



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **DISSERTATION**

**GETTING TO WAR: AMERICAN SECURITY POLICY  
IN THE PERSIAN GULF, 1969–1991**

by

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June 2020

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**GETTING TO WAR: AMERICAN SECURITY POLICY IN THE PERSIAN  
GULF, 1969–1991**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the evolution of American security policy in the Persian Gulf from 1969 to the Gulf War of 1991. Its research question is: why, and with what consequences, did American security policy evolve from an arm's-length approach that leveraged other powers to a hands-on approach whereby the United States became the unilateral guarantor of regional security? This study argues that the Carter administration departed from the practice of the Nixon and Ford administrations and viewed the region more narrowly than their predecessors, through a Cold War lens. This perspective continued through the Reagan and Bush administrations and resulted in American security policy being shaped by three interrelated beliefs that narrowed the range of plausible U.S. policy options to one: direct American involvement in any Persian Gulf security crisis. They shaped the Reagan and Bush administrations' Persian Gulf security policies, and when self-generated pressure to demonstrate American credibility to friendly Gulf states was added, robust American military involvement in Persian Gulf security matters became a realistic and desirable prospect. The evolution of American security policy from arm's length to hands on culminated in the 1991 Gulf War, which initiated sustained and direct U.S. military involvement in the region that continues through the present day.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.	Strategic and Military Histories .....	5
2.	Memoirs and Biographies .....	9
3.	Diplomatic, Regional, and Country Histories .....	13
<b>C.</b>	<b>METHODS, SOURCES, AND STRUCTURE .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>A NUMBER OF IMPONDERABLES: 1968–1969.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BRITISH RETRENCHMENT AND THE PERSIAN GULF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION’S RESPONSE TO BRITISH RETRENCHMENT .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>EARLY EFFORTS AT CRAFTING A POLICY: THE HOLMES REPORT .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>RELATIVELY UNRESPONSIVE TO U.S. POWER: 1969–1970 .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>NSSM-2: INITIAL EXAMINATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND PERSIAN GULF .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>NSSM-66: DEVELOPING THE TWIN PILLARS STRATEGY .....</b>	<b>49</b>
1.	Development of the NSSM-66 Study .....	50
2.	U.S. Strategic Interests .....	52
3.	U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf .....	60
4.	Deliberations and Decisions .....	68
<b>C.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>FRESH THINKING ON THE PERSIAN GULF: 1973.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>NSSM-181 AND -182: A NEW LOOK AT THE GULF .....</b>	<b>78</b>
1.	Development of the Studies .....	80
2.	U.S. Strategic Interests .....	82
3.	U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf .....	91
4.	Deliberations and Decisions .....	101
<b>B.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>106</b>

<b>V.</b>	<b>THE PROBLEMS ARE REGIONAL: 1976–1977 .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>NSSM-238: PASSDOWN TO THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Development of the Study .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>U.S. Strategic Interests .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Deliberations and Decisions .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>CONTAINMENT HAS BEEN FULLY BREACHED: 1977–1980 .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>U.S. STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND KEY BELIEFS .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>MORE DIRECT SECURITY COMMITMENTS: CARTER ADMINISTRATION SECURITY POLICY IN THE PERSIAN GULF .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>NO OTHER REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE: 1981–1989 .....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>NSSD-4/82: NEW COMMITMENTS .....</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Development of the Study .....</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>U.S. Strategic Interests .....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Deliberations and Decision .....</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>GETTING TO WAR: OPERATION EARNEST WILL .....</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>THE ELUSIVE PATH TO PEACE: 1989–1991 .....</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>NSR-10: CONTINUING INTERESTS IN THE REGION .....</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>A NEW WORLD ORDER: DESERT SHIELD AND DESERT STORM .....</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION: WHY AND WITH WHAT CONSEQUENCES? .....</b>	<b>261</b>
	<b>LIST OF REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>269</b>
	<b>INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....</b>	<b>277</b>

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGF	Miscellaneous Command Ship
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
BPD	barrels per day
CA	Heavy Cruiser
CCC	Commodities Credit Corporation
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CG	Cruiser
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CNA-78	Comprehensive Net Assessment, 1978
CTL	Constructive Total Loss
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DDG	Guided Missile Destroyer
FAA	Federation of Arab Emirates
FFG	Guided Missile Frigate
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GBPL	George Bush Presidential Library
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GRFL	Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HoA	Horn of Africa
IEA	International Energy Agency
IG	Interdepartmental Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRG	Interdepartmental Regional Group
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JCL	Jimmy Carter Library
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff

MIDEASTFOR	Middle East Force
MNFES	Multinational Force to Enforce Sanctions
MNFSA	Multinational Force for Saudi Arabia
NACP	National Archives at College Park, Maryland
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Council
NSD	National Security Directive
NSDD	National Security Decision Directive
NSDM	National Security Decision Memorandum
NSR	National Security Review
NSSD	National Security Study Directive
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PD/NSC	Presidential Directive/National Security Council
PDRY	Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen
PFLOAG	Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf
PRC	Policy Review Committee
PRM	Presidential Review Memoranda
RDJTF	Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force
RNPL	Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum
RRL	Ronald Reagan Library
SCC	Special Coordination Committee
SIG	NSC Senior Interdepartmental Group
SLOC	Sea Line of Communication
SR	Saudi Riyals
SRG	Senior Review Group
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
U.S.	United States
USAF	United States Air Force
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE**

This study examines the evolution of U.S. security policy in the Persian Gulf from the early 1970s, when the British abandoned their vestigial imperial responsibilities east of Suez, to the Gulf War of 1990–91, when the George H. W. Bush administration decided that the only credible response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait required the direct employment of American combat power in the region. During this period, American views of the Persian Gulf evolved from a perception of the region as a secondary theater, the security of which was primarily a British responsibility, to a strategic priority, requiring the near-constant employment of American military capabilities. The specific question the study answers is: why, and with what consequences, did American security policy in the Persian Gulf evolve from an arm’s-length approach that leveraged other powers to a hands-on approach whereby the United States became the unilateral guarantor of regional security? American military operations in the Persian Gulf during this period are not a primary focus of this study, which concentrates on the goals and rationales of U.S. policy.

This study argues that, starting with the Carter administration and continuing through the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, American policy makers departed from the practice of the Nixon and Ford administrations and chose to view the region more narrowly than their predecessors, through a Cold War lens. This outlook resulted in American security policy being shaped by three interrelated beliefs:

- The Soviet Union is confidently and successfully executing an offensive strategy designed to improve its geostrategic position vis-à-vis the United States. In contrast, the United States is becoming tentative and indecisive in the face of Soviet “victories” and “gains.”
- The Soviet Union aggressively exploits regional instability to enhance its prestige and influence.

- The security of the Persian Gulf and its petroleum resources is essential to the survival of the West and of Japan, and vulnerable to Soviet encroachment.

These beliefs were not the result of the February 1979 fall of the Shah of Iran or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan later that year. They were apparent from the earliest days of the Carter administration. Their internalization by American policy makers narrowed the range of plausible policy options down to one: direct American involvement in any Persian Gulf security crisis. They shaped the Reagan administration's Persian Gulf security policy, and when self-generated pressure to demonstrate American credibility to friendly Gulf states was added, robust American military involvement in Persian Gulf security matters became a realistic and perhaps a desirable prospect.

Accordingly, the development of American security policy regressed from the identification of broad and realistic options to govern Washington's overall posture toward the region (a characteristic of the Nixon and Ford years) to the identification of what were viewed as pragmatic steps (e.g., securing access agreements to facilitate the projection of American military power into the region) that were seemingly viewed as ends in themselves. While these actions may have been "pragmatic" within the context of the Cold War, they were inconsistent with the indigenous political and security realities of the Persian Gulf. Trapped by the determinist logic of their Cold War reasoning, American policy makers viewed the region in black and white terms and failed to understand that, in the greater Middle East, to license universal military intervention was to invite it, and to invite it was to guarantee it.<sup>1</sup> The continuous American military engagement in the region since 1990 stands as testament to this truth, for when it comes to maintaining security in the Persian Gulf, hands on equates to war.

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage boldly declared, "history starts today."<sup>2</sup> This startling

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<sup>1</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, "Pragmatic Realism versus the American Century," in Andrew J. Bacevich, ed., *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 107.

<sup>2</sup> Lears, "Pragmatic Realism versus the American Century," 202.

assertion ignored the fact that the Persian Gulf strategic environment and the menu of plausible policy options available in September 2001 was shaped by American decisions made decades earlier. The George W. Bush Administration was not handed a clean foreign policy slate on September 12, 2001. American policy was, and would remain, heavily conditioned by the decisions of previous presidential administrations and by the social, political, economic, and environmental forces prevalent in the Persian Gulf. Thus, any understanding of the American policy in the Persian Gulf in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires an understanding of American strategy and policy in the long run-up to America's first Gulf War in 1990–1991.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Three important works delineate the space that this study fills. The first is Michael B. Oren's *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present*, which focuses predominantly on the history of American involvement in the region prior to the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Oren identifies three themes that have historically resonated in American interactions with the Middle East. The first is the persistent use of American *power* (economic, political, and military) to realize strategic objectives. The second is the importance of religious *faith* in determining American attitudes and policies vis-à-vis the Middle East. The third is a persistent view of the region that is tainted by *fantasy*, as evidenced in the portrayal of the Middle East in popular fiction and in films.<sup>4</sup> Together, these themes, not unique to the United States, have had a persistent and important influence on the United States relationship with the Middle East.

Lawrence Freedman's *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* is the second work that shaped this study.<sup>5</sup> Describing his work as, principally, a political history, Freedman sets out to “convey how issues presented themselves to decisionmakers” and focuses predominantly on American policy toward the Middle East since the 1970s.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 12–14.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008).

He asserts that the United States examined the myriad actors operating within the Middle East and consciously chose which ones to support or oppose. He detects a tension in American policy that results from the requirement for the United States to maintain the status quo in the region while simultaneously being dissatisfied with this status quo. This tension is apparent in the paradox presented by the long-standing support to conservative and decidedly non-democratic Persian Gulf monarchies that stands in stark contrast to the oft-repeated lamentations expressed by American policy makers that the Middle East suffers from a lack of democracy.<sup>6</sup> Freedman identifies American policy makers' assumptions about "the sources of power and how it can be exploited" as a key driver of American policy and notes a "failure to come to terms with the limits of power."<sup>7</sup> Thus, like Oren, Freedman emphasizes the important role that assumptions, or beliefs, played in shaping American policy toward the Middle East and, more narrowly, the Persian Gulf.

The third work, Alexander L. George's "The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," focuses directly on the relationship between a foreign policy actor's beliefs and national security decision-making. George explains that policy makers operate under significant constraints when making decisions: their understanding of complex situations is hampered by incomplete information; cognitive limitations hamper a decision maker's ability to understand the consequences of specific decision; and, the difficulty associated with "developing a single criterion by means of which to choose which alternative course of action is 'best.'"<sup>8</sup> To simplify complex problems, a policy actor undertakes a "cognitive structuring of the situation that will clarify for him the nature of the problem, relate to his previous experience, and make it amenable for problem-solving activities."<sup>9</sup> A policy maker's "beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, his views regarding the extent to

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<sup>6</sup> Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies*, xxv-xxvi.

<sup>7</sup> Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies*, xxvi.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander L. George, "The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (June 1969): 197-198, <https://www.jstor.org>.

<sup>9</sup> George, "The Operational Code," 200.

which historical developments can be shaped, and his notions of correct strategy and tactics” comprise an “operational code” of philosophical and institutional beliefs that shapes this cognitive structuring, simplifying complex problems and allowing solutions to be identified and developed.<sup>10</sup> In George’s view, operational codes provide a lens through which fast moving and often confusing events are perceived, and this influences how potential courses of action are evaluated and specific policies decided upon.<sup>11</sup>

A large and diverse body of literature explores the contours of American security policy in the Persian Gulf and in the greater Middle East from a variety of perspectives and academic disciplines. This body of literature has grown substantially since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Among these perspectives are strategic and military histories, biographical and autobiographical accounts, and diplomatic, regional, and country histories. This literature review surveys many recent and often cited works that help illuminate the niche this study fills.

## **1. Strategic and Military Histories**

A range of historical accounts examines the evolution of American Persian Gulf security policy and the United States’ military involvement in the region. Many commonly cited works were published in the 1980s, before many of the archival materials became available to scholars. Writing for a contemporary audience in 1985, Jed C. Snyder’s *Defending the Fringe: NATO, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf* observed that the Cold War “strategic center of gravity” was shifting away from Central Europe to NATO’s southern flank and to the Persian Gulf.<sup>12</sup> Snyder argued that the West should “broaden its strategic horizon” to include emerging threats in areas on NATO’s periphery.<sup>13</sup> Amitav Acharya’s *U.S. Military Strategy in the Gulf: Origins and Evolution Under the Carter and Reagan Administrations* acknowledged the importance of Persian Gulf oil to American and

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<sup>10</sup> George, “The Operational Code,” 197, 199–200.

