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**CONSTRAINTS ON US MILITARY POWER
IN SOUTHWEST ASIA**

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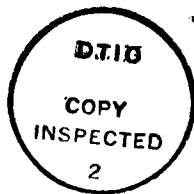
**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
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**CONSTRAINTS ON US MILITARY POWER
IN SOUTHWEST ASIA**

by

Richard B. Remnek

1 February 1982



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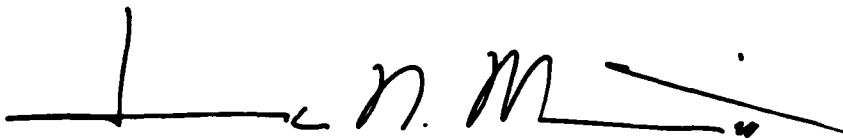
Composition of this memorandum was accomplished by Mrs. Janet C. Smith.

FOREWORD

This memorandum evolved from the Military Policy Symposium on "US Strategic Interests in Southwest Asia: A Long Term Commitment?" which was sponsored by the Strategic Studies Institute in October 1981. During the Symposium, academic and government experts discussed a number of issues concerning this area which will have a continuing impact on US strategy. This memorandum considers one of these issues.

The Strategic Issues Research Memoranda program of the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, provides a means for timely dissemination of analytical papers which are not constrained by format or conformity with institutional policy. These memoranda are prepared on subjects of current importance in areas related to the author's professional work.

This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. N. Merritt", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

JACK N. MERRITT
Major General, USA
Commandant

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

DR. RICHARD B. REMNEK is a Visiting Associate Professor of Political Science at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He was previously a member of the professional staff of the Center for Naval Analyses, Alexandria, Virginia. He received a bachelor's degree from Brandeis University, a master's degree in Russian area studies from the City University of New York, and a doctorate in political science from Duke University. From 1970 to 1977 he was Assistant Professor of Political Science at Memphis State University. Dr. Remnek is the author of *Soviet Scholars and Soviet Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Soviet Policy Towards India* (1975), and editor of *Social Scientists and Policy Making in the USSR* (1977). He has also authored a number of articles on Soviet political and military affairs.

CONSTRAINTS ON US MILITARY POWER IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

In the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States has assumed a major commitment to secure Western access to Persian Gulf oil. In January 1980, President Carter pledged the United States to take any measure, including the employment of military force, in order to repel "an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region," where US interests were officially declared vital. The Carter Doctrine, as it subsequently became known, has been endorsed and further amplified by the Reagan Administration. President Reagan has asserted that the United States would act to avert instability in the area that would threaten the flow of Persian Gulf oil to the West and Japan. The United States has now assumed a commitment to defend the region against external aggression and political instability.

The impetus for this security commitment was the Iranian revolution. At a single stroke, it both discredited the so-called "twin pillar" doctrine by which the United States looked to Iran and Saudi Arabia to play the leading role in securing regional stability and unleashed the forces of instability both within and

beyond the borders of this strategically-located state. The chaotic conditions and centrifugal ethnic strains in Iran have both heightened Soviet concerns for "the security of its southern borderlands" and created new opportunities for involvement in Iran. The weakening of Iranian military power, moreover, has enhanced appreciably Moscow's ability to project military power into the Persian Gulf region from the north. The Iranian Islamic revolution has also had an important destabilizing impact in the region, as the Iran-Iraq War and the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East attest.

Furthermore, regardless of whether the United States could have saved the Shah, his downfall was regarded by many as a major defeat for US policy and cast doubt on the value of US support. When compared with the Soviets' willingness to commit aggression and assume a long-term corrosive military burden to secure their interests in Afghanistan, the American failure to stand behind the Shah seemed more like a failure of will. US unwillingness to support the Shah was seen by local states as one more indication, along with US military inactivity during the Ogaden War and inability to avert a pro-Soviet coup in Aden in 1978, that the United States was no longer a "player" in the region and that growing Soviet power and influence would need to be accommodated.

To redress the strategic balance that had shifted dramatically in Moscow's favor following the Iranian revolution and to restore the credibility of US power and resolve, a far-reaching multibillion dollar program has been initiated to enhance our ability to project and sustain military power into Southwest Asia and to give meaning to the commitment the US Government has undertaken to secure Western access to Persian Gulf oil. The immediate response has been "over the horizon"—to augment and strengthen our peacetime naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Since the Fall of 1979, two carrier battle groups have been deployed continuously in the Indian Ocean. Also, for the first time, Marine amphibious ships with a complement of 1,800 Marines have been stationed there 70 percent of the time.¹ Prepositioned ships, carrying munitions and supplies sufficient to support a Marine brigade of 12,000 men for two weeks of combat, have been deployed continuously. Patrols by P-3 ASW aircraft have increased. And for the first time, B-52's have been used for maritime reconnaissance of the Indian Ocean. More demanding missions, including the worst case of countering a

Soviet thrust into Iran, have been assigned to the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF). Although a planning headquarters, the RDJTF can be augmented by a force whose combined maximum strength of roughly 200,000 men can be drawn from all four Services for service in Southwest Asia. In crises it would constitute the cornerstone of our efforts to project military power into that area.

