France is Arab world's arms source

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n a reversal of policy after dire soul-
searching, France's Socialist Govern-
ment has embarked on a major arms
export drive, particularly in the Arab
states, and is reaping big business that helps pay the country's oil bill and keeps the wheels of a vital industry turning. One out of three in the French arma-ments industry's 300,000-strong work-force is employed on export contracts which netted a global Fr44,300 million ($5,500 million) for aircraft and other aerospace equipment in 1982, compared with Fr37,000 million in 1981 and Fr27,000 million in 1980. Prospects for 1983 are even brighter.
The first six months of this year saw the sale of 66 Dassault-Breguet Mirage 2000s, bringing to 126 the total of France's latest fighter-bomber sold abroad: India 40, Egypt 20, United Arab Emirates 40, and Peru 26.

Each Mirage 2000 is worth about $50

France's success in supplying arms to the Middle East is keeping its aerospace industry afloat. Gilbert Sedbon reports.

million, but a contract includes pilot and
ground-crew training, spares, and setting
up of maintenance facilities. Some of the
sizeable deals include the transfer of tech-
nology.
Sales to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and other Gulf states, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere in North Africa, as well as to countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have made France the world's third-ranking arms dealer, far behind the United States and Soviet Union, but well ahead of Britain.

French arms sales to Iraq, which is engaged in a long, drawn-out war against Iran, have been maintained at a steady rate of Frl4,500 million in 1981 and Frl3,000 million in 1982, representing 40

Above Dassault-Breguet Mirage 2000. Below Qatar Alpha Jet

per cent of total exports. Bigger deals have been clinched in 1983.
Iraq owes France $7,000 million for weaponry, and many a Frenchman is beginning to wonder whether Baghdad will ever be able to pay its debts. 1 President Francois Mitterrand's admin-istration has thrown its full diplomatic weight behind Iraq in the Gulf war, argu-ing that an Iranian victory would danger-ously upset the balance of power in the region.
Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have invested some $20,000 million in Iraq's war effort and have underwritten some of Baghdad's debts to France. They feel it is money well spent, protecting them from both Baghdad and Teheran. They are somewhat relieved that Iraq keeps Iran too busy to incite their Shi'a communities to revolt, and happy that Iraq's battle-tested armed forces are too preoccupied with Iran to extend Baghdad's influence in the Gulf.
The Iraqis have used Exocet anti-ship missiles on helicopters, but these do not have the range to reach key Iranian targets and are vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire. As a result they pressed France for the specific Super Etendard-Exocet combination used by Argentine pilots last year to sink two British ships in the Falklands conflict.
France's unprecedented move to comply
with Iraq's request has caused concern in
Washington, where officials fear that
President Saddam Hussein's three-year-
old war against Ayatollah Ruhoallah
956 FLIGHT International 8 October 1983