<sup>11</sup> George, “The Operational Code,” 191.

<sup>12</sup> Jed C. Snyder, *Defending the Fringe: NATO, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), ix.

<sup>13</sup> Snyder, *Defending the Fringe*, xi.

Western interests and asserted that the United States “commitment and approach to protecting the interests have undergone a process of radical change.”<sup>14</sup> Focusing primarily on events occurring between 1979 and 1984, Acharya asserts that two critical events from 1979, the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, resulted in Washington deciding to play a more active role in safeguarding American interests rather than relying on regional powers. This decision necessitated a “new military strategy structured around a capability for rapid intervention in regional crises.”<sup>15</sup> Published in 1984, Anthony H. Cordesman’s *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* is an often-cited study that provides a long (1000+ pages) and well-researched contemporaneous assessment of the regional security challenges facing the United States and the West in the early- to mid-1980s.<sup>16</sup>

A more recent study, Steve A. Yetiv’s 2008 book, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf*, examined American security strategy through the lens of balance-of-power theory and argued that the United States had no coherent Persian Gulf strategy at all between 1972 and 2005.<sup>17</sup> Yetiv explained that Washington altered its policies in reaction to significant regional events, “sometimes fundamentally, sometimes clumsily,” resulting in an incoherent American Persian Gulf security policy.<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey F. Gresh’s *Gulf Security and the U.S. Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing* examines the politics underlying American military basing relationships with Saudi

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<sup>14</sup> Amitav Archaya, *U.S. Military Strategy in the Gulf: Origins and Evolution Under the Carter and Reagan Administrations* (New York: Routledge, 1989), xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Archaya, *U.S. Military Strategy in the Gulf*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Steve A. Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf, 1972–2005* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), x.

<sup>18</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, x.

Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman with an eye on drawing lessons learned and implications for future policymakers.<sup>19</sup>

A large volume of the literature examines American involvement in Persian Gulf conflicts. Two conflicts are particularly relevant to this study: the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War and the U.S.-led coalition’s 1990–1991 war with Iraq. Pierre Razoux’s *The Iran-Iraq War* provides a fairly recent (2015) history that considers the war within a contemporary context (i.e., since the 2003 American invasion of Iraq). In developing his study, Razoux made good use of heretofore unavailable materials, including audiotapes of Saddam Hussein’s discussions with Iraqi government and military officials that were captured by the United States following the 2003 invasion of Iraq.<sup>20</sup> Martin S. Navias’s and E. R. Hooton’s *The Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping During the Iran-Iraq Crisis, 1980–1988* digs deeply into the Iraqi and Iranian antishipping campaigns in the Persian Gulf, which provided the impetus for the United States becoming directly involved in the conflict in 1987 when the Reagan administration decided to reflag several Kuwaiti-owned oil tankers and provide them with naval escorts in the Persian Gulf.<sup>21</sup> Codenamed Operation Earnest Will, this decision resulted in several skirmishes between U.S. and Iranian naval forces that culminated in 1988 with the accidental shootdown of an Iranian passenger liner by the USS *Vincennes* (CG-49). Lee Allen Zatarain’s *America’s First Clash With Iran: The Tanker War 1987–1988* provides a detailed history of major events of Operation Earnest Will.<sup>22</sup>

Michael A. Palmer’s *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America’s Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833–1992* is an oft-cited work that traces the history of American strategic interests and military involvement in the Persian Gulf, with an emphasis on the

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<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey F. Gresh, *Gulf Security and the U.S. Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing* (Stanford: Stanford Security Studies, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Martin S. Navias and E. R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping During the Iran-Iraq Crisis, 1980–1988* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Lee Allen Zatarain, *America’s First Clash With Iran: The Tanker War, 1987–1988* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2013).

period between 1970 and the successful conclusion of the 1991 war with Iraq.<sup>23</sup> Writing in the afterglow of this American victory, Palmer asserted that American policy in the Persian Gulf since 1945 had been a success, as evidenced by the oil-fueled economic recovery of Western Europe after World War II that had been assured by the United States' commitment to the security of the region from Soviet encroachment.<sup>24</sup>

The United States' 1990–1991 war with Iraq, more commonly known as Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, has been examined from a range of perspectives. As military history, Michael R. Gordon's and Bernard E. Trainor's *The Generals' War* and Lawrence Freedman's and Efraim Karsh's *The Gulf Conflict 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* are two commonly cited histories that were written within a few years of the conflict.<sup>25</sup> Andrew Bacevich, in *The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, takes a negative view of the American victory over Saddam Hussein in 1991, writing that Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm gave rise to unforeseen consequences that continue to plague American foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> These included changed opinions on the utility of armed force, the reinvigoration of military power as a key component of American national identity, alterations in the structure of civil-military relations that have ceded more responsibility to four-star military officers, and the reinforcement of belief in American exceptionalism as an enabler of questionable policies and military commitments.<sup>27</sup> Thomas G. Mahnken assesses Bush administration strategic thinking with a critical eye, arguing that the administration "chose to end the Gulf War prematurely, robbing the coalition of the opportunity to translate a lopsided battlefield victory into a durable postwar

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<sup>23</sup> Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, 245.

<sup>25</sup> Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995); Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Splendid Little War: America's Persian Gulf Adventure Ten Years On" in Andrew J. Bacevich and Efraim Inbar, eds., *The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 155.

<sup>27</sup> Bacevich, "Splendid Little War," 156–164.



settlement.”<sup>28</sup> This failure was especially galling, given that the Bush administration cited promotion of “the security and stability of the Persian Gulf” as one of the war’s political objectives.<sup>29</sup> *Into the Desert: Reflections on the Gulf War* provides six diverse perspectives on the conflict from scholars and former policy makers that are well-supported by archival sources, to include Iraqi documents and recordings captured after the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq.<sup>30</sup> Finally, in *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*, Andrew Bacevich critically examines the United States’ military involvement in the Middle East from 1979 through 2016.<sup>31</sup> Bacevich argues that, since 1979, the American public’s demand for petroleum at low prices has required that “the United States impose order on the Persian Gulf and its environs” and “embarked upon a war for oil” that has, over time, “become a war for the Greater Middle East.”<sup>32</sup>

## **2. Memoirs and Biographies**

Virtually every significant actor that influenced American policy between 1970 and 1991 published a memoir chronicling his experiences. These accounts provide important first-person narratives that historians, political scientists, and international relations theorists studying American policy in the Middle East have relied on. Among this group, Henry Kissinger was the most prolific, publishing two volumes that provide a rich narrative of his long tenure as national security advisor and secretary of state for the Nixon and Ford administrations. His first volume, *The White House Years*, provides a long narrative of his experiences as President Nixon’s national security advisor between 1969 and 1972 that focuses on the Vietnam Conflict, the reestablishment of relations with China, and American relations with its European allies and the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> Kissinger’s treatment

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas G. Mahnken, “A Squandered Opportunity? The Decision to End the Gulf War” in Bacevich and Inbar, eds., *The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> Mahnken, “A Squandered Opportunity,” 125.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *Into the Desert: Reflections on the Gulf War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*, 20–22, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979).

of the Middle East focuses heavily on the Egypt-Soviet Union relationship and, outside of a short discussion of Nixon's May 1972 visit to Tehran and disaggregated statements of American goals in the region (e.g., reduction of Soviet influence, weakening of Arab radicals and strengthening of moderates, and the security of Israel), the Persian Gulf receives comparatively little attention.<sup>34</sup> His second volume, *Years of Upheaval*, chronicles the remainder of his tenure as national security advisor and secretary of state under Presidents Nixon and Ford.<sup>35</sup> American policy decisions associated with the October 1973 war, the oil crisis, and his tireless shuttle diplomacy aimed at resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute comprise much of Kissinger's second volume.

Several first-person accounts document the Carter administration's development of its Persian Gulf security policies. *In Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, Jimmy Carter provides a detailed description of his four years as the nation's chief executive.<sup>36</sup> Events in the greater Middle East and in the Persian Gulf, unsurprisingly, comprise significant portions of the manuscript, and the former president provides a detailed first-person account of the Camp David discussions between Egypt and Israel, as well as his views on the Iran crisis that dominated the last two years of his Presidency. President Carter's policy decisions were also chronicled by both his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and secretary of state, Cyrus Vance. Published in 1983, Brzezinski's *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor 1977–1981* and Vance's *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* reflect the authors' often conflicting viewpoints and adversarial relationship throughout the first three years of the administration, which impacted the development of foreign policy throughout the Carter presidency.<sup>37</sup> Gary Sick, an NSC staffer during the Carter administration, focuses his memoir, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, on the administration's day-to-day decision making

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<sup>34</sup> Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 564, 1258–1265.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983); Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

surrounding the fall of the Shah and the Iranian hostage crisis.<sup>38</sup> Taken together, these four autobiographical accounts provide a fairly comprehensive account of the Carter administration's attempts to develop and execute its foreign policy and chronicle much of its day-to-day decision-making.

Several first-person accounts document Reagan administration national security decision-making. Following the model provided by Kissinger's two-volume account of his time in the Nixon and Ford administrations, George Shultz's *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* provides a long (1138 pages) and detailed (dates and times are recorded to the minute) account of his nearly seven year tenure as Ronald Reagan's secretary of state.<sup>39</sup> While Shultz's narrative, understandably, places a heavy focus on U.S.-Soviet relations, the Cold War, and American policy in Asia, the Middle East and Persian Gulf receive considerable attention, reflecting the regions' increasing importance in American foreign policy. Schultz's memoir is complemented by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon*.<sup>40</sup> Weinberger's memoir digs deeply into American policy surrounding the Iran-Iraq War, which provided the impetus for the American military's first instance of direct combat in the Persian Gulf, Operation Earnest Will. These works are complemented by autobiographical accounts by Alexander Haig, President Reagan's first secretary of state, and Robert M. Gates, who served as Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) throughout much of the Reagan administration.<sup>41</sup> Finally, President Reagan provided his perspective, often cryptic, in his diaries.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> Alexander M. Haig Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984); Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

All three major foreign policy principals in the George H. W. Bush administration published lengthy memoirs describing the challenges they faced between 1989 and 1991. In *A World Transformed*, former President Bush and former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft provide a detailed description of what they considered to be the most significant foreign policy challenges that the Bush administration confronted.<sup>43</sup> Bush and Scowcroft focus much of their discussion on the changing Cold War environment, the Bush administration's Persian Gulf policy, and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, in particular their strenuous and successful efforts to build the international coalition that ultimately helped the United States eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Bartholomew Sparrow's *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* provides additional background on the national security advisor's role during the 1990/1991 crisis with Iraq.<sup>44</sup> Former Secretary of State James Baker's *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* provides a longer and more detailed description of the conduct of the Bush administration's foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> Baker describes American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf prior to and immediately following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, with an emphasis on his efforts to forge the international coalition that ultimately pushed Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait, to develop and implement United Nations Security Council resolutions supporting American action, and to gain and maintain the support of the Soviet Union. Finally, Richard N. Haass provides an NSC staffer-level perspective on the Bush administration's reaction to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> James A. Baker III and Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Richard N. Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

### 3. Diplomatic, Regional, and Country Histories

Several important works consider American policy in the Persian Gulf, the greater Middle East, and the Horn of Africa within the wider Cold War context. Many of these studies are authored or edited by Odd Arne Westad. Volumes II and III of the *Cambridge History of the Cold War* examine the Cold War from a range of perspectives and academic disciplines that complements narrower biographical, historical, and area-focused studies.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Westad's *The Cold War: A World History* places American policy toward the Middle East and Persian Gulf, and the Carter administration's view of Soviet activity in Ethiopia and in Afghanistan within a wider Cold War context.<sup>48</sup> More narrowly, Westad's *The Global Cold War* digs deeply into Soviet and American interventions in the Third World, arguing that ideological factors drove Moscow and Washington toward deeper involvement in the developing world as each sought to exert control and spur improvement in peripheral areas.<sup>49</sup> Westad's analysis digs deeply into events in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in the late 1970s, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the rise of Islamism in Iran and in southwest Asia, and it is well-supported by American and Soviet primary materials.

Several other Cold War-focused works provide the overarching context within which Persian Gulf security policy was developed. Raymond Garthoff's *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* also places events in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and the Horn of Africa within their wider Cold War context.<sup>50</sup> *The Last Decade of the Cold War, From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Termination* provides a range of perspectives on Cold War events from 1979 to 1989; it includes chapters authored by Westad, Garthoff, and William E. Odom, who served as

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<sup>47</sup> Melvin P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume II: Crisis and Détente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Melvin P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume III: Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4–5.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan Revised Edition* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994).