Our ability to project military power into Southwest Asia and more specifically to deal with the worst and most demanding case of a Soviet invasion in Iran (in something less than the worst case, the United States would fare better) is constrained by four broad factors: (1) insufficient combat capabilities to deal with a major war in Europe and Southwest Asia at the same time; (2) a hostile physical environment in which the United States has no recent experience in conducting military operations in areas with rudimentary facilities that are ill-suited to support of high technology armed forces; (3) very long lines of communication that handicap us in trying to counter a Soviet thrust towards the Persian Gulf from "over the horizon"; and, (4) an inhospitable political environment in which to operate our military forces.

These constraints have limited our current military options in Southwest Asia. As Defense Secretary Weinberger acknowledged during 1981 hearings on the US defense posture:

I don't think we are ready with the forces we have now to resist any and all types of aggression or any and all types of threats or incursions that could be made.²

To be precise, it is generally believed that the RDJTF is presently incapable of repulsing by conventional means a massive Soviet thrust towards the Gulf, particularly if it came with little warning. And some critics argue that the RDJTF would be ineffective even against regional adversaries.³ Our current military weakness has, in turn, dictated our near-term military strategy in Southwest Asia. The public debate over the adequacy of that strategy and the future shape of the RDJTF is to some extent related to varying assessments of how difficult it will be to overcome these constraints. It is therefore worth examining each of these constraints and the efforts that have been or could be made to overcome them.

We currently lack the forces required for handling NATO and Persian Gulf war contingencies simultaneously (in which, incidentally, the Soviets would have the advantage of enjoying interior lines of communication, although they too face the possibility of a multifront war). In developing the RDJTF, the United States may have "robbed Peter to pay Paul," since most of the Army units and Air Force tactical fighter squadrons that would make up the RDJTF are also designated for NATO contingencies.⁴ Also, in order to maintain two carrier battle groups in the Indian Ocean continuously, we have drawn down on our naval forces in the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific. What this suggests is that before mobilizing the RDJTF a high level of confidence would be desired that a Soviet thrust into Southwest Asia was not a diversion, preliminary to a NATO war. The time taken to ascertain Soviet motives could lengthen our response time to a Soviet attack, and hence impair our ability to counter it, as we shall discuss further below.

CURRENT DRAWBACKS

To overcome US problems, we can either expand present force levels considerably or look to allies in Europe and the Far East to pick up the slack by assuming a greater share of the burden to defend their home territories and to protect their access to Persian Gulf oil, on which they are far more dependent than the United States. Their response toward supporting US military initiatives has remained limited thus far. The French have increased the size of their Indian Ocean naval squadron from 14 to 20 units, roughly. The British and Australians also have increased their smaller-scale naval operations in Indian Ocean waters. Some US allies have also increased their financial contribution toward support of American forces stationed on their soil. But they have not begun to increase appreciably their own force levels to compensate for the establishment of the RDJTF. Without a stronger visible allied commitment toward supporting our military efforts to secure Persian Gulf oil, the US public may begin to believe that our allies are enjoying a "free ride" at US expense, and public support for Southwest Asia-related military programs may erode. It may take the Navy, whose expansion is constrained by, among other things,

the limited availability of shipbuilding facilities and manpower several more years beyond the 1980's to begin to do its share in Southwest Asia. Although force planning for Southwest Asia will not be complete till the late 1980's, it is not certain that crises will necessarily wait that long.

Another and perhaps more tractable set of problems constraining our military capabilities in Southwest Asia relates to the austere desert conditions—an environment in which the United States has not fought since World War II. Much of our combat equipment is ill-suited to desert warfare. Initial training exercises pointed to the difficulties of maintaining even M-16 rifles in desert conditions. They also showed what damage could be done by desert sand to the rotor blades of Blackhawk helicopters, though this problem has since been corrected.⁵ A more serious problem concerns the lack of, and greater need for, water. According to a Defense Department estimate, a 50,000-man Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) would require at least 75,000 gallons of water daily in the deserts of Southwest Asia (or 15 gallons per man per day).⁶ We do not now have the capability to supply water for the full RDJTF in Southwest Asia, though we have initiated several programs designed to develop that capability. Many of the tactical doctrines for the employment of combat forces are inappropriate for desert warfare, and it will take time and more training exercises before effective tactics emerge.⁷

Harsh climatic conditions are not confined to land. During the monsoon, visibility in the Arabian Sea is poor, thereby impeding naval air operations. High waves during the monsoon seasons also make navigation difficult which could impede the Navy's ability to respond to crises ashore, delay our sealift and hence impair our ability to sustain combat operations ashore during the critical early stages. Also, the waters of the Persian Gulf are too shallow to risk carrier operations in anything but the most dire emergencies. With carriers stationed off the coast of Oman, carrier-based aircraft will need refueling for operations in the upper reaches of the Persian Gulf. This, in turn, would place additional strain on our limited capabilities to support combat operations in that region.

The rudimentary state of port and airfield facilities in the region could also impede US ability to project and sustain combat forces there. But this situation should improve by the end of the decade. By that time the Marines will have acquired air-cushioned landing

craft (LCAC), capable of lifting 60 tons of men and materiel over the beach and well-suited for operation in the shallow gradients of the Persian Gulf.⁸ By 1987 the first C-X air transports, capable of transporting outsize equipment such as tanks to the small austere airfields that abound in the area, will come into service. That capability makes it suitable for performing both inter and intratheater military airlift tasks. Also, the sealift assets that are being acquired will be adapted for operation in the region.

