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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

From: Kenneth W. Dam, Acting Secretary
Caspar W. Weinberger

Subject: US Central Command Forward Headquarters

This memorandum responds to your request for a report on the possibilities of establishing a headquarters in Southwest Asia for the US Central Command.

While there are several ways of establishing a forward headquarters in the region, we are not optimistic about our chances in the near-term of locating a headquarters on the Arabian Peninsula where it would be militarily most desirable. The preferred locations from a military standpoint are in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman. Yet, these nations are likely to be extremely cautious regarding the presence of even a headquarters element. We plan, however, quietly to approach Saudi Arabia within the next several months to obtain its views on locating a headquarters element there or elsewhere in the Persian Gulf area.

If the Saudi response to this low key discussion is strongly negative, as it may well be, we should not raise the subject again until there is progress in the Middle East. If the response is relatively positive, we should shift toward proposing, formally, that the US establish a forward headquarters element in Riyadh or Dhahran. If the Saudis reject this formal proposal, we should reassess the situation and consider approaching Bahrain and Oman. Other regional countries or the afloat alternative would be considered only after it became clear that Bahrain and Oman were also opposed.

If the matter is handled carefully, we would hope eventually to establish a headquarters element of between 70 and 175 personnel somewhere on the Arabian Peninsula. Progress toward this objective, however, might be slow and will be influenced heavily by events in Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

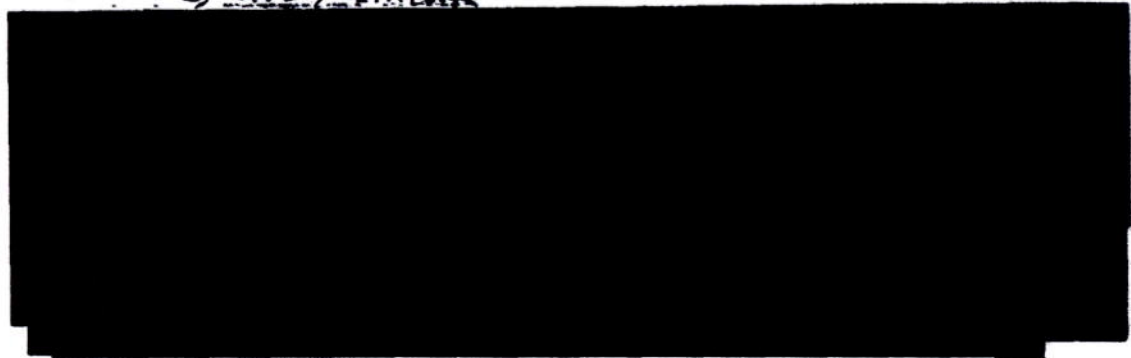
A full report with analysis and background information is attached. We will keep you informed of developments on this issue.

Attachment:
As stated.

Caspar W. Weinberger

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February 24, 1983

**REPORT ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF ESTABLISHING
A FORWARD HEADQUARTERS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA FOR
THE US CENTRAL COMMAND**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 1982, the President approved establishing US Central Command and endorsed the goal of finding a suitable headquarters for the command in Southwest Asia. The President asked the Secretaries of State and Defense to report by the end of February 1983 on the possibilities of achieving this goal. This report provides a basis for responding to the President's request.

The regional headquarters could vary in size and configuration, from the entire US Central Command headquarters staff of 850 personnel to an element of about 70. While locating the entire headquarters in the region is a possibility for the long-term, it is not politically or logistically feasible in the near-term.

The preferred option from a military point of view in the near-term is a land-based, forward headquarters element of about 175 personnel. This size staff could perform all regular headquarters functions, to include commanding and controlling forces in a small contingency, maintaining its own communications, and administering peacetime programs.

A smaller forward headquarters, though less capable, would be preferable to none at all if it could be established soon. If adequate communications support and logistic services were available from existing facilities, a headquarters as small as about 70 people could suffice. (If adequate communications were not available and if host nation support were limited or non-existent, the forward headquarters could require up to 475 personnel.) The operational limitations of a forward headquarters much smaller than 70 personnel would outweigh the advantages of establishing a headquarters presence in the region.

Military Criteria for Location

The most important military criteria in site selection for the forward headquarters are strategic location, access to a military infrastructure, the ease from which forces could be commanded and controlled, and vulnerability to attack. In accordance with these and other criteria, the four preferred land-based locations are

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(1) Riyadh, (2) Dhahran, (3) Bahrain, and (4) Muscat. Other potential sites rank lower, primarily because of poor location and lack of military infrastructure. An afloat option should be considered only if no acceptable ashore location were available.