Zbigniew Brzezinski's military assistant during the Carter administration.<sup>51</sup> Two additional studies explore the history of U.S.-Soviet détente, and also provide very useful context through which American security policy in the Persian Gulf should be considered. The first, Jussi M. Hanhimäki's *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* traces, among other things, superpower involvement in Iran, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa and the impact this competition had on American security policy in the Persian Gulf.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Stephan Kieninger's *The Diplomacy of Détente: Cooperative Security Policies from Helmut Schmidt to George Shultz* explains how Carter administration views of détente contributed to a souring of U.S.-Soviet relations that helped shape American Persian Gulf security policy during the Carter and subsequent presidential administrations.<sup>53</sup>

Several studies survey superpower and other extra-regional powers' involvement in the Persian Gulf. Jeffrey R. Macris's *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region* traces British and American impact on the Persian Gulf security environment through 2010.<sup>54</sup> Macris coedited, with Saul Kelly, a companion volume of sorts that examines great power involvement in the Gulf from 16th century Portuguese activity through contemporary Indian and Chinese involvement in the region.<sup>55</sup> In *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, F. Gregory Gause III provides a survey of the region's international politics between 1971 and 2008 and identifies three themes that drove the Persian Gulf strategic environment during this period: regional wars, American involvement, and the global importance of the region's oil.<sup>56</sup> In *The Clouded*

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<sup>51</sup> Olav Njølstad, ed., *The Last Decade of the Cold War, From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Termination* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Stephan Kieninger, *The Diplomacy of Détente: Cooperative Security Policies from Helmut Schmidt to George Shultz* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey R. Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey R. Macris and Saul Kelly, *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–3.

*Lens: Persian Gulf Security and U.S. Policy*, James H. Noyes, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near Eastern, African, and South Asian Affairs, provides a somewhat dated (1979) yet still frequently cited, study that clarifies U.S. interests and policy in the Gulf from 1971 through the Carter administration.<sup>57</sup>

Several studies focus on presidential administrations. George Lenczowski's *American Presidents and the Middle East* examines policy choices made by successive presidential administrations with the aim to identify inconsistencies between stated or implied objectives and the policies that were actually implemented.<sup>58</sup> Several relevant studies focus on the Carter administration, given the significant events that occurred in and around the Persian Gulf between 1977 and 1981. These studies range from surveys of the entire administration to more narrowly focused studies that examine specific policy decisions, events, or years.<sup>59</sup> Betty Glad's *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* highlights the significant impact that Zbigniew Brzezinski had in shaping American policy.<sup>60</sup> Glad's study is well-supported by primary source archival material. While not directly focused on the Carter administration, David W. Lesch's 1979 *The Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East* focuses on the Iranian Revolution, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and argues that 1979 marked "a major watershed, if not the major watershed, in modern Middle East history."<sup>61</sup> In "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in U.S. Strategic Planning During the Carter Years," Olav Njølstad examines the history behind the United States' "strategic-military preoccupation" with the Persian Gulf, arguing

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<sup>57</sup> James H. Noyes, *The Clouded Lens: Persian Gulf Security and U.S. Policy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979).

<sup>58</sup> George Lenczowski, *American Presidents in the Middle East* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>59</sup> Among the broader Carter administration surveys are M. Glenn Abernathy, Dilys M. Hill, and Phil Williams, eds., *The Carter Years: The President and Policy Making* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) and Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kauffman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> David W. Lesch, 1979 *The Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 2.

that this preoccupation was in response to the Iranian revolution and fall of the Shah and that the military initiatives taken by the Carter administration to buttress the American position in the Gulf weakened American ability to aid allies in Europe and Northeast Asia.<sup>62</sup> Njølstad's study is based primarily on archival sources and complements broader studies of Carter administration policy well.

Three oft-cited works, published over a period of 25 years after the Iranian Revolution, examine the U.S.-Iranian bilateral relationship, its rupture in 1979/1980, and American efforts to reestablish relations. Writing for a contemporary audience in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian revolution and the seizure of the American embassy, Barry Rubin's *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* provides a history of U.S.-Iranian relations from World War II through 1980.<sup>63</sup> Writing eight years later, James A. Bill's *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* provides an analysis of the history of U.S.-Iranian relations that is informed by both U.S. and Iranian sources.<sup>64</sup> Bill has a deep understanding of Iran that was informed by his years spent in that country, and he developed his study in an attempt to derive lessons to inform future policy-makers.<sup>65</sup> Writing in the early 2000s, Kenneth M. Pollack's *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* builds on Rubin's and Bill's earlier works by providing analysis that is better informed by archival materials and by historical perspective.<sup>66</sup>

Three other works, also published over an extended time period, examine the United States' second security pillar in the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia. Nadav Safran, in *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, traces the evolution of Saudi foreign and

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<sup>62</sup> Olav Njølstad, "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in U.S. Strategic Planning in the Carter Years," in *Cold War History* 4, no. 3, April 2004: 21, <https://www.jstor.org>.

<sup>63</sup> Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), x-xi.

<sup>64</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>65</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004).



defense policy from the kingdom's creation through the early 1980s.<sup>67</sup> Safran's analysis focuses heavily on Saudi security interests in the Persian Gulf and, more broadly, in the Middle East, in addition to the kingdom's close relationship with the United States. Writing after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States by al-Qaeda, Rachel Bronson's *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia* acknowledges the significance of oil and other economic and security factors in the U.S.-Saudi relationship. Bronson argues that the two countries' "mutual fear of the Soviet Union" defined a "protective political layer that enveloped oil and defense interests" and that the U.S.-Saudi relationship started to deteriorate at the end of the Cold War.<sup>68</sup> Published in 2018, Bruce Reidel's *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States Since FDR* traces the U.S.-Saudi relationship from President Roosevelt's 1945 meeting with Saudi King Abdul Aziz al Saud on board the USS Quincy (CA-71) through the early days of the Donald Trump administration.<sup>69</sup>

The September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, American involvement in Afghanistan, and the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq brought increased, and often critical, focus on American policy toward the greater Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Andrew Bacevich, in *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* and *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*, casts a critical eye on American security policy in the Persian Gulf.<sup>70</sup> Bacevich elevates domestic political, social, and economic forces as being the primary drivers of American security policy, explaining that the American military commitment to Persian Gulf security derives from the strategic imperative of guaranteeing "the ever-increasing affluence that underwrites the

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<sup>67</sup> Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>68</sup> Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3–5, 9.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Reidel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States Since FDR* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

modern American conception of liberty.”<sup>71</sup> Ensuring regional stability and American access to Persian Gulf oil were the key pillars supporting this imperative. In Bacevich’s analysis, the January 1980 promulgation of the Carter Doctrine and subsequent reorientation of the national security apparatus provided the impetus for the increasing militarization of American foreign policy throughout the 1980s that, ultimately, sought to ensure American dominance over the Persian Gulf.<sup>72</sup>

Douglas Little’s *American Orientalism: The United States in the Middle East since 1945* examines the United States’ relationship with the Middle East through a series of thematic chapters covering a range of topics that include the impact of commonly held American stereotypes of the peoples of the Middle East on American policy, the important role played by oil interests in the region, the close American relationship with Israel, and the myriad attempts to broker an Arab-Israeli peace.<sup>73</sup> Little argues that American Cold War security policy in the Middle East and Persian Gulf was ineffective, and that narrow fixation on the Soviet threat obscured from American policy makers the more dire challenge posed by revolutionary nationalism and Islamism.<sup>74</sup> Taking a narrower, but no less important, focus, Daniel Yergin’s *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* is a commonly cited study that provides a detailed narrative of the increasing importance of oil in both economics and foreign policy.<sup>75</sup> Yergin’s study is complemented by Francisco Parra’s *Oil Politics: A Modern History of Petroleum*.<sup>76</sup>

### C. METHODS, SOURCES, AND STRUCTURE

This study focuses on the development of Persian Gulf security policy at the National Security Council and presidential levels. Among the primary sources supporting

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<sup>71</sup> Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, 183.

<sup>72</sup> Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, 182, 190–191.

<sup>73</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States in the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>74</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 155.

<sup>75</sup> Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Francisco Parra, *Oil Politics: A Modern History of Petroleum* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

the analysis presented here, the most important are five studies of Persian Gulf security conducted under the auspices of the National Security Council (NSC) between 1969 and 1989. These studies, termed National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM), Presidential Review Memoranda (PRM), National Security Study Directives (NSSD), or National Security Reviews (NSR), were interagency products drafted in support of the policy development processes of the NSC. They provided the analytical rigor that underpinned policy decisions reached by the Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations and thus provide the clearest elucidation of American interests in the region, the threats to these interests, and the range of alternative courses of action that were provided to the NSC. When combined with close examination of early drafts, interagency comments, internal NSC memoranda, meeting minutes, and information papers provided to NSC principals, a holistic picture of American policy emerges that exposes the key beliefs and assumptions underpinning how five successive administrations viewed the Persian Gulf strategic environment. This enables an especially clear explanation of why American security policy evolved as it did between 1970 and 1991, including the manner in which Persian Gulf security policy was formulated, the specific political, social, and economic factors that were considered, how threats and obstacles to achieving these objectives were perceived, the actions taken to achieve American strategic objectives, and an assessment of the results obtained.<sup>77</sup>

The first of these studies, NSSM-66, was completed by the Nixon administration in 1970. Facing the retrenchment of British military forces from the Persian Gulf to positions west of the Suez Canal, the Nixon administration chose to vest responsibility for Persian Gulf Security with the twin pillars of Iran and Saudi Arabia and, despite the assessment's rather gloomy view of the prospects for it, rely on cooperation between the two Gulf powers as the basis for American strategy and policy toward the region. The Nixon administration's study is notable for its recognition of indigenous social, economic, and political factors as the primary shapers of the Persian Gulf strategic environment and for its relatively restrained view of the Soviet threat to the region. Despite later

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<sup>77</sup> Gordon A. Craig, "Diplomacy: History, Theory, and Policy," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 13.

characterizations of this decision as merely setting an *initial* posture for American strategy in the Gulf, as well as the completion of follow-on studies in 1973 (NSSM-181) and 1976 (NSSM-238) that called into question the efficacy of the Twin Pillars strategy, the decisions that emerged from the NSSM-66 study can be shown to have guided American security policy in the Persian Gulf until the fall of the Shah and the Iranian revolution in 1979.

The Carter administration undertook no comprehensive examination of Persian Gulf security and thus would confront the tumultuous events of 1979–80 (the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the start of the Iran-Iraq War) without the aid of a rigorous framework wherein their impact on American interests in the region could be assessed. Instead, the administration interpreted events in and around the Persian Gulf through a strict Cold War lens that, in contrast to the more nuanced view characteristic of the Nixon/Ford era, elevated the potential Soviet threat to the region above that of political, economic, and social forces indigenous to the Gulf. Carter administration officials ceased to adapt American security strategy to the evolving Persian Gulf strategic environment and instead became focused on improving American capacity to project military force into the region as a counter to anticipated Soviet aggression, and arguably as an end in itself, expressive of general American strategic resolve.

The Cold War beliefs that underpinned the Carter administration's view of Persian Gulf security were effectively operationalized during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The Reagan administration identified the Persian Gulf as the nexus of Cold War competition with the Soviet Union and continued its predecessor's focus on improving American ability to project military power into the region. Returning to the Nixon/Ford model of developing regional security strategy based on long interagency studies, NSSD-4-82 was issued on March 19, 1982. Unlike the Nixon administration's NSSM-66 report that provided a range of options for American security posture in the region, NSSD-4/82 took the importance of robust American involvement in Persian Gulf security for granted. Based on this study, the Reagan administration issued National Security Decision Document 99 (NSDD-99) on July 12, 1983, which laid out a combined diplomatic and security strategy that featured visible American military presence, prepositioning of

military equipment, and access to port and airfield facilities as key pillars. A credible and visible American commitment to protect U.S. allies in the region was the sine qua non that would ensure the conservative Gulf monarchies maintained their pro-Western orientation. Accordingly, the Reagan administration chose to focus on short-term threats and opportunities to expand American military presence in the region at the expense of developing strategy and policy based on the broader outlines of the Persian Gulf strategic environment. NSDD-99 marked the official abdication of the Nixon era strategy of relying on local powers to combat regional crises and subversion that threatened the stability of the Gulf monarchies and instead proposed the direct employment of American military power in these contingencies. Despite its determination to differentiate its policies from those of the Reagan years and avoid being seen as the fortieth president's de facto third term, the George H.W. Bush administration's Persian Gulf study, NSR-10, broke no new policy ground, and American security policy in the Persian Gulf continued on the course set by Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.<sup>78</sup>

This initial chapter provides an overall introduction to the study. Chapter II examines the implications for American security policy brought by the 1968 announcement of the withdrawal of British military forces from the region and the Johnson administration's studies of the region. This set the context within which the Nixon administration labored to develop a Persian Gulf security policy. The development of NSSM-66 and the decisions that led to the implementation of the Twin Pillars strategy are discussed in Chapter III. Later efforts by the Nixon and Ford administrations to reassess American Persian Gulf policy, first in 1972 (NSSM-181/182) and later in 1976 (NSSM-238), are examined in Chapters IV and V, the latter study providing a clear line of demarcation between the comparatively nuanced Nixon/Ford era view of the Persian Gulf strategic environment and the narrower Cold War focus of the incoming Carter administration. Chapter VI examines the three beliefs that underpinned Carter administration's views of Persian Gulf security. Chapter VII discusses the Reagan administration's Persian Gulf study, NSSD 4-82, which generally reflected the views and

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<sup>78</sup> Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 265.

assumptions held by its predecessor and led to the increasing militarization of American policy in the region, including the direct intervention of American air and naval forces in the Iran-Iraq War. Chapter VIII provides a discussion of the Bush administration's 1989 Persian Gulf study, NSR-10, and the decision to deploy hundreds of thousands of American soldiers to protect Saudi Arabia in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Together, these events marked the culmination of the steady evolution of American security policy from an arm's length to a hands-on posture. Chapter IX provides an overall conclusion to the study.

