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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

15 JUN 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY POLICY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MANPOWER,
RESERVE AFFAIRS AND LOGISTICS
DIRECTOR, PROGRAM ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

SUBJECT: Defense Policy Guidance for Southwest Asia

One of the highest priorities of this Administration has been to determine our policy and strategic approach to Southwest Asia.. The attached background paper reviews how Defense policy thinking on Southwest Asia has evolved and where we stand today. It is intended to serve as a basis for policy consistency as we continue to refine that policy and develop programs and capabilities to carry it out.

I would appreciate having any comments or observations you wish to make.

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Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDP, ESD, WHS
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Defense Policy Guidance for Southwest Asia

I. INTRODUCTION

~~107~~ The interrelated economies of the US, Europe, and Japan could not do without Persian Gulf oil. Soviet control of Gulf oil would totally change the political and economic shape of the world. The prime US defense objective in Southwest Asia (SWA), therefore, is to prevent Soviet military hegemony in the region. Two other US objectives related to the Gulf are: (1) prevention of the political disintegration of the region (e.g., the Iranian collapse on a regional basis); and (2) resolution of the international economic crisis generated by Western dependence on Persian Gulf oil. This paper first takes a macro-perspective of the problem and outlines strategic considerations. Then it reviews the evolution of defense policy thinking on SWA and recommends policy guidance to cope with the problem.

II. SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

(U) In essence, at least for the foreseeable future, what happens in SWA determines the economic well-being of the industrialized world. This means we must maintain access to adequate supplies of reasonably priced oil. Even with access, however, there has been a marked deterioration in the economic, financial and strategic position of the industrialized world resulting from OPEC price increases. The financial problems of recycling petro-dollars at current prices, let alone at future prices, have become increasingly onerous. The impact on the US and international financial systems has resulted in a worldwide sustained recession, slow rates of economic growth, high rates of inflation, widespread unemployment, industrial and national bankruptcies, and political upheavals. While these economic burdens make it especially difficult for the US and our allies at a time when we are forced to increase defense spending in the face of growing Soviet challenges, they would be secondary compared to the challenges we would face without access to oil. The economy of Western Europe would be crippled, and the worldwide reallocation of oil supplies would have a severe impact on the US.

~~107~~ We must also be concerned with oil being cut off or significantly reduced by the political disintegration of the region. To date, most DoD planning has been of a military-operational nature, and has focused on the threat of a Soviet invasion of Iran. This is not, however, the most likely threat. The region is rife with potential internal and intraregional conflicts. Troublesome threats more likely to occur include the collapse and subsequent break-up of Iran as an independent and non-Soviet state, widening of the current Iran-Iraq war with deepening political divisions between regional states, and uprisings within the fragile political

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structures of some of the oil producing states. Military measures designed to deter a Soviet armed intervention may not deter or prove appropriate to respond to these other threats. In addition to the skillful employment of military forces as a tool of diplomacy and deterrence, we should place greater reliance on active diplomacy, intelligence capabilities, security assistance programs and other economic measures.

(S) The prospect of Soviet military hegemony in the region is the major concern of military planners. Regional nations can be expected to shape their policies in accord with their perception of the prevailing military balance between the superpowers. If the US were perceived as wanting in either the will or the capability to act strongly to defend its interests, it would undermine support of potential regional allies and perpetuate instability and adverse trends in the Persian Gulf area.

(S) The Soviets could achieve their objectives by political subversion, invasion by surrogate forces, or direct armed intervention. Most regional states are militarily weak, and all depend on external support to equip and supply their armed forces. This makes them exceptionally vulnerable to external influence, although they generally resist over-dependence on either superpower and abhor superpower domination or competition in their region. These circumstances are particularly enticing to the Soviets who, realizing that overt military aggression on Persian Gulf oilfields would mean general war with the United States, may opt for encouraging subversion and intraregional conflict as a safer, more productive policy.

III. GENERAL STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS.

(S) Given the need to maintain access to Gulf oil and the scope of the problem we face in maintaining that access, an integrated national strategy is required that:

- orchestrates the efforts of all agencies of the United States government;
- includes a strong energy program to reduce oil dependence;
- gains the cooperation of our allies and the acceptance and confidence of states in SWA;
- subordinates the regional quarrel between Arabs and Israelis to the global rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States;
- establishes realistic objectives for the mid-eighties, while adopting interim measures which recognize capabilities short of those objectives; and

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-- provides flexible responses to crises in the region.

(U) The national strategy must deal with the tarnished image of the United States as a resolute geo-political power, as well as with the increasing Soviet ability to threaten the region. We must convince the regional states that we are serious and get our allies to act in concert with us.