Overcoming the geographic disadvantages faced by the United States in projecting military power into Southwest Asia may prove to be more difficult than developing the capabilities to conduct warfare in that austere environment. Whereas the Persian Gulf is roughly 1,000 miles, albeit through mostly difficult mountainous terrain, from the Soviet border, it is 7,000 miles distant by air and 8,000 miles by sea through the Suez Canal from the US east coast. In fact, even Diego Garcia, the closest US military installation to the Straits of Hormuz, is 2,400 miles from the Persian Gulf. In Southwest Asia, unlike Europe or the Far East, the United States cannot compensate for distance by stationing combat forces, ordnance and equipment ashore to sustain defensive operations until reinforcements arrive by air and sealift. Hence the need to project military power from over the horizon.

FUTURE DIFFICULTIES AND SOLUTIONS

To avoid the Soviets presenting us with a *fait accompli* in Iran, the United States must be able to slow a Soviet advance through the difficult terrain of the Zagros Mountains, to deploy forces as rapidly as possible to southern Iran, and then to sustain those forces until seaborne logistic supply support from the United States is established. Indeed, the speed by which we deploy forces may be a crucial factor, for the forces required to conduct defensive operations would be fewer than those needed to dislodge Soviet troops already in place. We are presently far more capable of performing the former rather than the latter tasks. Staging from Diego Garcia, B-52H bombers, within hours, could commence low altitude, night operations against brigades, airfields and other strategic targets to impede a Soviet advance.⁹ Carrier-based aircraft, if on station in the Indian Ocean, also could be available at short notice to provide air superiority and perform other missions

that would, among other things, obstruct Soviet deployment of their airborne troop assets.

In the absence of forward deployment of men and materiel, a major problem constraining US ability to project military power into the Persian Gulf is the inadequacy of its current strategic mobility assets. A recent congressionally-mandated Defense Department mobility study showed that current US mobility forces could move less than half of the combat forces and support required prior to the arrival of a sealift.¹⁰ The ability to deploy forces rapidly into the region and to sustain them for the first weeks depends mainly on our long-range military air transports, currently composed of 70 C-5A and 234 C-141 aircraft.¹¹ The C-5A is the only military air transport capable of carrying outsize equipment. Unfortunately, it can transport only one of the Army's new XM-1 battle tanks at a time or two at the most when reinforced. (A lightweight tank, capable of being airlifted in larger numbers, is being developed, but will not be available for several years.) Moreover, the C-5A is so large that fully loaded, it can utilize only major airports with wide taxiways and large runways and parking ramps. Few of these exist in the region. Now, the Military Airlift Command cannot airlift a full division for immediate action in Southwest Asia. It would take around 700 C-141 sorties or their equivalent to move the 82nd Airborne Division with its equipment to the Gulf, a matter of 15 days.¹² Nor, as recent mobilization exercises have shown, could we now sustain such a force until reinforcements and supplies arrived by ship from the United States.

However, we have initiated a broad and comprehensive program to augment and improve our air and sealift capabilities. A stretch version of the C-141 is being developed (C141B); the wings of the C-5A are being reinforced; and as previously noted, the C-X air transports will become available by the late 1980's. Within the next year or so the Navy plans to add four cargo vessels and two tankers to its contingent of near-term prepositioning ships, which will increase our ability to support a Marine brigade from 15 to about 33 days.¹³ The construction of eight new commercial-type ships and four other roll-on/roll-off vessels for use as maritime prepositioning ships also has been scheduled. When available beginning in 1985, they reportedly will be able to support a Marine division for 30 days. And finally, the Navy is augmenting its sealift capabilities with the purchase of eight high-speed SL-7 container

ships, each capable of carrying 27,000 tons. Once converted for underway replenishment and roll-on/roll-off operations, they could move under optimal transiting conditions, and offload in an uncontested environment a mechanized infantry division from the US east coast to the Persian Gulf via the Suez Canal within roughly two weeks.¹⁴ However, until these mobility assets come on line in the late 1980's, our ability to project rapidly and sustain combat forces in Southwest Asia will remain very limited.

REGIONAL IMAGES

To an appreciable degree, the need to improve US strategic mobility capabilities is a function of our inability to station combat forces and equipment in Southwest Asia. Lacking a military posture supported by alliance systems or by time-tested bilateral security arrangements, the United States in Southwest Asia is trying to develop a military presence in a generally inhospitable political environment. The situation is further aggravated by the perceptions of Third World nations, for whom the presence of foreign military forces on their soil smacks of colonialism and stands as a contradiction to their recently-acquired and often hard-won sovereign independence. This perception underlies the general antipathy among nonaligned nations toward superpower access to overseas military support facilities.

