RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE MIDDLE EAST ARMS RACE

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

INTRODUCTION

While the church has quite rightly focussed its attention on the nuclear arms race between the superpowers, another arms race, fueled by local antagonisms and superpower rivalries, is being carried on in the Middle East. Both arms races have their victims and their potential victims. The fact that the nuclear arms race could lead to the extinction of the human race should not blind us to the fact that the Middle East arms race has already taken a considerable human toll: thousands of dead in the Israeli-Arab war, thousands of dead in Lebanon, thousands of dead in the war between Iran and Iraq. As His Holiness Karekin II, Co-Catholics of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Cilicia has put it, concern in the West about the potential victims of nuclear conflagration is self-serving if it does not take into account the real victims of "little" conventional wars, or small-scale conflagrations such as we have witnessed in Lebanon.

Both the nuclear arms race and the Middle East arms race have their own internal logic - or illogic. But these arms races intersect at three crucial points. Both involve the superpowers in a preponderant way; a Middle East war involving highly destructive conventional weaponry could lead to a wider war between the superpowers; and the "logic" of the Middle East arms race suggests that its next stage is proliferation of nuclear weapons in the area. Indeed, it is likely that one state in the Middle East - Israel - already has nuclear weapons, and it is quite clear that other states - Iraq, Libya, Pakistan - are actively seeking such a capability. These points of intersection alone would suggest that the Middle East arms race deserves special attention.

BACKGROUND

In the years since the 1967 war between Israel and the Arab States the Middle East has become the most highly militarized region in the world. Between 1968 and 1977 the Middle East absorbed fully 39% of the world's arms imports. Of the top ten third-world arms importers between 1977 and 1980, eight were Middle Eastern countries. During the 1970's the United States accounted for roughly 48% of arms imports into the area; the Soviet Union 26%, Great Britain 7%, and France 6%.

One of the results of this extraordinary militarization has been that the Middle East has the highest per capita expenditure for arms of any region in the world. Although the Middle East is an area where there is great wealth - Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, it is also an area where there is considerable poverty - Egypt, Sudan, Syria. Thus the arms race has had a detrimental effect on the economy of particular countries and that of the region as a whole. Israel, for example, has suffered an annual inflation rate of 130%; Iran's arms binge was certainly one of the contributing factors to the Iranian revolution; the literacy rates, an indicator of government spending for social programs, vis-a-vis the military, are among the lowest in the world.

A. The superpowers. The two superpowers have their own rationales for feeding the arms race in the Middle East. For the Soviet Union the supply of weaponry to client states is a way of undermining U.S. influence in the area. The Soviet's major clients recently have been Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Until 1972 Egypt was a major importer of Soviet arms.

The United States, on the other hand, has been the major supplier of arms to Iran (until the Iranian revolution of 1979), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. Egypt has now replaced Iran as a major client for U.S. arms. The two major emphases of U.S. policy in the region have been support for Israel and the building of an anti-Soviet alliance among moderate Arab States.

The policies of both superpowers have led to some surprising inconsistencies, however, The Soviet Union, for example, has been forced to walk a tightrope between its clients Syria and Iraq, whose rivalry has almost become institutionalized. In addition the USSR has sought to improve its relationship with Iran, which in turn has been using its American-supplied weaponry in its war with Soviet-supplied Iraq.

Nor has the U.S. been able to avoid the implicit inconsistencies of its foreign policy goals. The anti-Soviet consensus of the moderate Arab states is clearly of secondary importance to the consensus of these states against the policies of the U.S. major ally, Israel. Thus the foreign policy goals of the superpowers are beclouded and at times frustrated by local conflicts.

Finally, it should be pointed out that there is little empirical evidence to prove that the provision of military assistance leads to a closer alliance between supplier and recipient. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to the contrary. The Soviet Union's heavy involvement in Egypt was rewarded by eventual expulsion of Soviet advisors and a quick turn toward the West by President Sadat. The United States' three and one-half billion dollars worth of military imports to Iran between 1977 and 1980 is cited by many observers as a major contributing factor to the disarray in the Iranian economy before the shah's demise.