## **II. A NUMBER OF IMPONDERABLES: 1968–1969**

Prior to 1968, the United States had been content to cede responsibility for maintaining the security and stability of the Persian Gulf to the United Kingdom (UK). In January 1968, following a lengthy balance of payment crisis, London announced that it would withdraw from its Persian Gulf commitments and redeploy its military forces to positions west of Suez. This decision dissolved the architecture that had maintained Persian Gulf security and stability since the 1830s. In response, following a brief attempt at trying to persuade London to reconsider its decision, the Johnson administration labored to develop a security policy for this important region. While this effort remained incomplete when Johnson left office in January 1969, these efforts surfaced four key themes governing American posture in the Persian Gulf that would resonate throughout the 1970s.

### **A. BRITISH RETRENCHMENT AND THE PERSIAN GULF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

British imperial interests in India provided the original rationale for London's political and security responsibilities in the Persian Gulf. Protection of the sea lines of communication (SLOC) between the British home islands and the subcontinent necessitated the deployment of the Royal Navy to the region in the early 1800s. The threat posed by piracy to British maritime trade was reduced to an acceptable level via gunboat diplomacy and a series of treaties between local rulers and London that began in 1820 with the signing of the General Treaties of Peace and the 1835 conclusion of the First Maritime Truce. As the maritime threat to British trade with the subcontinent receded, it was replaced with concern over the threat to India posed by other Great Powers (e.g., the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Germany), which broadened London's strategic focus from the maritime domain to the security and stability of the regions surrounding its prized colony. Accordingly, London extended security guarantees to the rulers of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the territories comprising the present-day United Arab Emirates (UAE) in return for British management of these sheikhdoms' foreign policies. The conversion of the Royal Navy from coal to oil in the years prior to World War I further

heightened the importance of Persian Gulf security and stability in the eyes of British policy makers.<sup>79</sup>

The granting of independence to India in 1947 did not immediately alter London's view of its political and security interests to the Persian Gulf, nor did it initiate a reappraisal of how these interests would be supported in the absence of the economic and military resources that the subcontinent had provided to the British Empire.<sup>80</sup> London remained bound by its earlier agreements to provide for the security of its allies in the region and it retained significant economic interests in Persian Gulf oil, the gross value of fixed assets in the region controlled by British oil companies reaching \$680 million by 1959.<sup>81</sup> These interests continued to be protected by overt military displays (e.g., formation of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1955, the 1961 deployment of British forces to Kuwait to counter Iraqi bellicosity (Operation Vantage) and covert intelligence operations (e.g., the 1953 coup that removed Mohammed Mossadegh from power in Iran). By the mid-1960s, however, domestic political pressures and the economic constraints imposed by an ongoing balance of payments crisis forced London to accept significant cuts in its defense appropriations and reexamine its security commitments east of Suez. Defense expenditures for 1966 were capped at £2 billion. This forced the cancellation of the Royal Navy's next generation aircraft carrier program, the reduction of the Royal Air Force's planned F-111 bomber purchase by half, and, most importantly, the abandonment of the UK's principle base in the Persian Gulf, Aden, in present-day Yemen.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 15–22; F. Gregory Gause, "British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968–1973," *Review of International Studies* 11, no. 4 (October 1985): 249, <https://links.jstor.org>.

<sup>80</sup> Many of the soldiers and sailors that upheld British interests in the Persian Gulf had been provided by India. See Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 85–86.

<sup>81</sup> Phillip Darby, *British Defense Policy East of Suez, 1947–1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 59, 154. Between 1957 and 1961, Kuwaiti oil alone accounted for approximately 50% of British consumption.

<sup>82</sup> Gause, "British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968–1973," 250; Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 137. The British maintained 11,000 troops in Aden that, in addition to participating in the ongoing civil war on the southern Arabian Peninsula, stood poised to intervene in the Persian Gulf, if required. The evacuation of these troops was completed in late November 1967. Approximately 2,600 troops were repositioned to Bahrain (600) and Sharjah (2,000) in the present-day UAE to maintain regional stability.



London's balance of payments crisis became more acute in 1967, forcing the Labour government of Harold Wilson, which assumed power in October 1964, to examine additional reductions in London's global commitments as a means of reducing its overseas expenditures. A June Defence white paper reaffirmed the government's decision to withdraw British forces from Aden and announced a 50 percent reduction in its Far East military footprint, to be completed by 1971. A 100 percent redeployment would be complete by the mid-1970s.<sup>83</sup> These steps did little to alleviate the pressing monetary difficulties confronting Wilson's government as sustained attacks on sterling in the spring caused its value to fall. The closure of the Suez Canal due to the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the exchanging of large sterling deposits for U.S. dollars by some Arab governments, negatively impacted British exports.<sup>84</sup> Facing its worse monetary crisis since 1949, the Wilson government turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in November. As a prerequisite to receiving IMF assistance the Wilson government was forced to devalue sterling from \$2.80, where it had stood since 1949, to \$2.40 while simultaneously reducing overall government expenditures. Despite the relatively low cost of maintaining British forces in the Persian Gulf, which were estimated by the British MoD to cost £12 million annually, and offers made by Trucial rulers in 1968 to fund the British presence, the Wilson government was forced by his party's left wing to acquiesce to further defense reductions as a quid pro quo to reductions in cherished social programs.<sup>85</sup> On January 4, 1968, a budget package was submitted that called for the complete withdrawal of British forces from the Persian Gulf and the Far East (excepting Hong Kong) to be completed by 1971.<sup>86</sup> This far-reaching decision was formally conveyed to the United States government during a January 11 meeting between British Foreign Secretary George Brown and American Secretary of State Dean Rusk. On January 16, 1968, Prime

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<sup>83</sup> Department of State; memorandum of conversation; "British Defense White Paper," 17 June 1967; folder DEF 1 UK: Container 1640; Record Group 59 (RG59); National Archives at College Park (NACP), College Park, MD.

<sup>84</sup> Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>85</sup> Gause, "British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968–1973," 251–252.

<sup>86</sup> Gause, "British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968–1973," 251–252

Minster Wilson publicly announced this decision in a speech delivered to the House of Commons.

Wilson's announcement effectively upended the political and security status quo that had been guaranteed by the British for over 100 years and removed the lid from a range of territorial disputes that required resolution. Many of these revolved around Iran. The Shah was wrapped up in a Persian Gulf median line dispute with the Saudis, claimed sovereignty over the island of Bahrain, and leveraged his desire to control a series of small islands (Sirri, Abu Musa, and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs) to contest the establishment of a Federation of Arab Emirates (FAA) comprised of the nine Trucial States. While both the median line dispute and the issue of Iranian sovereignty over Bahrain were resolved amicably, the former by mutual Iranian-Saudi agreement in November 1968, the latter via a UN-conducted survey wherein a majority of the Bahraini people chose independence under the existing ruling family over the Shah, efforts to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the islands dispute failed and Iranian forces waded onto the Tunbs and Abu Musa on November 30, 1971, resulting in an armed clash and several deaths. Despite this blemish, London's efforts to establish an enduring political order were largely successful. Six of the nine Trucial States formed the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in July 1971. A seventh, Ras al-Khaimah, joined in 1972, while Bahrain and Qatar became sovereign nations.

Concurrent with the emergence of a new Persian Gulf political order were tremendous changes in the global oil market. The explosive economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s produced a worldwide surge in demand for petroleum, consumption in the free world alone increasing from 19 to 44 million barrels per day between 1960 and 1972.<sup>87</sup> American surplus production capacity, traditionally the supply of last resort in times of crisis, disappeared in 1970 when U.S. production reached its peak of 11.3 million barrels per day.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, American oil imports rose from 19 percent to 36 percent as a share of total consumption between 1967 and 1972.<sup>89</sup> The elimination of American surplus production capacity shifted

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<sup>87</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 549.

<sup>88</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 549.

<sup>89</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 549.

the world oil market center of gravity from the United States to the countries of the Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East, location of the largest proven petroleum reserves. The countries of Western Europe, rebuilding their industrial base in the aftermath of the World War II, were the first to experience this shift, starting in the late 1940s as Middle East oil began to supplant American sources.<sup>90</sup> The emergence of the Persian Gulf as the world's oil production center of gravity and the accumulation of great wealth by the region's oil producing countries resulted in rapid social and economic change, as evidenced by the Shah's White Revolution, while simultaneously removing economic aid as a viable foreign policy tool for American statesmen.

The threat posed by the Soviet Union to the Persian Gulf was consistently downplayed during this period. Discarding the assumption that ideological drive trumped pragmatic self-interest as the engine of Soviet policy, a May 1969 State Department report explained that Moscow "places higher priority on normalizing relations with Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan than in seeking their immediate radicalization," and that great-power interests translated to the Soviets adopting a cautious approach vis-à-vis Persian Gulf territorial disputes.<sup>91</sup> This resulted in Moscow taking a negative view of regional instability, as intra-Gulf disputes would complicate Moscow's efforts to improve relations with established Gulf powers as well as the states that would emerge following British withdrawal.<sup>92</sup> Subversive groups indigenous to the Gulf riparian states were identified as the primary threat to regional stability, particularly with respect to the development of the Trucial States into viable and independent countries. By September 1971, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research assessed that external military attack against the FAA/UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar was unlikely; a much more realistic threat, particularly to the FAA, was posed by subversive groups sponsored by

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<sup>90</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 404.

<sup>91</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research; *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East: Implications for CENTO*; 16 May 1969; folder POL Near-E-USSR 1.1.67: Container 2357; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD, i-ii.

<sup>92</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, ii.

Iraq and/or South Yemen.<sup>93</sup> The formation of viable British-trained security forces was viewed as the best means of mitigating this threat.<sup>94</sup>

## **B. THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSE TO BRITISH RETRENCHMENT**

Foreign Secretary Brown's January 1968 revelation to Secretary of State Rusk that the UK would abandon its political and security commitments in the Persian Gulf and redeploy its military forces from the region marked a rather abrupt departure from relatively recent assertions to the contrary, which had been provided by the Wilson government in the aftermath of the January 1967 decision to withdraw British forces from the Far East. On November 1, 1967, while informing Secretary of State Rusk that British forces would be withdrawn from Aden, London's Ambassador to the United States, Sir Patrick Dean, emphasized that this decision did not detract from the United Kingdom's determination to remain in the Persian Gulf.<sup>95</sup> Similar sentiments were echoed in a November 18 letter from British Minister of Defense Denis Healey to American Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and again on November 20, when Secretary of State Rusk was informed that Foreign Office representatives had confirmed to the American ambassador in London that the UK intended to maintain its military presence in the Persian Gulf at least until the mid-1970s.<sup>96</sup>

The first indication that the Wilson government could reevaluate its Persian Gulf political and security commitments appeared in the aftermath of London's November 17

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<sup>93</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research; *Persian Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal*; 3 September 1971; folder POL 33 Persian Gulf 8/1/71: Container 1996; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD, i-ii, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *Persian Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal*, i-ii, 1.

<sup>95</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, November 1, 1967," *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula (Washington, DC, 2000) doc. 107.

<sup>96</sup> American Embassy London to the Department of Defense and Department of State; telegram; "Defense Impacts of New Economic Measures;" 18 November 1967; folder DEF 1 UK 11/67: Container 1640; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD; "Information Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (Battle) to Secretary of State Rusk, November 20, 1967," *FRUS 1964–1968* vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 113.

devaluation of the pound sterling, which energized opponents to Britain's remaining defense commitments east of Suez in the House of Commons and in the British press.<sup>97</sup> In light of this opposition, American ambassador to the UK David K. E. Bruce asked British Foreign Office Undersecretary Frank Brenchley if the recent devaluation of the pound sterling was cause for a reevaluation of the American estimate that a strong British military presence would remain in the Gulf after 1975.<sup>98</sup> While Brenchley replied in the negative, he did admit that a continuation of the British military commitment to the Persian Gulf would depend on the recovery of the pound and an improvement in the UK's balance of payments over the next 18 to 24 months.<sup>99</sup> Absent this improvement, Brenchley believed that pressure for a complete withdrawal from the Persian Gulf "might prove irresistible."<sup>100</sup> Brenchley's admission marked the first time in his 16-month relationship with the American ambassador that the British commitment to the Persian Gulf was questioned. Accordingly, Bruce recommended, and the Department of State concurred, that Secretary of State Rusk or Secretary of Defense McNamara reiterate to their British counterparts the high value that the United States placed on the British commitment to maintain military forces in the Persian Gulf and express appreciation for the Wilson government's repeated assertions that London would maintain substantial military forces in the region.<sup>101</sup>

Washington's evaluation of British willingness to continue its Persian Gulf commitments took a more ominous turn after the New Year. On January 4, 1968, Ambassador Bruce reported to Secretary of State Rusk that, in light of cuts to the Ministry of Defense budget, London would withdraw its forces from the Far East and Persian Gulf by mid-

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<sup>97</sup> American Embassy London to the Secretary of State; airgram; "British Military Presence in the Persian Gulf;" 12 December 1967; folder DEF 1 UK 12/67: Container 1640; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD, 1.