A number of more specific obstacles stands in the way of US efforts to obtain land-based support for our military presence in Southwest Asia. First, in many Middle Eastern countries, US military power is still regarded as Israel's "strategic reserve," and it is Israel, and not the USSR, that is regarded by many as the main threat. There are also fears that the ultimate objective of the RDJTF is not to protect the oil producers but to seize the oil fields—an objective that could be more easily accomplished with a US military presence ashore. Furthermore, there is the belief that a US involvement would make it more difficult to remove the Soviets from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), Afghanistan, and Ethiopia. It is assumed that the way to keep both superpowers out of Southwest Asia is to deny facilities to both states. (That access to overseas facilities is only a facilitating, but not a necessary, condition for both superpowers' military presence is ignored, as is also the fact that even if the Soviets were to vacate

the Indian Ocean, they could still exercise their presence in Southwest Asia by virtue of their geographic proximity to the region.)

Aside from these specific factors, a general feeling that the United States is unreliable and not a fit partner for establishing a long-term security relationship also exists. Too many US efforts to strengthen its power projection capabilities, while a step in the right direction, are not in themselves evidence of US resolve to defend mutual security interests in the region over a period of time. That resolve will be tested in practice. The refined use of US military power, including the well-publicized deployment of AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia to limit the Iran-Iraq War, represents only a start towards restoring the damaged credibility of the United States in the region.

Improving the American image, as Deputy Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci has observed,¹⁵ could conceivably make our friends in the area more receptive toward US requests for shore-based support. Thus far, the United States has concluded formal agreements for limited access to facilities in Oman, Somalia, and Kenya. An informal understanding with Egypt has also been reached over contingency-related use of the Ras Banas complex on the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia is reportedly overbuilding support facilities for its own armed forces capabilities. US combat operations could be supported from the Saudi facility. However, given Saudi opposition to US access arrangements elsewhere, whether the facilities would ever be made available for that purpose remains unclear.

US ACCESS

The formal agreements with Oman, Somalia, and Kenya were concluded mainly because access was available there, not because those states were particularly well-suited for providing peacetime and crisis-related support for our military forces. Oman's interest in providing facilities predates our US interest in obtaining access to them. The Somali military regime of President Siad Barre always has been interested in bartering access in the hope of receiving superpower support for Somalia's irredentist ambitions in the Horn of Africa. Kenya's interest in US access stems from both security and economic considerations. On several occasions in the

past (e.g., during tensions with Uganda following the 1976 Israeli hostage rescue at Entebbe), the US Navy has been deployed to bolster Kenyan security. Kenya also stands to gain from liberty visits by US warships. It has been estimated that each US carrier visit to Mombasa is worth over \$1 million to the Kenyan economy.

Both Oman and Kenya provide support functions important to the US Navy in peacetime, but they are not ideally located for those purposes. For example, the fleet logistic (COD/VOD) support operations currently provided through Oman's Masirah Island, which possesses an airfield but no port facilities, could be more efficiently furnished from Karachi or Gwadar, Pakistan. Though an excellent liberty port, Mombasa is located 4 days sailing distance from the Navy's main operating area in the northern Arabian Sea. Moreover, carriers can visit Mombasa now only half of the year. (They have to anchor in unprotected waters outside Mombasa harbor and transfer personnel ashore on small boats. During monsoon season [five months of the year] small boat operations are unsafe. However, the US Government is financing the dredging of Mombasa's harbor channel. A Defense Department official anticipated that once dredging is completed, carriers will be able to make six visits per year, a threefold increase over present usage.¹⁶) By contrast, good liberty also can be found year round in Bombay, which is about a third as far as Mombasa from the northern Arabian Sea. But since the United States refuses to declare whether or not its warships are carrying nuclear weapons, India will not permit port visits by US naval combatants.

During crises, Oman's airfields and port facilities would play a crucial role as a staging area for combat forces. But Seeb, the international airfield of Muscat, is roughly 700 nautical miles from Khuzistan (i.e., beyond the unrefueled combat radius of our shorter range tactical aircraft) and a few hundred miles further from the Iranian mountain passes through which a Soviet march to the Gulf would advance. As Albert Wohlstetter has well documented,¹⁷ it would be far easier to try to interdict a Soviet invasion of Iran from closer airfields in eastern Turkey—the back door to the Persian Gulf—than from more distant ones in Oman or even Egypt and Israel. Also, well-developed airfields in Turkey are already available, while those in Oman still need to be refurbished. Employing Turkish facilities would enhance our flexibility in dealing with both NATO and Southwest Asia contingencies.

Revitalizing Turkey's defenses would strengthen NATO's southern flank at a time when Greece's commitment to the alliance is waning.

Clearly it will be difficult for the Reagan Administration to bring Turkey into the "strategic consensus" it is trying to achieve in Southwest Asia. This is due not simply because of unstable political conditions there or because of Turkey's misgivings about US policy in the Middle East, but also because Turkey, having suffered a US arms embargo after the 1974 Cyprus crisis, has reason to distrust renewed strategic cooperation with the United States.

Questions have been raised about the reliability of our existing access arrangements. Many believe that security relationships with states in this politically volatile region of the world are bound to be ephemeral. Since the foreign and security policies of our access donors are not wholly compatible with our own, there may be certain contingencies in which access to a given donor's facilities would be denied. It is argued, therefore, that we need redundant access to insure against that possibility.¹⁸ (It seems obvious, however, that should the Soviets invade Iran, facilities in Kenya and Somalia—due partly to their long distance from the upper Persian Gulf—would not serve as adequate substitutes for those in Oman.)

