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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

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Date: JUN 05 2019

JCSM-66-81
12 March 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Military Strategy for Southwest Asia (U)

1. ~~(S)~~ US Interests. Southwest Asia is an area vital to the Free World and vulnerable to both regional instability and external threats. Dependence on Arabian Gulf oil inextricably links the security of Southwest Asia with the US commitments to NATO and east Asia and with the viability of Free World economies. Accordingly, maintaining unimpeded access to Arabian Gulf oil and preventing the expansion of Soviet influence are the fundamental US security interests in this region.
2. ~~(S)~~ Threats. Threats to vital US and allied interests in Southwest Asia are real and imminent. As witnessed in Iran, internal instability threatens major disruptions of oil exports. Intraregional conflicts, with the present Iraq-Iran war a case in point, also pose grave consequences because they could spread to involve the entire region. Both forms of conflict also provide opportunities for Soviet or Soviet-surrogate adventurism. Although not as likely to occur, the most militarily demanding threat would be a Soviet invasion through Iran to the Arabian Gulf. This threat is also potentially the most damaging to US interests.
3. ~~(S)~~ Elements of Strategy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recently reviewed a comprehensive set of military options that focuses on what US forces can achieve in the near term to protect US and allied interests in Southwest Asia. The strategy covers the entire threat spectrum and includes military actions, political initiatives, and allied and host-nation support requirements. The JCS strategy is based on deterrence of actions hostile to Free World interests. To enhance the limited ability of the United States to project and sustain forces in the region, US strategy calls not only for improved US military capabilities but also for the aggressive pursuit of increased political, economic, and military support from allies and friends. In particular, an improved strategic division of labor in other theaters, especially NATO, would enhance the US capability to protect mutual interests in Southwest Asia.

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a. (S) Internal Conflict. JCS strategy for internal conflict seeks to protect US interests in the event of political, social, religious, and economic instabilities that could lead to curtailed access to oil and an enhanced Soviet position. In most cases, US support would involve economic, technical, political, and security assistance programs. The strategy recognizes the constraints on the role of US military power and the need to bolster the position of the US-supported faction.

b. (S) Intraregional Conflict. The strategy for intraregional conflict seeks to protect US interests while defusing the potential for other regional states being drawn into the conflict and reducing the likelihood of Soviet involvement. Steps to accomplish these goals include coordinated diplomatic initiatives, increased security assistance, and direct military actions. All such actions taken in Southwest Asia must recognize regional concerns over excessive superpower influence and, consequently, should emphasize cooperation and collective action with allies and regional friends. The JCS strategy adheres to the principle that each nation bears primary responsibility for its own defense. US actions should therefore supplement self-defense capabilities, when US national interests are threatened, by the rapid application of appropriate assistance and, if necessary, sufficient force to deter or defeat the aggression.

c. (S) Deterrence of Soviet Aggression. With the power projection advantages accruing to the Soviet Union by virtue of geographic proximity, there will be no case in which the Soviets--given the willingness to commit sufficient forces and resources and acting with full determination to reach the Arabian Gulf--cannot eventually achieve superiority in the air and on the ground in Iran. US military strategy must therefore be designed to deter Soviet aggression and, should the Soviets launch an invasion, to dissuade them from continuing their advance. The US action must convey to the Soviets that, should they attack vital US interests in Southwest Asia, the United States would respond promptly with military force, not necessarily confined to that theater. In the final analysis, the prospect of actual combat with the United States and its allies, coupled with an evident US willingness to accept confrontation and escalation, may be the ultimate deterrent to Soviet aggression. US deterrent actions under this strategy should include:

(1) (S) Broad political, economic, and military initiatives designed to strengthen the independence and stability of regional nations and to make them less attractive targets for subversion or aggression.