<sup>98</sup> American Embassy London, "British Military Presence in the Persian Gulf," 2.

<sup>99</sup> American Embassy London, "British Military Presence in the Persian Gulf," 3.

<sup>100</sup> American Embassy London, "British Military Presence in the Persian Gulf," 3.

<sup>101</sup> American Embassy London, "British Military Presence in the Persian Gulf," 3.

1972.<sup>102</sup> In response, on January 5, Bruce was instructed to convey a personal message from Secretary of State Rusk to British Foreign Minister George Brown:

I am deeply disturbed by information which has just reached me to the effect that HMG may be considering accelerating its withdrawal from the Persian Gulf. As you know, we attach very high importance to the maintenance of the British position in the Persian Gulf for the indefinite future. We welcomed the repositioning of some of your forces there from Aden last year as an earnest of your determination to continue to play the essential stabilizing role in the Gulf which has been so helpful to us all for so long. While economies can no doubt be made, I would earnestly hope that when we meet next week HMG will not have taken any irrevocable decisions. In our view, fixing of specific timetable at this early stage would be likely feed instability in the region and increase your own problems in arranging eventual orderly departure.<sup>103</sup>

British defense minister Denis W. Healey expressed surprise over Rusk's message to Foreign Minister Brown on January 9, telling a U.S. embassy official on January 9 that his assumption was that continuation of UK involvement in the Far East was of greater interest to the United States than maintenance of London's commitments to the Persian Gulf.<sup>104</sup> Healey observed that, while British forces did contribute to regional stability, the range of potential conflicts in the Gulf could be resolved diplomatically. In this sense, Healey believed that prolonging British military commitments to the region beyond 1970–71 would be harmful to Persian Gulf stability.<sup>105</sup>

By January 9, the U.S. government stance on British retrenchment from the Persian Gulf was solidifying. In a short paper developed to prepare Secretary of State Rusk for a January 11 discussion with Foreign Secretary Brown, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Lucius D. Battle lamented that withdrawal of British military

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<sup>102</sup> American Embassy London to the Secretary of State; telegram; "British Defense Cuts;" 4 January 1968; folder DEF 1 UK (1967) DEF 1 UK (1/21/68); Container 1640; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

<sup>103</sup> "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, January 5, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe (Washington, DC, 2001), doc. 285.

<sup>104</sup> "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, January 5, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe, doc. 285.

<sup>105</sup> "Telegram From the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, January 9, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe, doc. 287.

forces from the Gulf threatened the position of the West in this vital region.<sup>106</sup> The absence of a credible military threat that stood ready to back up London's preeminent political influence in the region would shake the confidence of existing regimes toward the West, while simultaneously making them a more enticing target for the forces of Arab radicalism. Battle also argued that announcement of a specific date for an irreversible British withdrawal from the Gulf would provide the Soviets with an opening to make inroads to the "weak but oil-rich Gulf sheikhdoms" while the United States would be unable to fill any resulting security void.<sup>107</sup> In this light, Battle argued that Western interests were best served via maintenance of even a reduced British military presence in the Persian Gulf.

On January 11, Foreign Secretary Brown met with Rusk in Washington and informed the American secretary of state that on January 16 London would announce that all British forces in the Far East and Persian Gulf would be withdrawn by March 31, 1971. Brown explained that these steps were necessary to London realizing £1 billion in budgetary savings that were required to restore the value of sterling and facilitate the success of the Wilson government's currency devaluation policy.<sup>108</sup> Brown offered that the Persian Gulf was more stable than it had been in the past, characterized relations between the "major parties" in the region as being "as good as ever," and offered that fixing a precise date to British withdrawal would force local governments to assume responsibility for their own security.<sup>109</sup> Rusk did not share the British foreign secretary's rosy view of Persian Gulf and Far Eastern stability and expressed his concern over London's decision, explaining that British retrenchment in the face of ongoing turmoil in the Far East and Persian Gulf jeopardized Western interests. His

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<sup>106</sup> "Briefing Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Battle) to Secretary of State Rusk, January 9, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Persian Gulf, doc. 122.

<sup>107</sup> "Briefing Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Battle) to Secretary of State Rusk, January 9, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Persian Gulf, doc. 122.

<sup>108</sup> Department of State; memo; "British Withdrawal from the Far East and Persian Gulf;" 11 January 1968; folder DEF 6 UK 1.1.68: Container 1642; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

<sup>109</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, January 11, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe, doc. 288.

advice for Brown was simple: “be Britain.”<sup>110</sup> Rusk warned that the United States was unable to assume responsibility for maintaining Gulf security and expressed hope that London would reevaluate the implications of its retrenchment decision.<sup>111</sup> That evening, President Johnson signed a personal message to Prime Minister Wilson explaining:

I cannot conceal from you my deep dismay upon learning this profoundly discouraging news. If these steps are taken, they will be tantamount to British withdrawal from world affairs, with all that means for the future safety and health of the free world. The structure of peace-keeping will be shaken to its foundations. Our own capability and political will could be gravely weakened if we have to man the ramparts all alone.

Although the decision must, of course, be your own, I can only wonder if you and your associates have taken fully into account the direct and indirect consequences.

While the hour is late, I urge you and your colleagues once more to review the alternatives before you take these irrevocable steps. Even a prolongation of your presence in the Far East and the Persian Gulf until other stable arrangements can be put in place would be of help at this very difficult time for all of us.<sup>112</sup>

Johnson’s appeal did not have the desired effect. On January 16, in what became known as “Black Tuesday” within the British Ministry of Defence, Prime Minister Wilson announced that British military forces would be withdrawn from the Far East and Persian Gulf by December 31, 1971.<sup>113</sup>

### C. EARLY EFFORTS AT CRAFTING A POLICY: THE HOLMES REPORT

Prime Minister Wilson’s January 16, 1968, announcement that British forces would be fully withdrawn from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971 capped a year in which the Johnson administration had completed a series of somewhat disjointed efforts to develop a

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<sup>110</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, January 11, 1968,” *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe, doc. 288.

<sup>111</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, January 11, 1968,” *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe, doc. 288.

<sup>112</sup> “Message from President Johnson to Prime Minister Wilson, January 11, 1968,” *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XII, Western Europe, doc. 289.

<sup>113</sup> Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947–1968*, 325.



strategy to guide American foreign policy in the Middle East. While these efforts did not directly result in the development of a cogent strategy to guide American policy in the Persian Gulf, they shed light on the rather confused state of Johnson administration thinking on the region and, more importantly, preview the beliefs that would underpin the Carter administration's view of the region and shape American security policy in the Persian Gulf throughout the 1980s.

Most revealing is a four-month study conducted by a joint Department of State-Department of Defense study group under the direction of Ambassador Julius C. Holmes.<sup>114</sup> Commissioned in March 1967, the Holmes study was intended to analyze how American interests and policy objectives in the large region comprising the Middle East, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa interacted with those of other powers and discuss the important trends that would shape this region in the future.<sup>115</sup> Holmes intended the study to provide guidance that would shape American policy in this region through 1972. Accordingly, it proposed long-term strategic objectives, outlined a five-year strategy to guide American policy in the region, and provided a list of policy initiatives in support of this strategy. Despite being disrupted by the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the study was completed in July and discussed by the NSC Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) in September.

Unfortunately, the Holmes report suffered from several significant flaws that seriously degraded its utility as a guide for policy-making. First, its treatment of the Near East, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa as a homogenous region coupled with the belief that American policy for this significant portion of the globe could be driven by one overarching strategy document was an unrealistic assumption that, for all intents and purposes, doomed the Holmes study from the outset.<sup>116</sup> Closely related was a second major fault of the report: its failure,

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<sup>114</sup> Holmes served as ambassador to Iran from 1961–1965.

<sup>115</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22.

<sup>116</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22. The Holmes study defined these three regional groupings as follows: Near East- Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Muscat, Oman, and the states comprising the present-day United Arab Emirates. North Africa- Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Horn of Africa- Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia.

outside of its description of Arab nationalism and conservative governments as potential barriers to Soviet influence in the region, to adequately consider the social, economic, and political environment indigenous to the region. Third, domestic American political and economic considerations, such as opposition to American military commitments across the globe in response to the ongoing Vietnam conflict and the worsening balance of payments crisis confronting the United States, were ignored. Instead, the region was examined exclusively through a Cold War lens. This perspective permeated the study's view of American interests in the region, the threat to those interests, and the proposed policy initiatives. The failure to adequately consider domestic economic and political factors, both American and those indigenous to the study region, ensured that the Holmes report's policy recommendations were either unrealistic or ill-suited to the Near East, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa.

Preventing the Soviet Union from obtaining a predominant position that would inhibit Western access to the region and enable Moscow to control the areas' political, social, and economic modernization provided the basis for U.S. strategic interests in the region.<sup>117</sup> Supporting these were secondary interests of bolstering the security of the Northern Tier Countries (i.e. Greece, Turkey, and Iran) and maintaining American military and intelligence facilities in the region. On the economic front, preserving access to Persian Gulf oil and protecting private American investments (primarily oil-related) were viewed as crucial to the strength of Free World economies and the U.S. balance of payments.<sup>118</sup> These interests were threatened by Soviet efforts to eliminate American influence, disrupt the CENTO and NATO alliances, and secure predominant levels of political, economic, and military influence that

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<sup>117</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22.

<sup>118</sup> "Paper Prepared in the Department of State, February 8, 1967," *FRUS* 1964–1968 vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 19; "Paper prepared in the Department of State, December 27, 1967," *FRUS* 1964–1968 vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26. These two Department of State (DoS) studies describe the United States' primary interest in Middle East oil as being derived from the significant profits American oil companies derived from investment in Persian Gulf and, consequently, the impact these profits had on the United States' ongoing balance of payments problem. According to a DoS paper issued on December 27, 1967, American oil companies accrued an annual profit of \$1.5 billion and contributed over \$1 billion per annum to the U.S. balance of payments. The paper went on to explain, "the loss of \$1 billion annual credits to the U.S. balance of payments would be a matter of very great concern to the United States government."

were part of a second front strategy ultimately designed to weaken Western Europe.<sup>119</sup> The Holmes report described Soviet activity in support of these objectives as opportunistic and aimed at avoiding a direct conflict with the United States. The Soviets were aided by the prevailing anti-imperialist sentiment in the region and, strangely in light of Russia's and the Soviet Union's long history of involvement in Iran, Moscow's status as a "relative newcomer" in the region.<sup>120</sup>

The report's specific policy recommendations reflected the document's Cold War perspective and its failure to account for the current political and economic environment confronting the United States, its allies, and the countries indigenous to the study region. For example, while London was confronting the economic crisis that would shortly force the withdrawal of its forces from the region, the Holmes study recommended that the United States should press its Western European allies to assume greater responsibility for maintaining security in the region and encourage the British to remain in the Persian Gulf.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, the study recommended that Turkey and Iran, as key components of the vital Northern Tier, be encouraged to assume a greater role in the affairs of the Arab states. In reality, the Arab states viewed Iran with varying degrees of alarm, and would not have been receptive to a large role for Tehran in their own internal affairs. The Holmes report included several policy initiatives that would resonate into the 1970s. It advised that the United States rebuild its relationship with the Arab states, first targeting the moderate monarchical regimes, particularly Saudi Arabia, and designating Iran as a country that should receive substantial economic and military support. Additionally, the report recommended that on-call military forces, stationed in the United States but capable of rapid deployment to the Red Sea-Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf region, be developed to respond to local emergencies.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22.

<sup>120</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22.

<sup>121</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22.

<sup>122</sup> "Report Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, undated," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 22.