However accurate the above-mentioned generalizations may be, a better understanding of the reliability of our access relationships can be gained by examining the reasons why each donor is willing to furnish access. These factors tend to be specific, and analyzing the conditions that affect them should provide useful insights about the future of our access relations. The case of Oman, whose facilities are the most important of the three Indian Ocean states with whom we have access agreements, can serve as an example.¹⁹

Initial fears that our 1980 access agreement would be the "kiss of death" for Oman's Sultan Qabus have proved groundless so far, partly because of our success in maintaining a very low profile even though our routine support operations have been inconvenienced thereby. For example, after the aborted Iranian hostage rescue mission in April 1980, our fleet air logistic support activities were shifted from Seeb to the more austere and isolated airfield on Masirah Island. The Sultan's government also has taken measures to insure that our use of Omani facilities would not compromise Oman's sovereignty. Our support activities there are consequently

subject to a highly centralized Omani command structure, which occasionally has complicated our operations.

Where our access may have a destabilizing impact is if our construction work, which is now underway after some initial delays, aggravates the already serious problem of high-level corruption in Oman. Over the next several years the US Government will spend hundreds of million dollars in developing a support infrastructure at several locations in Oman. In doing so, we have acceded to the Sultanate's request that "maximum practicable" use be made of Omani contractors as either joint venture partners or subcontractors.²⁰

Besides high-level corruption, other potential threats to the Sultanate include the large presence of foreigners in the armed forces,²¹ among the Sultan's most influential advisers, and Oman's business and professional elites. Another potential target for dissidents are the expatriate Omanis from Baluchistan and Zanzibar, for whom Arabic is a foreign language. They have monopolized the jobs created in the process of Oman's rapid modernization over the past decade. In that process the authority of Oman's traditional leaders gradually has been undermined by an emerging modern bureaucracy.

But whereas Oman offers fertile ground for dissident activity, no group has mobilized significant opposition by exploiting the Sultanate's vulnerabilities. The Marxist-oriented People's Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) is the logical candidate for such a role, but it has been quiescent since the collapse of the Dhofar rebellion 6 years ago. It now focuses more on proselytizing Omani students living abroad than on trying to revive insurgency in the Dhofar, which may no longer seem like an attractive option. Since the supply route from the PDRY, where the PFLO is based, to the Dhofar region is narrow, it can be easily interdicted, and hence insurgency can be controlled. Attempting to revive the Dhofar rebellion would therefore simply play into Washington's hands, for in such a contingency US military power could play a very effective role.

Positive factors for stability also exist in Oman. So far, the rapid modernization Sultan Qabus introduced 12 years ago when he deposed his father has sustained his popularity. Due to recent discoveries of oil deposits, Oman's economic prospects seem reasonably good into the next decade. On balance then, the Sultanate appears secure at least in the short run.

As long as Qabus stays in power, US access to Omani facilities is likely to be available when needed because our security interests generally are compatible. After the fall of the Shah, who provided Iranian expeditionary forces to quell the Dhofar rebellion, Qabus felt isolated and solicited US support. He values the American military presence, albeit "over the horizon," as a counter to the Soviets—to check what he sees as their expansionist drive, directed from both north and south toward the Gulf, that places Oman in the middle of a pincer movement. He also values our efforts to contain local wars such as the one now in progress between Iran and Iraq. Finally, he sees the United States as the ultimate protector of local pro-Western regimes—both his own and neighboring ones.

Though policies diverge on Israel, this is not a serious impediment to US-Omani relations. Oman, in fact, was the only Arab state in the region to support the Camp David accords. This policy reflects Oman's historic isolation from the rest of the Arab world and also the fact that relatively few Palestinians reside in Oman. These factors explain why Oman has been the only Arab state willing to enter an access arrangement with us.

But what happens when Sultan Qabus is gone? The long-term prospects for US access are not favorable. It seems more than likely that the Sultanate will not outlive Qabus, and just how long it survives in the midst of rapid modernization in what was only a decade ago a highly traditional Islamic society remains unclear. Independent of external circumstances, the next generation of Oman's leaders are less likely than Sultan Qabus to support US military access. Emerging Omani elites being educated at Arab universities are far more likely than Sandhurst-trained Qabus to share Arab antipathy for a foreign military presence in any form. Nationalist future leaders will probably seek independent means of satisfying security requirements, and Oman's historic reliance on foreigners for that purpose will likely come to an end. To the extent that US military access is seen as part of that traditional policy, Oman's willingness to furnish these facilities will probably decline.

The lack of shore-based support constrains our ability not only to project military power ashore during crises, but also to maintain a peacetime naval presence as well. Limited opportunities for rest and recreation ashore for the 20,000 naval and civilian crews serving aboard US ships in the Indian Ocean represent one aspect

of this problem that has thus far been largely ignored. Some idea of the magnitude of the "liberty" problem can be gained by comparing the ratios of time spent in Indian Ocean ports to total time deployed in the Indian Ocean for US naval task forces before and after the Fall of 1979 when the Navy established a continuous presence. Prior to that time, when the Navy maintained intermittent patrols alternating carrier and major surface combatant task groups in the Indian Ocean, deployment of (non-Middle East force²²) units averaged 45 days. Of that time, roughly 20 percent was spent in port on visits of 2 days duration or longer, which would be sufficient time for crews to receive some liberty ashore. For the year following the initiation of a continuous presence of two carrier battle groups in the Indian Ocean, average deployment lengths for all units increased to 3 months, and the average proportion of time spent in port plummeted to less than 5 percent.²³ The percentage of time in port included visits to Diego Garcia, which was never intended to serve as a liberty port.