Political Assessment

In the near-term, the locations where we most likely could establish a forward headquarters element are Somalia and Diego Garcia. Other regional nations, like Bahrain and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia have gradually displayed less anxiety regarding a visible, land-based US military presence, but, currently, would probably not accept a new, highly visible US military presence embodied in a headquarters. With progress in the withdrawal of outside forces from Lebanon and in the Middle East peace process, it might be easier to negotiate suitable arrangements for a forward headquarters with these countries.

There are several other considerations. First, creating a forward headquarters for USCENCOM is only one of several programs we are pursuing which might require some increase in US military presence ashore. Establishing a regional communications network and expanding our pre-positioning and contingency support arrangements, all currently underway, will also increase the visibility of US military in the region. Second, any country agreeing to host the USCENCOM headquarters is likely to expect favorable US consideration of security-related requests; some of these expectations might be more than the US could meet.

Approaches

The analysis of military and political factors suggests several ways of establishing a forward headquarters for USCENCOM. These are:

- Do nothing until progress in the Middle East peace process is clearly evident.
- Initiate low key inquiries in the next six months with those nations in which it is militarily desirable to locate a headquarters (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman) and follow with formal proposals should they be receptive.
- Propose establishing a forward headquarters element in Bahrain.
- Propose establishing a forward headquarters element in Oman.

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• Propose establishing a forward headquarters to the remaining countries that have acceptable land-based locations (UAE, Jordan, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia, in that order).

• Establish a forward headquarters element afloat.

Recommendation

We recommend against either establishing a forward headquarters element afloat—which the United States could do unilaterally—or formally proposing to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, or Oman at this time that we establish a headquarters element. We also recommend against awaiting progress on the Middle East peace process, although success in this area would clearly improve our prospects for acceptance of a USCENTCOM headquarters.

Rather, we should begin in the next several months by asking the Saudis for their views of a forward headquarters element of between 70 and 175 personnel. This inquiry could be initiated in conjunction with briefing Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman on US strategy toward the region and related requirements for US-regional cooperation generated by our strategy. The inquiry would, of course, be viewed by the Arab nations as an initial approach by the United States. But our interest in a forward headquarters would come as no surprise, and, if it were clear that the US was not at this time proposing the establishment of a regional headquarters, little would be lost.

If the Saudi response to this low key discussion is strongly negative, we should not raise the subject again until we have made substantial progress on a plan for withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and the Jordanians have made a decision on entering the peace process.

If the Saudi response were ambiguous or positive, we would propose that the headquarters element be located in either Riyadh or Dhahran. We would indicate that our preferred location for a USCENTCOM headquarters is Saudi Arabia, but express our intention to request acceptance of the headquarters by another Gulf state if the Saudis reject our proposal. We would then approach the government of Bahrain and, after our initial demarche, we would ask the Saudis to support our request with the Bahrainis. In discussions with the Bahrainis, we would propose that the headquarters element be collocated ashore with the MIDEASTFOR Administrative Support Unit. In accordance with Bahraini desires, any arrangement with the Bahraini government would best be proposed within the existing MIDEASTFOR Lease Agreement and would preferably follow a positive Bahraini response to the proposals currently before them for increased cooperation with the US.

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In both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, we would make clear to our prospective hosts that over the longer-term we would hope to expand the initial arrangement to a full-size forward headquarters of approximately 175 personnel.

An approach to the Omanis should be deferred pending the outcome of discussions with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, largely because of the full agenda we already have with the Omanis. Approaching other countries--UAE, Jordan, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia--should also be deferred at least until the initial inquiry has been made to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman.

If our initial approaches fail, we must look at this effort as part of an evolutionary process and keep searching for ways to alleviate regional sensitivities toward a forward headquarters. This could be accomplished through, among other things, exercises and deployments in the region, intelligence sharing, visits (both by USCINCENT to Southwest Asia and by regional military leaders to MacDill Air Force Base), and USCENTCOM's participation in joint military commissions. Then, as regional governments become accustomed to USCENTCOM and we establish working relationships with their military organizations, other approaches could be made. As an interim measure, we would consider establishing the forward headquarters afloat.

I. MILITARY RATIONALE

The US Central Command (USCENTCOM)--with responsibility for the command and control of US military forces in Southwest Asia and the planning, training, and readiness of other designated forces to defend vital US interests in that area--was established as a unified command on January 1, 1983. The headquarters is located at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida. Thus, unlike other regional unified commands, USCENTCOM must presently perform its functions without a headquarters in its area of responsibility. This situation, while not unworkable, hampers the command's credibility and effectiveness. It could be improved significantly by establishing a forward headquarters in Southwest Asia.

A. Functions

The primary functions of a forward headquarters would be to represent the Commander in Chief, US Central Command (USCINCENT) in Southwest Asia and link the main headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base with US embassies, US military organizations in the region, and with military officials of the regional countries.

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