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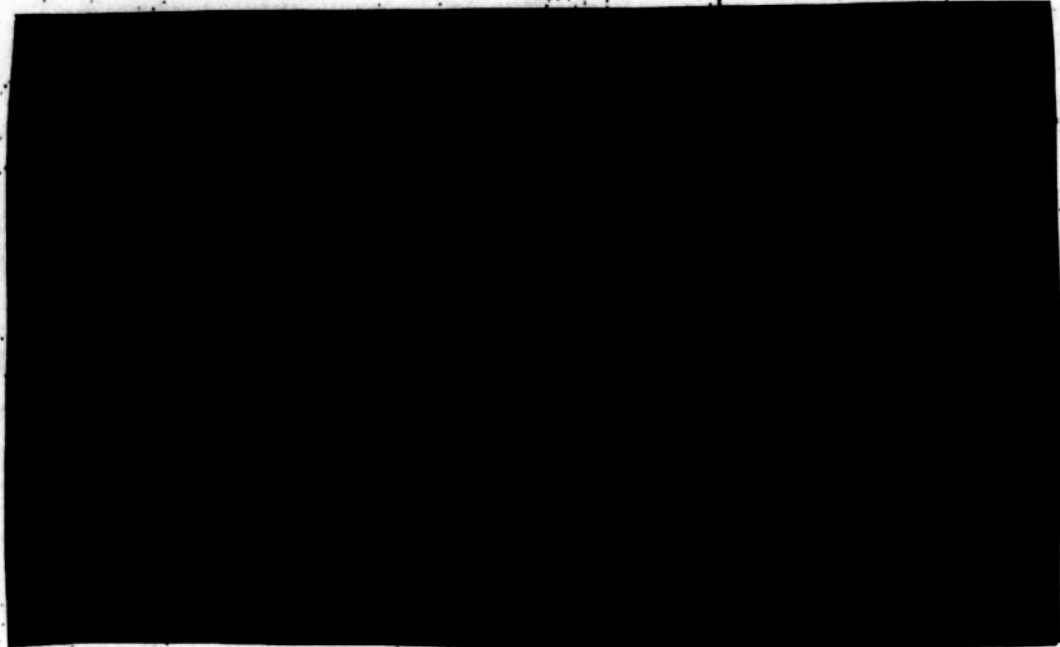
(2) ~~(S)~~ Improvements to the US military posture, including the development of a rapid deployment capability for substantial warfighting forces, and the expansion of access to enroute and regional facilities.

(3) ~~(S)~~ Unmistakable signals, phased to the threat, of an intent to react militarily to Soviet invasion and the willingness to risk escalation and widening the conflict.

d. (U) US Military Response

(1) ~~(S)~~ The United States cannot allow a Soviet thrust into the region without contesting it, nor can the United States accept yielding the Arabian Gulf to Soviet control. To do otherwise would destroy US political influence in Southwest Asia, place Western economies in jeopardy, severely strain the bonds of alliance with NATO nations and Japan, and result in a significant shift in the global balance of power. If deterrence should fail, the United States must take military action unilaterally or in concert with allies to protect vital interests.

(2) ~~(S)~~ Alternative concepts for an initial military response range from opposing the invasion at the Soviet-Iranian border to taking primarily maritime actions. They represent a range of actions that stress a firm initial response, the exact nature of which will depend on the effectiveness of US peacetime actions as well as on the military and diplomatic situation at the time. These alternatives include:



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4. (S) Peacetime Requirements. US military activities in peacetime must be part of a global strategy of deterrence, the key to which is the national will and military capability to protect US interests worldwide. The United States must also continue to pursue diplomatic initiatives essential for building a regional security framework. US actions must bolster regional states and encourage their cooperation while evoking support from US allies in Europe and Northeast Asia. Continuous US military presence in Southwest Asia, or at least on its immediate periphery, must be maintained. Periodic exercises and deployments highlighting the US military presence should be conducted. Greater access to regional facilities must be pursued vigorously. Such access should include facilities ashore for pre-positioned equipment/supplies, military communications, and naval support. Of greatest impact on deterrence, however, will be a demonstrated ability to deploy rapidly, employ, and sustain warfighting forces. The emphasis on these actions reflected in the current budget initiatives, if maintained over the next three to five years, will improve those capabilities necessary to protect US and allied interests in Southwest Asia.

5. (S) Conclusion. The military strategy outlined herein supports national efforts to protect US vital interests in Southwest Asia and provides the best probability of success with today's forces. Current military capabilities, however, are insufficient to achieve US objectives worldwide. As a result, severe risks are inherent in any strategy. Planning, programming, budgeting, and diplomatic efforts must continue to focus on correcting the recognized deficiencies.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

DAVID C. JONES, General, USAF
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

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