Moreover, the quality of crew rest and recreation ashore leaves much to be desired, for there are few good liberty ports in the Indian Ocean. And some of the best ones, such as Victoria in the Seychelles, are now off limits to US warships, mainly because of hostile local reactions to increased US military activities in the area. Although littoral states may be powerless to rid the Indian Ocean of foreign naval presence, they can nevertheless make it more difficult for the superpowers to maintain their presence by curtailing access to local ports.

From the Navy's perspective, the situation with respect to liberty visits has improved over the past year. The first US carrier visited Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1981. In connection with improved military cooperation with the Reagan Administration, Pakistan's ports are now open again for US naval visits. Once dredging operations in Mombasa are completed, carriers will be able to visit that port year round. The Navy also has attempted, so far without complete success, to lengthen home port time to one year for carriers deployed on 6-month cruises in the Indian Ocean.²⁴

While the situation is improving, the shortfall in liberty visits will undoubtedly remain as long as the United States maintains a continuous large naval presence in the Indian Ocean. This means that long deployments in tropical conditions with few opportunities for rest ashore will be the norm with incalculable repercussions on

crew retention and readiness. It is worth remembering, however, that crew morale is the product of many factors. Whatever negative impact lack of shore liberty has upon crew morale may be offset by a sense of purpose connected with a real mission in the Indian Ocean. That evidently happened during the Iranian hostage crisis when visitors aboard US combatants in the area reported crew morale to be high.

The "liberty" problem already has had some negative operational implications that are not well understood. One way the Navy has tried to compensate for the lack of opportunities for liberty visits has been to use cramped Diego Garcia for limited crew rest.²⁵ To the extent that Diego Garcia has been used as an ersatz liberty port, its use for other, more essential support functions may have been constrained. Another way the Navy has dealt with the liberty problem is to increase use of ports in western Australia. These ports are about 10 days, assuming normal transiting speed, from the main operating area in the northern Arabian Sea, or about as far away from there as Subic Bay. Units visiting Australian ports, therefore, are away from operating stations for about 4 weeks. Reliance on these ports for liberty ashore would draw down on the average force levels maintained on station.

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY

The Reagan Administration is considering reducing our naval strength in the Indian Ocean to one carrier battle group. If implemented, this measure would not only yield savings ultimately of well over \$100 million a year,²⁶ but it also would improve the liberty problem by removing about a third of the naval personnel now serving in the Indian Ocean. Should the remaining carrier visit Australian ports, this would mean that no carrier-based aircraft would be available for missions in Southwest Asia for weeks at a time. And if that arrangement would be found acceptable, pressure would probably be exerted to shift towards a flexible pattern of carrier deployments, which would enable us to respond more effectively to future crises wherever they may occur. It would also obviate the liberty problem in the Indian Ocean.

If the technical and political obstacles constraining our ability to project military power into Southwest Asia can be overcome, it will take several years to do so. In the interim, we have opted for a

deterrence strategy containing the threat of horizontal escalation of the conflict should deterrence fail. As Defense Secretary Weinberger has stated, "If Soviet aggression against our vital interests occurs in an area where they have significant advantages, it is not axiomatic that the US response will be confined to that region."²⁷ He further added that "our deterrent capability is linked with our ability and willingness to shift or widen the war to other areas."²⁸ Sweeping the Soviets off the seas is mentioned often as a Soviet vulnerability that should be exploited in such circumstances.²⁹ However, war widening options carry the seed of vertical escalation without achieving the US political objective of securing access to Persian Gulf oil.

The Reagan Administration counts on the RDJTF even in its formative phase of development as being able to signal US resolve to go to war with the Soviets to defend our vital interests in the Gulf. Two assumptions about the RDJTF's employment have been made that bear directly on its ability to act as an effective deterrent force: first, that it would be invited into a country and be able to operate initially in an uncontested environment; and second, that it would have and use advance warning to preempt a Soviet attack.

Neither of these assumptions seems well-founded. Given the current virulent anti-Americanism of the Khomeini regime, there is little reason to believe we would be invited into Iran even if Soviet troops were crossing the border. Under such circumstances the RDJTF might be deployed without invitation and face local, if not Soviet, opposition. While the RDJTF has units capable of seizing contested areas (e.g., the 82nd Airborne Division and Marine amphibious forces), the added time it would take to secure local airfields and port facilities would delay, perhaps critically, the influx of other combat forces and supplies.

The flaw of a preemption strategy is its reliance on advance warning. As Albert Wohlstetter aptly stated, "the usable amount of 'warning time'—where warning is shorn of ambiguities enough to permit the insertion of firepower or massive movements to the theater—is likely to be measured in hours or tens of hours rather than weeks or even days."³⁰ The problem is not so much one of detecting a Soviet mobilization but rather of knowing what it may mean. Our record of predicting Soviet interventions is not particularly good. Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for example, high-ranking advisors to President Carter believed the

Soviets intended merely to increase the number of their advisors, not to intervene on a massive scale. Should a President be unwilling to commit US forces until a Soviet assault were certain, there might well be insufficient time to deploy those forces preemptively.