(U) Thus, although diplomatic and economic initiatives and pursuit of alternate energy sources will in the long run be critical aspects of free world security, for the next few years it is real and perceived military power which will govern the power balance in SWA. In time of major conflict in the region, we must be able to offset the Soviet military threat. And even in peacetime, the military power balance is a significant factor affecting the perceptions of regional states about what is in their long term interest.

IV. EVOLUTION OF DEFENSE POLICY THINKING

(U) The creation of the Rapid Deployment Forces (RDF) evolved as a new development in DoD policy, programming and planning for contingencies outside the geographic boundaries of NATO. DoD has made considerable progress in a short period of time identifying our needs and beginning to program to fill these needs (primarily in the areas of mobility, facility improvements and combat support). While the mission of the RDF was originally conceived as being global, nearly all planning and programming has focused on SWA. At issue has been how the RDF should be structured and employed.

(U) There have been several schools of thought on the RDF structure/employment and the related issue of US military presence and facility access in SWA. First, the position largely espoused by OSD for the past year was to build a larger rapidly-deployable force that could defend successfully our interests while keeping the fighting confined to the region. This would entail countering a Soviet invasion of Iran, for example, with US conventional ground forces operating along natural defense lines as far forward in Iran as possible. US forces would be deployed to the theater upon warning. They would seize key terrain features in front of the Soviet advance, preferably in the Zagros Mountains, and occupy key ports and airfields to permit the introduction of additional US forces. This approach puts a premium on increasing the size of our projectable land-based forces, strategic lift assets, large regional facilities, and combat service support.

(U) The greatest problem with this approach is that it could not be done before 1985 (if ever) when some of the improvement programs (especially in the area of mobility) come on the line. Another drawback is that to receive and support the force envisaged by this

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approach would require assured access to large facilities in the Gulf region. It would also require fighting (primarily air interdiction) from Turkey; factoring Turkish cooperation into our plans is a desirable longer-term goal. We should work to ensure it. But it is not a near-term option. The price tag to support a force capable of meeting the Soviets head on in the region would be considerable. To achieve that goal, we would be forced to spend enough money to be able to defend in Iran against 15 or more Soviet divisions at M+30. Furthermore, with the power projection advantage accruing to the Soviets by virtue of geographic proximity, there would be no case in which the Soviets--assuming their willingness to commit sufficient forces--could not eventually achieve superiority in the air and on the ground in Iran.

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A third school of thought is the maritime approach which would structure the RDF to be a small, agile and tactically capable intervention force that is based and supplied from the sea. Advocates of a maritime approach believe we should not structure a rapid deployment force that relies heavily on tenuous access to regional facilities. The dependence upon benign entry environments

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of air-transported Army units and land-based Air Force squadrons, which comprise the bulk of the forces now assigned to the RDF, may well be a standing invitation to hostile preemption of airfields and port facilities. Even in peacetime, a large US presence could work to destabilize friendly governments and raise the resentment of local populations. Furthermore, the Navy/Marine advocates believe that the cutting edge of any credible US intervention force in the region must rest upon sea power and the capacity to project power from sea to shore, forcibly if necessary.

(S) The biggest drawback to a maritime approach is that no one Service has the capability to accomplish the RDF mission. Any conflict involving a major Soviet invasion would require all the combat capabilities the United States could project. Naval and marine forces, if already on the scene, would be among the first to fight. But they would not be sufficient to finish it. In addition, by not focusing so narrowly on the types of forces that would be used (including those used in the initial response), we allow ourselves greater flexibility and more options in the way we fight. Besides, the conflict may not be reachable by sea-based forces.

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(S) Strengthening internal security in regional states and a determined effort on their part to resist (with US help) a Soviet takeover would play heavily in minimizing the opportunities for a Soviet attack. Support of the NATO Allies should be kept within Europe proper, although the assistance of allied naval forces and other military measures on a bilateral basis in the Indian Ocean region are to be encouraged. Allied efforts in NATO and Southwest Asia must be tied together, through political consultations as well as through commonsense military planning.

V. POLICY GUIDANCE

(S) Defense policy for Southwest Asia will be one of the foremost objectives of this Administration. In fact, SWA will rank alongside NATO as a strategic centerpiece of Defense conventional force planning and of incremental resource allocation for the next several years.

(S) The scope of the problem of maintaining access to Persian Gulf oil will require an integrated national strategy that draws on all available diplomatic, economic and national security resources. The overall US-Soviet military balance--as embodied in our strategic forces, NATO, and power at sea, as well as the military postures in SWA--will determine the perceptions and corresponding cooperation of other nations.

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