Members of the NSC Interdepartmental Regional Group (IRG) for the Near East and South Asia, which was conducting a similar study more narrowly geared toward the Near East, questioned the assumptions that shaped the Holmes study on August 16, 1967. Stuart Rockwell, responsible for developing the NSC IRG study, remarked that some members of his working group believed the Holmes study's treatment of the Soviet threat was inflated and, consequently, it exaggerated the urgency of its policy recommendations.<sup>123</sup> NSC staffer Harold Saunders, who would play a large role in the formulation of American policy in the Persian Gulf during the Nixon administration, described the Holmes report's policy recommendations as "the same tired old programs with which Congress is disenchanted."<sup>124</sup> Saunders directly challenged the assumptions underlying the Holmes study, asking if the study area was vital to the United States and if its loss to the Soviets posed such a dire threat to Western Europe. If this was the case, Saunders observed, the Europeans had shown little interest in shoring up their southern flank and that either they, or the Holmes report assumptions, were wrong. Other voices argued that Western European silence on this issue resulted from Anglo-American security guarantees and that the United States had not seriously pursued cooperative security arrangements for the Persian Gulf with its NATO allies.<sup>125</sup> All, however, agreed that Western Europe was reluctant to assume a prominent military or political role in the Middle East. Finally, Saunders questioned the utility of considering policy options that were politically or monetarily unrealistic or exceeded the capabilities of the United States to support.<sup>126</sup>

Ambassador Holmes acknowledged these shortcomings when, in lieu of discussing the conclusions and recommendations of his study, he concentrated on answering its critics

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<sup>123</sup> "Memorandum for the Record, August 16, 1967," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

<sup>124</sup> "Memorandum for the Record, August 16, 1967," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

<sup>125</sup> "Memorandum for the Record, August 16, 1967," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

<sup>126</sup> "Memorandum for the Record, August 16, 1967," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

when he presented his study to the NSC SIG on September 14, 1967.<sup>127</sup> Rather bizarrely, in light of the clear language in his study, he explained that his joint State- Defense team did not view specific Soviet political and military actions in the study area as being the natural result of an overarching strategic blueprint that sought to outflank NATO and weaken Western Europe. Holmes explained that Soviet activity in the Middle East resulted from long-held policy geared toward acquiring warm-water ports. Holmes defended his study's portrayal of the Soviet threat as prudent, as it provided a worst-case scenario that could be considered in the development of American policy options.<sup>128</sup> The SIG concluded that American policy should concentrate on assisting moderate forces in the region.

Harold Saunders, perhaps with the Holmes report fresh in mind, attempted to identify and discuss the key issues confronting the United States government that had been exposed by the Holmes study, the NSC/Rockwell study, and CIA intelligence estimates of the region in a memorandum drafted in early September 1967. From Saunders point of view, the studies completed during 1967 had identified two broad issues that required adjudication at "a high political level."<sup>129</sup> The first involved the precise nature of the threat the Soviets posed to American interests in the Middle East. Saunders argued that two schools of thought existed on this question. One point of view, in the mold of the Holmes study, asserted that Soviet activities derived from a deliberate strategy geared toward achieving total control of the region.<sup>130</sup> Others viewed Soviet gains in the region as a natural outcome in light of the retrenchment of imperial powers from the region.<sup>131</sup> Resolution of this issue would in large part determine how active American foreign policy in the Middle East should be. One school of thought argued that the Middle East was a vital region that required substantial American

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<sup>127</sup> "Record of Meeting, September 14, 1967," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 25.

<sup>128</sup> "Record of Meeting, September 14, 1967," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 25.

<sup>129</sup> Harold H. Saunders to John Walsh; memo; "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 5 September 1967; folder POL 1 Near East 1/1/67: Container 2356; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD, 2.

<sup>130</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 2.

<sup>131</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 2.

involvement.<sup>132</sup> The opposite viewpoint held that the region was of lesser importance, thereby mandating a more detached level of American involvement.<sup>133</sup> In Saunders' opinion, many in the U.S. government believed that the region was vital to American interests but, despite this belief, policy in the Middle East *in practice* emphasized a more detached and less hands-on flavor.<sup>134</sup> Saunders attributed this to CIA estimates that downplayed the chances of the Soviets dominating the region, limitations on American resources, other priorities, such as Europe and Asia, and anti-American sentiment in the Middle East. In this environment, Saunders viewed a policy of limited engagement as the most realistic option for the United States.<sup>135</sup> What the United States required, in Saunders' estimation, was a policy that moved beyond what he described as, in implicit criticism of the Holmes study, "the tools and concepts of the 1950s-keeping NATO from being 'outflanked,' viewing CENTO as important for its 'blocking position,' and relying on large-scale supporting assistance" and toward a "policy for the 1970s."<sup>136</sup> Saunders went on to lay out a rough series of questions that were intended to guide the development of future policy for the region. The study Saunders had in mind would not be commenced until the Nixon administration assumed office in 1969.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The short-fused nature of the British decision to withdraw its forces from the Persian Gulf necessitated a rather fast and somewhat ad hoc response as the Johnson administration groped for a Persian Gulf policy appropriate to the altered political and security conditions created by Britain's withdrawal. This task was complicated by the lack of consensus within the administration on the Gulf's importance to the United States and the magnitude of the threat to American interests in the region. Additionally, the thoughts of the Johnson administration were, understandably, focused heavily on the ongoing conflict in Vietnam, especially after North Vietnam commenced the Tet offensive on January 30, 1968. Despite

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<sup>132</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 2.

<sup>133</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 2.

<sup>134</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 6.

<sup>135</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 7.

<sup>136</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "The U.S. and the USSR in the Middle East," 8.

these considerable obstacles, in early February 1968 the administration reached consensus on four tenets that would ultimately guide American strategy in the Persian Gulf throughout the 1970s.<sup>137</sup>

The first was that it was “neither politically feasible or desirable for the U.S. to ‘replace’ the British presence in the Persian Gulf.”<sup>138</sup> What this meant in practice was that the United States would avoid undertaking new programs in the Gulf and refrain from becoming enmeshed in the internal affairs of the emerging riparian states of the southwestern Persian Gulf littoral. Outside the well-established and close relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, American involvement would be generally “low key and peripheral to the activities of the British and indigenous Gulf states,” as the people of the region would be better able to manage their affairs without outside interference from the United States.<sup>139</sup> While it was assumed that the small states of the Persian Gulf would naturally turn toward the United States to assume the responsibility for Gulf security, it was better for Washington to avoid this temptation from the outset rather than adopt an intrusive policy and then try to back off at a later date.<sup>140</sup>

Encouraging the British to maintain as much of their traditional and special role in the Gulf after 1971 was the second major theme that guided American policy makers in the

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<sup>137</sup> Jeffrey R. Macris, “Why Didn’t America Replace the British in the Persian Gulf,” in Macris and Saul Kelley, eds., *Imperial Crossroads*, 63–74. My discussion of the policy direction taken by the Johnson administration closely mirrors that put forth by Macris, who argues that six key themes emerged from the Johnson administration that guided American policy in the Persian Gulf throughout the 1970s. These themes were: 1. The U.S. will not replace the British in the Persian Gulf. 2. Keep the British engaged in the Persian Gulf. 3. Brief attempt at defensive alliances. 4. Build up the twin pillars. 5. Keep the U.S. Navy’s Middle East Force, and 6. Restrain the Soviets. My treatment of the Johnson administration response to the British withdrawal announcement diverges with that of Macris somewhat by identifying four key tenets that endured into the 1970s.

<sup>138</sup> “Record of Meeting, February 1, 1968,” *FRUS* 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 131.

<sup>139</sup> “Record of Meeting, February 1, 1968,” *FRUS* 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 131.

<sup>140</sup> “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Warnke) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, June 12, 1968,” *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 146; Department of State to American Consul Dhahran; telegram; 15 February 1968; folder DEF 1 UK: Container 1640; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD; Department of State to U.S. Embassy London; telegram; 22 March 1968; folder DEF 1 Near East: Container 1603; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

immediate aftermath of London's withdrawal announcement. The Americans assumed that, while Great Britain's security role would be diminished following the withdrawal of British forces from the region, London's significant political footprint would remain and be well-positioned to mediate conflicts, provide advice to the emerging Gulf states, train and equip local security forces and help provide a "climate of stability favorable (to) foreign investment."<sup>141</sup> It was believed that an American arm's-length policy, coupled with a strong British political presence, was well-suited to the Persian Gulf security environment, as the Soviets were too distracted by domestic issues, the threat posed by China, and maintenance of the Eastern Bloc to pose a realistic threat to the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the ability of indigenous threats to Persian Gulf security and stability, such as the Arab nationalist movement, lacked the capacity to topple existing regimes.<sup>142</sup>

Encouraging greater political and economic cooperation between the Persian Gulf riparian states, in particular between Iran and Saudi Arabia, was an early theme that shaped the American response to London's announcement that it would withdraw its forces from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971.<sup>143</sup> Political and economic development of the weaker Gulf states, which at the time were deemed to be Bahrain, Qatar, the seven Trucial States, and Oman, rested upon the ability of the rulers of these states to cooperate with each other and was also dependent upon joint Saudi and Iranian restraint from interfering in the internal affairs of these states.<sup>144</sup> Only in an environment of close regional cooperation could the enduring institutions that Washington believed were essential for long-term regional stability be constructed. Johnson administration officials had to tread very carefully in encouraging

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<sup>141</sup> Department of State to U.S. Embassy London; telegram; "Persian Gulf," 17 January 1968; folder DEF 1 Near East: Container 1603; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

<sup>142</sup> "Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Warnke) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, June 12, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 146; "Background Paper Prepared in the Department of State, February 2, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 132.

<sup>143</sup> Department of State to U.S. Embassy Kuwait and U.S. Embassy Tehran; telegram; "Persian Gulf," 9 January 1968; folder DEF 1 UK (1/21/68): Container 1640; RG 59; NACP; College Park, MD. The telegram stated "British position in past has provided limited element of regionalism but states bordering Gulf should themselves think more seriously about future arrangements than they have done so far."

<sup>144</sup> "Background Paper Prepared in the Department of State, February 2, 1968," *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 132.



these institutions, however, as special assistant to the president Walt W. Rostow learned in January 1968, when his January and February 1968 statements that the United States may choose to pin its hopes for Persian Gulf stability on “security groupings of nations in the region” or a more effective CENTO alliance unleashed public condemnation from the Arab nations and the Soviets, and private criticism from the British.<sup>145</sup> Another possibility considered by the State Department was for the United States to encourage “greater interest in Gulf affairs on part of those Arabian Sea states whose orientation was basically pro-Western and whose presence would likely contribute to orderly political evolution and economic development” to the small emerging riparian states.<sup>146</sup> Pakistan, as a Muslim nation that was not suspected of harboring ambitions to control the Gulf, seemed well suited to this role. Just what the riparian states, particularly Iran, would think of the prospect of a large Pakistani presence in the Gulf was not considered. This initiative was quietly shelved three days later in light of objections raised by the embassies in Rawalpindi and Tehran.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, the Johnson administration sought to avoid an excessive and potentially destabilizing military buildup by the littoral states of the Persian Gulf.<sup>148</sup> While the Johnson administration recognized that it was inevitable that some increase in indigenous security forces would occur, and that some segments of the State Department were in favor of developing an arms supplier relationship with the riparian states, consensus developed that it would be best for the United States to refrain from selling arms to former British clients, such as Kuwait, and the emerging states of the southern Arabian peninsula.<sup>149</sup> This policy was tested in April 1968 when Kuwait approached the United States and expressed interest in

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<sup>145</sup> Macris, “Why Didn’t America Replace the British in the Persian Gulf?,” in Macris and Kelly, eds., *Imperial Crossroads*, 66–67.

<sup>146</sup> Department of State to American Embassy Rawalpindi, American Embassy New Delhi, and American Embassy Tehran; telegram; 19 March 1968; folder DEF 1 Near East: Container 1603; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

<sup>147</sup> Department of State to American Embassy Rawalpindi and American Embassy Tehran; telegram; “Persian Gulf Initiatives;” 22 March 1968; folder DEF 1 Near East: Container 1603; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

<sup>148</sup> “Record of Meeting, February 1, 1968,” *FRUS* vol. 21, document 131.

<sup>149</sup> “Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Schwartz) to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Warnke), April 22, 1968,” *FRUS*, 1964–1968, vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 143.

purchasing 60 troop carriers. Despite some State Department interest in moving forward with the sale, the Johnson administration, in an effort to avoid new defense commitments, ultimately decided against it.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Macris, “Why Didn’t America Replace the British in the Persian Gulf?,” 66–67. Macris goes on to state that this decision would result in Kuwait turning back toward the British for its arms requirements, thereby reinforcing the Johnson administration’s objective of encouraging London to continue as much of its special role in the Gulf as was possible.

### III. RELATIVELY UNRESPONSIVE TO U.S. POWER: 1969–1970

The problem of developing a strategy to guide American policy in the Persian Gulf remained unresolved when Richard M. Nixon assumed the presidency on January 20, 1969. During his 68 months in office, important issues involving the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, the Arab-Israeli conflict, American foreign military sales (FMS), and Iran would be the subject of no less than 16 studies that were developed for consideration by the NSC. Promulgated as National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM), two of these studies were initiated in the first six months of the administration. The first, NSSM-2, was issued on January 21, 1969, the day after Richard Nixon assumed the presidency and was entitled *Middle East Policy*. Despite its focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the NSSM-2 study provided an important indicator of early Nixon administration thinking on American interests in the Persian Gulf, the threats to these interests, and the assumptions that underpinned both.