On the other hand, were a President willing to commit forces in the absence of clarity regarding Soviet intentions, he could find himself justifying the very Soviet intervention he sought to prevent. Alternatively, were we to act on the basis of advance warning that turned out to be a false alarm, we would be seen as either reckless or rapacious. (Indeed, many Arabs fear that a preemptive strategy could be used in this way to seize the oil fields.) Our credibility would be damaged. The next time a President opted to act in anticipation of a Soviet attack our regional allies would be far less receptive and accommodating.

It is far easier to point out the pitfalls of our current strategy for Southwest Asian security than to devise an effective one for the future. On this subject there has been considerable public debate, reflecting in part varying assessments of the constraints involved. How that debate is resolved will impact significantly on future force level planning, so it is worth examining some of the main arguments that have been advanced.

Perhaps the most sweeping criticism of the RDJTF has come from Jeffrey Record.³¹ He finds its flaws

attributable in part to the inherent political obstacles to successful intervention in the Gulf, and in part to the structural, technological, and doctrinal unsuitability of rapidly deployable US forces for the likely combat environments they would confront in the region.³²

The thrust of his argument is that if it is inherently impossible to counter a Soviet attack in Iran by conventional means, then we should seek to develop instead a smaller, more flexible force capable of handling crisis contingencies less demanding and more likely to occur than a Soviet invasion. In his view,

the deficiencies of the present Rapid Deployment Force can be overcome only through its replacement by a small, agile, tactically capable intervention force that is based at and supplied from the sea, governed by a single unified command, and supported by expanded sea power, especially forcible-entry capabilities.³³

There are, however, problems with basing soldiers at sea in the Indian Ocean climate.

Kenneth Waltz also favors a small, highly mobile "asset-seizing" force, but more optimistically believes that it would be able to deter a Soviet incursion into Iran.³⁴ In his view, the credibility of deterrence rests primarily on the interest of the deterrer being perceived to be a vital one. The deployment of troops to Khuzistan would make manifest our vital interest in Persian Gulf oil. Moreover, if deterrence has worked in West Berlin, where vital Soviet interests (in the stability of East Germany) are affected, then it should also work in the more defensible Gulf region, which is far less important to the Soviets as long as they remain self-sufficient in oil. (While Soviet oil production is tapering off gradually, this will affect their ability to export petroleum. They are unlikely to become net importers of oil in the foreseeable future however.) If a deterrence strategy for Southwest Asia is effective for the short term, there is no reason to believe it would not work for the longer term as well. Hence, the RDJTF should be developed, at far less expense, as a smaller and more mobile force than the one now envisioned.

An opposite view has been advanced by Albert Wohlstetter, who argues that the United States has no alternative but to develop the capability to meet a Soviet conventional threat in Southwest Asia in place and on its own terms.³⁵ In his opinion, "to declare a bare tripwire policy does not register a determination to use nuclear weapons in a time of crisis; rather, it registers a lack of will to prepare before the crisis to meet a nonnuclear threat on its own terms."³⁶ To acquire a "high standard of confidence" that we will be able to deal with a Soviet attack in Iran requires not only a major enhancement of our power projection capabilities but also the military cooperation of strategically-located allies like Turkey.

How much force is needed in Southwest Asia is an issue that will be debated for a long time. Obviously, with increased pressure to reduce defense spending, less costly strategies will be favored. But one key element in that debate is whether the United States will ever be able to surmount the technical and political obstacles that now stand in the way of our possessing a full range of military options for dealing with threats to the security of Persian Gulf oil. On balance, it would appear that these constraints could be overcome to an appreciable degree. Despite its great distance from the United States, Southwest Asia is not, like West Berlin, inherently indefensible. With vastly improved strategic mobility capabilities,

more suitable equipment and tactics, and secure access to more strategically-situated facilities, we should have a reasonable chance, even without much advance warning, of countering a Soviet invasion.

In Europe, the United States can plan for the worst case involving NATO-Warsaw Pact hostilities with assurance that, however unlikely, it is also the only threat that would require a US military response. In Southwest Asia, however, where there are far greater and more likely security threats than Soviet incursions, we do not have that luxury. Indeed, our planning to deal with a Soviet invasion of Iran could easily be rendered obsolete by the course of events in that country. Should, for example, a leftist regime take power in Iran, the Soviets could well find themselves in a predicament similar to the one they faced in Afghanistan—of increasing involvement in support of a beleaguered client regime. Should Soviet combat forces be requested to help stabilize an established government (and this time not be used to evict the invitor), an American President would face a very difficult decision: to intervene militarily without an invitation and to contravene international law thereby; or to respect it and thus acquiesce to a Soviet military presence in Iran.

The pressure to acquiesce to such a Soviet intervention would undoubtedly be enormous. The Soviets might limit their initial troop deployments to Teheran and northern Iran, thereby respecting traditional Western interests in southern Iran by leaving it a no-man's land. Moreover, any Soviet intervention would almost certainly be accompanied by reassurances of Western access to Persian Gulf oil. In this way the Soviets might try to manipulate our allies' greater stake in Persian Gulf oil to exert added pressure on us to accept a Soviet *fait accompli*.