B. The danger of wider war. There have been five major wars between Israel and Arab states since the creation of Israel in 1947. Each of those wars has carried the threat of superpower involvement. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 for example, brought it into confrontation with Syria, which had recently signed a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. In addition, King Hussein of Jordan has announced that he will seek a mutual assistance pact with the United States.

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As mutual assistance agreements of this sort are concluded the danger of superpower involvement in local Middle East conflicts increases. Arms may not be at the root of these conflicts, but they become an important factor in the cycle of hate and violence. Suppliers are called upon to prove their fidelity by the provision of ever more sophisticated weaponry. Rivalry between the superpowers thus feeds and feeds on local conflicts with ever greater destructive potential.

Along with the interplay of superpower and local conflicts it is clear that both superpowers have important strategic and economic interests in the Middle East. The enunciation of the Carter Doctrine, which identified the Persian Gulf as a zone of American interest, has only underscored U.S. and Soviet short-term interests in the oil-producing states of the Middle East. Although the world oil market is in temporary decline because of the world-wide recession, the U.S. has a continuing interest in assuring a secure supply of oil from the Middle East. The current oil glut, indeed, may lead to a future oil crisis because Western nations have no incentive to develop alternative fuels. A sudden change in the status of Iran or other Persian Gulf states could lead to deadly confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

C. The Middle East as a nuclear zone. Israel's destruction of an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 led to much worried speculation about the development of an "Islamic bomb." Whether or not it was Iraq's intention to develop nuclear weapons before that raid, subsequent statements by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein have made it clear that Iraq now actively seeks nuclear capability. Similarly Pakistan, worried about its neighbor India, has worked toward a development of a nuclear capability which could become a part of the Middle East power equation.

Although Israel has never officially acknowledged having nuclear weapons, it is widely assumed that it does. It is well known that Israel's nuclear reactor at Dimona has the capability to produce fissile plutonium. Israel has not permitted on site inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, nor has it signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The conventional arms race, while not affecting directly the spread of nuclear weapons, has enhanced the nuclear danger nevertheless by providing Middle Eastern countries with sophisticated "delivery systems." In addition, any perceived imbalance in conventional armaments could lead a country to seek an "equalizer."

CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Christians in the United States are called to witness to the immorality and futility of the Middle East arms race. They are called to do so out of solidarity with Middle East Christians who have taken on the ministry of reconciliation; they are called to do so because their nation is one of the major arms suppliers to the Middle East. Although cluster bombs which maimed Lebanese and Palestinians were dropped from Israeli jets and fired by Israeli artillery, they bore American markings.

Similarly we need to witness to the Soviet Union our concern about its role in the Middle East arms race. Soviet weaponry has been used in attacks on Israeli villages; Soviet promises to supply Syria with even more sophisticated missiles and jets add to the danger of a wider Middle East War.

Above all, as Christians we must be concerned because of the human consequences of the Middle East arms race. The victims are so often the noncombatants - children and old people caught between the warring parties. These little wars are not little wars to the people victimized by them. They are a daily reality of death, pain and separation - the very antithesis of the gospel.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Middle East arms race constitutes a major threat to regional and world peace; and

WHEREAS, this arms race has made the Middle East, arguably the most volatile region of the world, now the most heavily militarized region of the world, with the highest per capita expenditure for arms; and

WHEREAS, the United States and the Soviet Union are the major suppliers of destructive and sophisticated arms to Middle Eastern nations; and

WHEREAS, we are called to be in solidarity with Christians of the Middle East who seek to carry out the ministry of reconciliation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in San Antonio, Texas, September 23-28, 1983, call upon the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to communicate to the leadership of the Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches of the Soviet Union, our concern about the threat the Middle East arms race poses to world peace and to propose that our churches join in a joint witness to our governments on this issue;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) urge the United States government to work towards a multilateral agreement among all arms-supplying nations to limit or freeze arms transfers to Middle Eastern countries.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) convey to the Presidents of the Middle East Council of Churches deep sadness over the grievous loss of life caused by military conflicts in the area and our resolve to move our government toward a more positive role in the region.