The task of developing American security policy for the Persian Gulf remained, however. In July 1969 the Nixon administration issued NSSM-66 to fill this gap. Entitled *Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, NSSM-66 directed the NSC Interdepartmental Group (IG) for the Near East and South Asia to examine the impact of British withdrawal on the Persian Gulf security environment, provide a menu of policy options that could serve as the basis for an overall American posture (diplomatic and military) suitable for the region, and to provide a recommendation regarding the continuance of the MIDEASTFOR presence in the area.<sup>151</sup> The study was completed in March 1970 and discussed by the NSC Review

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<sup>151</sup> White House, *Reorganization of the National Security Council System*, National Security Decision Memorandum 2 (Washington, DC: White House, 1969), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-nixon/nsdm-2.pdf>. Henceforth referred to as *NSDM-2*. The composition and functions of the NSC Interdepartmental Regional Groups were elucidated in *NSDM-2* (Reorganization of the National Security Council System). Participation included, at a minimum, representatives from the following agencies: Department of State (chair), Department of Defense, the NSC, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Depending on the subject being considered, other agencies, at the discretion of the chairperson, could be included in IG activities. The IGs were assigned several functions: “1. discussion and decision on interdepartmental issues which could be settled at the Assistant Secretary level, 2. preparation of policy papers for consideration by the NSC, and 3. preparation of contingency papers on potential crisis areas for review by the NSC;” “National Security Study Memorandum 66 July 12, 1969,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970 (Washington, DC, 2008), doc. 73. Henceforth referred to as “NSSM-66.”

Group in early June.<sup>152</sup> The NSC Review Group recognized Tehran as the principle power in the region and reached a consensus that Iranian-Saudi cooperation provided the most efficacious means of ensuring stability and safeguarding American interests in the Persian Gulf. These decisions were codified on November 7, 1970, in National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 92, which established the template that would govern American security policy in the Persian Gulf until the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

NSSM-2 and NSSM-66 shared two important assumptions. First, both reports elevated political, economic, and social forces indigenous to the Persian Gulf as the primary shapers of the Persian Gulf strategic environment while simultaneously adopting a sober and measured view that minimized the Soviet threat to the region. This prevented both studies from devolving into a facsimile of the flawed 1967 Holmes report wherein the region was viewed through a strict Cold War lens. Second, they also viewed regional instability as irreconcilable with Moscow's desire to better its relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the emerging riparian states. Together, these two assumptions helped ensure that American security policy in the region remained somewhat humble and realistic vis-à-vis the suitability of the direct employment of American military power as its principle tool.

#### **A. NSSM-2: INITIAL EXAMINATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND PERSIAN GULF**

NSSM-2 directed the NSC Interdepartmental Group (IG) for the Near East to examine the Arab-Israeli conflict and develop two papers for consideration by the NSC. The first would examine the menu of plausible policy options available to the Nixon administration to secure a peace agreement. The second deliverable had a broader focus and posed a series of questions that were intended to surface alternative views of American

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<sup>152</sup> White House, *NSDM-2*. The purpose of the NSC Review Group was to examine papers prior to their submission to the NSC in order to ensure that the topic under consideration was appropriate for NSC consideration, that "all realistic policy alternatives are presented," and ensure that the facts and all government agency views are represented. The NSC Review Group was chaired by the National Security Advisor and included representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the CIA, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

interests in the greater Middle East, assess the threat posed by the Soviet Union to these interests, gauge the political standing of the United States amongst the countries of the region and provide recommendations on the level of involvement Washington should assume in the region.<sup>153</sup> The IG merged the two studies directed by NSSM-2 into a single paper that was discussed by the NSC on February 1 and February 4, 1969.<sup>154</sup>

There was widespread agreement that the independence and integrity of Greece, Turkey, and Iran, identified as the principle bulwark against Soviet domination of the region, was a vital national interest. Indeed, a Soviet attack on any of these countries would be understood in Washington as a deliberate decision by Moscow to start a “general war” with the United States and its allies.<sup>155</sup> Opinion over the level of importance of the Arab world and Israel to the United States fell within two schools of thought, both of which largely rested on similar Cold War assumptions. The first contended that events in this region were vital to the security of the United States and that its loss to the Soviet Union would drastically alter the Cold War balance of power.<sup>156</sup> Adherents to this view cited the importance of the region’s oil resources to the West, the presence of American intelligence facilities in the area, and the importance of its air- and sea-lines of communication. It was thus essential that the United States “establish a firm position on this land mass, a nation or group of nations who will act as allies in all but name” for the purpose of fending off

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<sup>153</sup> The White House, *Middle East Policy*, National Security Study Memorandum 2 (Washington, DC: White House, 1969), [https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm\\_002.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm_002.pdf). Henceforth referred to as NSSM-2. These questions were: “1. What is the role of the Middle East today in U.S. global strategy? What are the real U.S. interests there and how important are they? 2. What is the nature of the Soviet threat to the Middle East? How likely is Soviet dominance or predominance? What forces will tend to limit Soviet influence? 3. What is the precise nature of the Soviet threat to NATO via the Middle East? 4. What is the present state of the U.S. position in the Middle East? Is it eroding drastically? Or is there a level of common interests shared with some nations in the area which will prevent it from deteriorating beyond a certain point? Is an early Arab-Israel settlement essential to preserving the U.S. position? 5. In light of answers to these questions, what is the most appropriate U.S. posture toward the Middle East? What level and kinds of involvement are appropriate in view of our interests and U.S. and Soviet capabilities?”

<sup>154</sup> Since the IG chose to merge the two studies directed by NSSM-2 into a single deliverable, a sixth research question concerning the urgency with which a settlement to the Arab-Israeli crisis should be pursued was also included in the study.

<sup>155</sup> Department of State; *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*; 24 January 1969; folder NSC Meeting Middle East 2/1/69; Container H-20; National Security Council Institutional Files; Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum (RNPL), Yorba Linda, CA, 4.

<sup>156</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 1–2.

Soviet advances.<sup>157</sup> Many in the military, the oil industry and academia believed that the United States should throw its support behind the Arabs for these reasons.<sup>158</sup>

Critics of this viewpoint contended that it lacked nuance and was based on outmoded conceptions of the region. They argued that Arab oil producers would be hesitant to halt the long-term flow of their most valuable economic resource to the west, either through voluntary embargo or via acquiescence to Soviet control.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, many argued that Israel offered the best hope in the region for resisting Soviet encroachment and that the United States had an obligation to protect the Jewish state.<sup>160</sup> While the IG ostensibly rejected both theses, its view of the importance of the region more closely adhered to this latter viewpoint. IG consensus held that while the United States could easily weather the loss of individual states in the region, incorporation of the area into Soviet orbit would constitute a grave national security threat.<sup>161</sup> Additionally, the existence of a “long-standing national consensus” elevated survival of Israel as an important national interest.<sup>162</sup> The study concluded that U.S. involvement in the Middle East was based on two principle reasons: American desire to ensure the survival of Israel, and to prevent Soviet domination of the Arab world. American interests in the region’s oil resources, lines of communications, and intelligence facilities were all subordinate to these two concerns.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 2.

<sup>158</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 2.

<sup>159</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 3–4.

<sup>160</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 2.

<sup>161</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> White House; *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*; 30 January 30 1969; folder NSC Meeting Middle East 2/1/69; Container H-20; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 2.

<sup>163</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 2–3. The January 30 revised draft more clearly elucidated American interests vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. These were: 1. Avoidance of a U.S.-Soviet war, 2. Preventing the introduction of nuclear weapons into the area, 3. Ensuring that American forces would not become involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and 4. Preventing a renewed outbreak of war between Israeli and Arab forces.

Two schools of thought existed over the Soviet threat to the Middle East. At one end of the spectrum were those that believed that Moscow was on the cusp of dominating the region, thereby posing a grave threat to NATO and western Europe.<sup>164</sup> Proponents of this viewpoint cited heightened Soviet military, naval, and diplomatic activity in the Mediterranean Sea and Persian Gulf as well as the close relations Moscow enjoyed with Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). On the opposite end of the spectrum were voices arguing that the staunch anti-Soviet policies of the Northern Tier states would combine with indigenous religious, cultural, and political forces to limit Moscow's ability to influence the region and threaten NATO.<sup>165</sup> While noting that the "high-water mark of Soviet potential influence" in the region had yet to be reached, the IG largely adopted this latter view.<sup>166</sup> The NSSM-2 study did point out, however, that the indigenous forces that militated against Soviet domination of the region would also work against American efforts to secure a settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute.<sup>167</sup>

Similarly, assessments of the United States' position in the Middle East were also split between two competing viewpoints.<sup>168</sup> Some argued that Washington's support for Israel weakened moderate pro-American regimes and imperiled U.S. interests in the region.<sup>169</sup> Comprised of oil interests, missionaries, and educators, this lobby recommended forcing Israel to accept Arab peace terms. Pro-Israel voices took an opposing view, arguing that Arab dissatisfaction with American support for Israel paled in comparison to the United States' capability to exercise its power in support of its interests in the Middle East.<sup>170</sup> They asserted that moderate regimes would continue to support American policy

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<sup>164</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 5–6.

<sup>165</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 6–7.

<sup>166</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 3; Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 7–8.

<sup>167</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 8.

<sup>168</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 14.

<sup>169</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 14.

<sup>170</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Interests in the Middle East State (NEA) Staff Study*, 15.

in order to secure their survival regardless of U.S. support for Israel. The IG consensus fell somewhere between these two extremes.<sup>171</sup> It accepted that while the United States' position in the Middle East had deteriorated and remained vulnerable, it did possess several key strengths in the region. First, the states of the region recognized that the United States could bring tremendous power to bear in support of its interests, that it provided the only legitimate "counterweight to Soviet domination of the area," and was the only power that was in a position to "influence and restrain" Israel.<sup>172</sup> Second, Israel understood that American support was vital to its long-term survival.<sup>173</sup> Third, American technical, educational, and financial assistance were crucial to the continued economic development of the region, which would mitigate Arab adverse reaction to Washington's continued support for Israel.<sup>174</sup> Finally, much of the Arab elite was believed to possess a staunchly pro-American viewpoint.<sup>175</sup> The IG cautioned, however, that despite these strengths American ability to influence the states of the region was limited by indigenous political and social forces.<sup>176</sup> In this light, the IG argued that the United States should seek a broader relationship with the Arab states without prejudicing its relationship with Israel, while simultaneously pressing Tel Aviv to withdraw from territories seized during the June 1967 war. This would also benefit moderate pro-American regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, as Arab-Israeli peace would lessen the threat posed to them by radical Arab nationalist elements.<sup>177</sup>

The NSSM-2 study was completed in late January and was discussed by the NSC in early February. From the perspective of American security policy in the Persian Gulf, NSSM-2 provided a preview of four assumptions that would underpin the Nixon administration's major study of the Persian Gulf, NSSM-66. First, was the report's

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<sup>171</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 5.

<sup>172</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 4–5.

<sup>173</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 5.

<sup>174</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 5.

<sup>175</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 5.

<sup>176</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 5.

<sup>177</sup> White House, *Basic U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 7–8.



measured and sober view of the Soviet threat to the region that avoided the alarmist Cold War viewpoint expressed in the 1967 Holmes study. This assumption militated against voices that would be inclined to establish a more robust military footprint as a counter to the Soviet threat to the region. Closely related, the report emphasized that indigenous social, economic, and political forces were the primary shaper of the Middle East security environment and stressed the dampening effect they would have on the ability of the Soviet Union and the United States to exercise influence in the region. This would be a recurring theme in later studies of the Persian Gulf carried out by both the Nixon and Ford administrations. Third, the report identified the Arab-Israeli conflict as posing a direct threat to American strategic interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Resolution of this conflict would improve Washington's relations with the Arab states of the Gulf while simultaneously lessening internal pressures on the pro-American conservative regimes in the region. In the interim, American technical and educational assistance were critical to the rapidly developing economies of the Arab oil producing states and would provide Washington with a useful foreign policy tool that would serve to dampen hostile Arab response to American support for Israel. Both public and private technical assistance programs would factor heavily into Nixon administration thinking on Persian Gulf strategy and policy.

#### **B. NSSM-66: DEVELOPING THE TWIN PILLARS STRATEGY**

On July 10, 1969, two members of the NSC staff, Harold Saunders and Mort Halperin, routed a draft NSSM to Henry Kissinger for forwarding to President Nixon. "While it is not in the headlines today," read a cover memorandum, "developments in the Persian Gulf will become increasingly difficult to cope with over the next two years."<sup>178</sup> Saunders and Halperin explained that while Saudi and Iranian willingness to maintain regional security would fill any perceived "power vacuum" in lieu of the impending departure of British military and naval forces from the Gulf, London's withdrawal would

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<sup>178</sup> Henry A. Kissinger to President Nixon; memo; "NSSM on the Persian Gulf;" undated; folder NSSM-66 (1 of 3); Container H-156; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA.