While most of the foregoing discussion has focused on constraints affecting our ability to project and sustain military power in Southwest Asia, the scenario of a limited Soviet intervention in Iran described above underlines the importance of the political constraints that affect how such power will be used. In crisis situations the employment of military power is determined less by estimates of relative military strengths than by calculations of political outcomes.

ENDNOTES

1. US Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 2970*, Part III: Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee, Title I, 97th Cong., 1st sess., Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 41.
2. US Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for FY 1982*, Hearings, 97th Cong., 1st sess., Part I: Posture Statement, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 48.
3. See Stuart L. Koehl and Stephen Glick, "The Rapid Deployment Farce," *The American Spectator*, January 1981, pp. 18-21. Their argument is based on the supposition that the RDJTF, which when fully deployed could field only 270 tanks, would be badly outgunned by regional powers such as Iraq, which has 2,000 tanks in its inventory. This assessment ignores superior US and allied (e.g., Israeli) air power that could be brought to bear against regional opponents however.
4. See Jeffrey Record, *The Rapid Deployment Force and U.S. Military Intervention in the Persian Gulf*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1981, p. 54.
5. US Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for FY 1982*, Hearings, 97th Cong., 1st sess., Part IV: Sea Power and Force Projection, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 1724.
6. US Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1982*, Hearings, 97th Cong., 1st sess., Part IV: Rapid Deployment Force, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 264.
7. In this regard Jeffrey Record has argued that the Army's high "fire power/attrition" approach to warfare, which entails a very low ratio of combat to support formations, places too great a burden on a logistics supply train to be effective in long-range deployment against the Soviets, whose combat formations possess greater organic firepower. See Record, p. 3.
8. US Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1982*, p. 370.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
11. See E. Asa Bates, "The Rapid Deployment Force: Fact or Fiction," *RUSI*, (Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies), June 1981, pp. 23-32.
12. See *Strategic Survey 1980-1981*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981, p. 18.
13. US Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1982*, p. 351.
14. US Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations*, Hearings on Sea Power and Force Projection, p. 1824.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 1718.
16. See US Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, *Military Construction Appropriations for 1982*, Part V, Hearings, 97th Cong., 1st sess., Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 209.

17. See Albert Wohlstetter, "Meeting the Threat in the Persian Gulf," *Survey*, Spring 1980, pp. 180-181.

18. US Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1982*, p. 218.

19. For additional information on political trends in Oman, see Ian Greig, "The Security of Persian Gulf Oil," *Atlantic Community Quarterly*, Summer 1980, pp. 193-200; and "Oman: Some Competence, and Some Corruption," *Armed Forces Journal International*, November 1980, pp. 67-68.

20. See the memorandum, dated November 24, 1980, by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Perry J. Fliakas on "Construction in the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf," contained in US Congress, House, Appropriations Committee, *Military Construction Appropriations for 1982*, Part III, Hearings, 97th Cong., 1st sess., Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 384.

21. There are over 600 seconded and retired British officers serving in the Sultan's armed forces. They command all service branches. Large numbers of Pakistanis, Jordanians and other Arab personnel also serve in Oman's military forces. Reliance on foreigners to secure the Sultanate is a deliberate and traditional policy. There are, in fact, more Omanis serving in the armed forces of the United Arab Emirates than in those of Oman.

22. Since the small Middle East force performs mainly diplomatic "show the flag" missions that require many port visits, it has been excluded from our calculations.

23. In many cases deployments were far longer. The carrier *Eisenhower*, for example, paid only one 5-day port call to Singapore during a 255-day deployment in 1980. US Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 2970*, Part III: Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee, p. 41.

24. US Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations*, Hearings on Sea Power and Force Projection, pp. 1871-72.

25. The Navy has tried not to overload Diego Garcia. For example, though it would be easier to perform maintenance of unit equipment stored on prepositioning ships ashore, the insufficient availability of space and facilities on Diego Garcia make it impossible to do so. Instead, the Navy has decided to deploy for that purpose a maintenance barge, whose crew will live and work aboard it and have their own recreational facilities. Their presence on the island, as well as support required for the barge from the island, would be kept to a minimum. US Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1982*, p. 359.

26. The cost for maintaining a second carrier battle group in the Indian Ocean has been estimated to be \$124 million per year. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

27. US Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for FY 1982*, Hearings, Part I: Posture Statement, p. 71.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

29. An exposition of this proposal is contained in F. J. West, "NATO II: Common Boundaries for Common Interests," *Naval War College Review*, January-February 1981, pp. 59-67. The drawback of a strategy based on horizontal escalation is not knowing where it would end. If we exploited the Soviets'

vulnerability of exposed naval forces in forward areas, they could retaliate by exploiting our areas of vulnerability (e.g., West Berlin).

30. Wohlstetter, p. 166.

31. See Record, *The Rapid Deployment Force and U.S. Military Intervention in the Persian Gulf*.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

34. Kenneth N. Waltz, "A Strategy for the Rapid Deployment Force," *International Security*, Spring 1981, pp. 49-73.

35. See Wohlstetter.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-65.

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