll as buffer/stabilizer/last resort to protect Israel
 - Iran
- With Iraq all messed up with a civil war and having been steamrolled by the US several times, there is no longer any other large military power in the Middle East to challenge/keep Iraq in check. Iran now also has power over the oil prices in the region.
- Military Credibility – apparent tendency that the US is quick to enter into a conflict but very unlikely to continue once there begin to be American casualties.
- This is a policy weakness that is often exploited by whoever we are fighting.
 - Somalia
 - Vietnam
 - Desert 1 – rescue attempt in Iran of US embassy fails horribly (1981)
 - 1983 - we put forces in Lebanon - military barracks are blown up - lot of us casualties - we pull out soon thereafter
 - Bosnia
- However in the cases of Vietnam and Iraq it leaves a pretty big mess and no one to clean it up.
- Hezbollah - Feeding arms through Syria to Lebanon – Iran has a hand in that
 - Is Lebanon still a state?
 - Not really because it doesn't have a monopoly on coercion.
 - Hamas – West Bank. Palestinian political/militaristic – Iran also involved with this
 - Factors towards pulling out of Middle East?
 - A lot of our problems have stemmed from having our troops on the ground in the Middle East
 - Osama Bin Laden's first statement was that the US brought on 9/11 by having forces on holy land in Saudi Arabia
 - Sacred ground and nationalism
 - Opportunity cost - by having our forces in one place they can't be available to be deployed elsewhere. We are pulling out of other commitments that we have spent a lot of time trying to help/fix and we risk them reverting or losing ground on what we have achieved, either for military-political stability or humanitarian aid missions.
 - Who are we unable to pay attention to?
 - North Korea
 - Afghanistan (Taliban growing stronger, leftover troops are ineffective)
 - Global nature of politics/economics/trade: do we really need to protect the oil reserves in the Middle East if there is enough global competition to secure a supply from somewhere else? However, oil is becoming increasingly scarce in relation to the growing demand - they have increasing market share and they are willing to use that influence even if it means a slight price cut.

- Actually on the Homeland Security - small interest in having troops to serve as infrastructure reinforcement here.