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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

NOV 9 1978

Charles J

DOC #119

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: U.S. Policy in the Middle East

DECLASSIFIED IN FULL
Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: OCT 05 2015

I just returned from the Middle East and Africa, as you know, where I met with, among others, the heads of government and military chiefs of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Sudan. I found in each country a great appreciation for what the United States had done to contribute to the peace and security of the region, and a desire for a closer relationship with us.

I also found grave concern in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan about the threat from the Soviet Union. Each leader saw himself and his country on the front lines of opposition to Soviet encroachment and domination. Each had clearly in mind the scope and speed of Soviet arms supply demonstrated in Ethiopia, and the Soviet propensity for subversion and political intervention accomplished in Afghanistan. Each thought we seriously underestimated the weight of the Soviet threat to the region. Each, in one way or another, professed not to understand the objectives of the United States in the region. They argued that we are equivocal in declaring and pursuing our objectives and in supporting our friends.

I explained that American policy was indeed aimed at building up and supporting our friends. I said we were not indifferent to Soviet activities. I said you personally had taken a number of actions that made this clear--for example, in Zaire; in arms supply to Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Turkey; in the F-15 sale to Saudi Arabia; and in your efforts to bring about a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which would do much to limit Soviet opportunities in the region. The leaders acknowledged these strong steps.

I recognize that most of what I heard is a familiar story to us. I recognize also that the nature of these governments, and their relatively small size and close proximity to the Soviet Union or to Soviet activities in neighboring states, makes them more fearful than we believe is warranted.

Nevertheless, I recommend we carefully weigh their message. The area of the Persian Gulf-Arabian Peninsula is a fragile and potentially explosive one, as events in Iran suggest. The risks of instability are significant and Russian opportunities for meddling are substantial. My preliminary

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15-m-1692



Judgment is that, for a small additional investment of political and financial capital, we could constructively advance American purposes in this area. For example, we might make stronger and more frequent statements of American interest and policy, do more consulting with the governments, develop a more elaborate web of defense and other contacts (ship visits, military exercises and the like), and consider, for the poorer countries, additional financial assistance.

In view of the extreme importance of this area to U.S. and Allied national security interests, I recommend we undertake, on an inter-agency basis, a prompt review of U.S. policy toward the area, to see what measures we might take to strengthen our position there. I know Harold Brown shares my view and I believe he also recommended such a study.

ok

W. Lawrence

cc: Sec State
Sec Def
Asst to President
for National Security
Affairs

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Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
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Declassify: X Deny in Full: _____
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MDR: 15 -M- 1692