“require a difficult readjustment of local relationships.”<sup>179</sup> Saunders and Halperin cautioned that British retrenchment would also “require a clearer definition of our role in the area...while we may not wish to pick up the full burden ourselves, we will have to redefine our position.”<sup>180</sup> Kissinger signed NSSM-66 on July 12.

Entitled *Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, NSSM-66 provided the IG for the Near East and South Asia with three questions that were to form the basis of the study.<sup>181</sup> First, the IG was directed to examine the problems that would result from London’s decision to withdraw from the region, to include a discussion of the potential for conflict between Iran and the Arab Gulf states. Second, the study was required to examine the menu of policy options available to the Nixon administration to set an overall posture for U.S. involvement in the region. This posture would serve as the basis for the United States’ political relationships, diplomatic representation, and arms relationships with the Gulf riparian states. Lastly, NSSM-66 was to describe the decision associated with the continuance of the MIDEASTFOR presence in the Gulf, to include the costs and benefits of the various courses of action that were available to the administration. NSSM-66 directed that the IG for the Near East and South Asia submit the study to the NSC Review Group by September 30, 1969.

### **1. Development of the NSSM-66 Study**

The IG failed to meet the September 30 deadline mandated by NSSM-66. In late December, an initial draft was completed and comments were solicited from key stakeholders.<sup>182</sup> The draft accepted that British withdrawal from the Gulf was likely to be irreversible and noted that states in the region were adjusting to this reality. Maintaining access and influence in the region, ensuring regional stability as a hedge against Soviet and

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<sup>179</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “NSSM on the Persian Gulf.”

<sup>180</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “NSSM on the Persian Gulf.”

<sup>181</sup> “NSSM-66,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

<sup>182</sup> Memorandum from Peter Rodman of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 31 December 1969,” *FRUS*, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

radical Arab control of the Gulf, and maintenance of intelligence and communications facilities in Iran were identified as key U.S. interests. Additionally, American commerce in the area was estimated as adding a \$1.5 billion surplus to the overall U.S. balance of payments and the region's petroleum resources were deemed crucial to Western Europe, Japan, and American forces in Vietnam.<sup>183</sup> In terms of future policy options, the draft listed three primary courses of action, only one of which was realistic. Making no changes to American policy in light of the impending British withdrawal, an option characterized by Kissinger as silly, and in the draft as an abdication of responsibility, was rejected outright.<sup>184</sup> Encouraging London to reverse course on its retrenchment decision and continue its historical role in the Gulf was also disregarded, on the grounds that it would be unacceptable to the British and most likely unworkable to the riparian governments. The report advised that acquiring and maintaining influence in the Persian Gulf necessitated American interest and presence in the region. Thus, the third, and only realistic, option asserted that the United States "can do a good deal in small ways to provide reassurances that we are not abandoning our stake in the region."<sup>185</sup> A series of specific recommendations were provided in support of this option that included encouraging a non-military British presence in the region, establishment of foreign service posts in the newly emerging Gulf states, setting an arms aid policy to the region to include sales to Kuwait and the states of the lower Gulf, development of cultural exchanges and technical aid programs, and hosting visits by Arab political leaders.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Memorandum from Peter Rodman of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 31 December 1969," *FRUS*, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

<sup>184</sup> Memorandum from Peter Rodman of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 31 December 1969," *FRUS*, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

<sup>185</sup> Memorandum from Peter Rodman of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 31 December 1969," *FRUS*, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

<sup>186</sup> "Memorandum from Peter Rodman of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 31 December 1969," *FRUS*, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

On December 31, a member of the NSC staff, Peter Rodman, forwarded a short summary of the draft NSSM-66 report to Kissinger. In an accompanying cover memo, Rodman advised the national security advisor that the draft report was “not worth reading,” citing the paper’s one paragraph treatment of Soviet policy in the Gulf and its single page explanation of the need for advanced planning in establishing foreign service posts in the region to support his characterization of the study.<sup>187</sup> The study, entitled *Future U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, was revised in January and February and forwarded to Kissinger on March 10, 1970. Another three months would pass, however, before the NSC Review Group met to discuss NSSM-66 on June 5.

## **2. U.S. Strategic Interests**

The overriding American interest in the Persian Gulf was the maintenance of a stable environment in which embedded American political, military and economic concerns could flourish. Politically, the security of the regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia, staunchly pro-American as opposed to “more nationalist elements of a radical bent, such as Iraq and Syria,” was identified as a “major” American concern.<sup>188</sup> The presence of critical intelligence and communications facilities in Iran, presumably monitoring activities within the Soviet Union, continuation of refueling and port call privileges for MIDEASTFOR, and the sustainment of overflight and landing rights for American military aircraft were the principle military interests underpinning American involvement in the region. Additionally, the United States maintained a significant military sales and training relationship with Riyadh and Tehran as a key pillar supporting Washington’s relationship with the Saudi and Iranian governments.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> “Memorandum from Peter Rodman of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 31 December 1969,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 76.

<sup>188</sup> White House; *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 30 July 1970; folder NSSM-66 (3 of 3): Container H-157; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 2.

<sup>189</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 2.

Economic interests centered on the region's importance vis-à-vis the United States' ongoing balance of payments crisis.<sup>190</sup> Twenty American-owned oil companies operated in the Gulf and were responsible for approximately 50 percent of the region's crude oil production.<sup>191</sup> Overall, the Persian Gulf accounted for an estimated net dollar inflow to the United States of approximately \$1.5 billion, with Saudi Arabia and Iran alone accounting for nearly 70 percent of this total.<sup>192</sup> This inflow was estimated to have reduced the overall U.S. balance of payments deficit by over 40 percent and was expected to increase as Persian Gulf oil production expanded and the oil-rich states increased their levels of trade with, and investment in, the United States.<sup>193</sup> Persian Gulf oil production provided Western Europe with 55 percent of its annual crude oil requirements and 85 percent of U.S. military requirements for operations in Southeast Asia.<sup>194</sup> It was believed that the substantial and growing foreign exchange holdings of the Gulf states would play an increasingly important role in the global economy in the future.

Characterizing the climate of the Persian Gulf as "uneasy" in the wake of London's announcement of its withdrawal from the region, the NSSM-66 report asserted that the potential for regional instability had increased in the face of "historic racial, religious, and linguistic differences which have long clouded Arab/Persian relationships."<sup>195</sup> The report noted, however, that a series of forces were present in the Gulf that could serve to offset the negative repercussions of the British withdrawal. The region's growing oil wealth and traditional family and governmental ties were believed to have imparted regional governments with a common interest in regional security and stability, and it was theorized that the imminent departure of British forces constituted a shock therapy of sorts that would provide local rulers an opportunity to settle outstanding differences and encourage regional

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<sup>190</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 3–4.

<sup>191</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 4.

<sup>192</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 3–4. The \$1.5 billion estimation included \$535 million and \$503 million from Saudi Arabia and Iran, respectively. Kuwait was estimated to contribute \$262 million, the lower Gulf states \$74 million, and Iraq \$62 million.

<sup>193</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 3.

<sup>194</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 4.

<sup>195</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 6.

cooperation.<sup>196</sup> The report disagreed with the contention that the withdrawal of British military forces would produce a security vacuum, stating that London's considerable political influence would remain in the Gulf and, in any case, the United States had "for many years outpaced the British in our volume of trade and the amount of U.S. investment."<sup>197</sup> Also hedging against the appearance of a Persian Gulf security vacuum was Iranian willingness to assume the British security role and pressures on Saudi Arabia to become more engaged on local security issues.<sup>198</sup>

The report took a measured view of the impact that British retrenchment from the region would have on American interests that focused on social, economic and political factors indigenous to the Persian Gulf and downplayed the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Saudi fears of Iranian hegemony over the Arab side of the Gulf were highlighted, as were Tehran and Riyadh's shared fear of radical Arab nationalism taking hold in the Trucial States.<sup>199</sup> London's retrenchment decision significantly impacted the latter, as British forces were responsible for the training, equipping, and provision of intelligence to the primary policing force in the Trucial States, the 1500 man Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS). The report noted with concern that the absence of an effective security force in the Trucial States would provide a conducive environment for radical/subversive activity, imperiling the formation of the FAA in as little as three to five years.<sup>200</sup> The report concluded, however, "while various Arab radical groups unresponsive to United Arab Republic (UAR) control are active in the Gulf States, working for the eventual overthrow of the region's conservative regimes, their present influence is limited."<sup>201</sup>

The report briefly discussed the threat that ongoing Soviet support for "national liberation movements" and Arab nationalist regimes posed to the conservative, "moderate"

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<sup>196</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 7–8.

<sup>197</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 22.

<sup>198</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 14–15.

<sup>199</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 6.

<sup>200</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 13–14.

<sup>201</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 6.

regimes that were aligned with the United States and concluded that “it was virtually certain that the USSR will seek to increase its presence in the Gulf after the British leave.”<sup>202</sup> Soviet support for the radical Gulf states (i.e., Iraq, the two Yemens) had a significant impact on politics and security in the Persian Gulf. Iraq harbored territorial ambitions against Kuwait and was engaged in a long-running dispute with Iran over navigation rights in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, while a series of dissident groups were believed to threaten the position of the Kuwaiti ruling family and the formation of the FAA.<sup>203</sup>

The State Department asserted, however, that Soviet support for radical-nationalist regimes in the Gulf also imposed a cost on Moscow, explaining in May 1969 that such regimes “often follow high-risk foreign policies and expect greater and firmer commitments of support than Moscow is prepared to extend.”<sup>204</sup> These regimes jeopardized Soviet interests in Persian Gulf stability and imperiled Moscow’s ongoing efforts to improve its relations with Iran and Turkey.<sup>205</sup> Previous assessments that Soviet policy “invariably derives benefit from stirring up trouble and exacerbating regional disputes” were no longer germane, as instability threatened Moscow’s efforts to improve its relations with the Gulf riparian states and increased the danger of a U.S.-Soviet confrontation.<sup>206</sup> The impact of Soviet economic, technical, and military aid programs in the region was questioned, the State Department concluding that “these measures tend to work slowly, if at all, and they do not necessarily present an immediate threat...to the security or political integrity of a regime that understands Soviet policy and is determined

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<sup>202</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 9–10.

<sup>203</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 11. These dissident groups included the Ba’ath Party, the Arab nationalist Movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG), among others.

<sup>204</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, ii.

<sup>206</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, 5.

to preserve its independence.”<sup>207</sup> The efficacy of specific Soviet aid programs in the Gulf was openly questioned. In a statement that, in retrospect, should have served as a warning to American policy makers, it was assessed that Moscow “appears to have discovered that it quite often has less influence on recipients of Soviet aid than it might have expected when it first embarked on programs of economic assistance.”<sup>208</sup>

The NSSM-66 report’s description of the Soviet threat to the region did not cite specific policies or actions undertaken by Moscow that could be construed as directly targeting American security interests. Rather, it relied more on inference and assumption. It placed Soviet interest in the Persian Gulf in an historical context, explaining that in times of maximum power Moscow had traditionally “sought to play a significant role in the Gulf.”<sup>209</sup> The report cited Czarist era Russian naval scouting expeditions of the Gulf coastline that “*might* [emphasis added] have threatened the British Empire’s communications with India,” highlighted Soviet naval visits to the region in the aftermath of the January 1968 announcement of British withdrawal from the Gulf, and voiced concern over Moscow’s increased naval activity in the adjacent Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean.<sup>210</sup>

Significantly, however, the report lacked any description of the context within which these recent visits occurred or the political gain the Soviets garnered from them. As a result, the report’s description of the Soviet naval “threat” has a pro forma appearance that is buttressed by earlier State Department correspondence. On December 18, 1969, the

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<sup>207</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, 3.

<sup>208</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, 3. Commenting on an earlier draft of the NSSM-66 report on February 4, 1970, the American ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II, stated his belief that British withdrawal would result in a regional security vacuum and that, absent cooperation between the Gulf riparian states, would be filled by Soviet-supported radical Arab forces. Perhaps echoing the Shah, MacArthur cited recent Iranian overtures to the rulers of Sharja and Ras al-Khaimah “some arrangement for cooperation between Iran and (the) moderate Gulf states can be developed.” See “Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, February 4, 1970,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 77.

<sup>209</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 8–9.

<sup>210</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, 8.



U.S. embassy in Tehran provided the State Department with an assessment of a visit by three Soviet naval vessels to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas during the previous June.<sup>211</sup> The embassy concluded that the visit actually produced a negative effect on Iranian-Soviet relations by making Tehran more wary of Soviet intentions in the Gulf and encouraging the Shah's efforts to modernize his military forces with American-supplied weapons. Additionally, the Soviet foray into the Gulf had provided further encouragement for Iranian diplomatic activity in the region that was geared toward "mending its political fences with its regional neighbors, including India, Afghanistan, and Arab states on the Persian Gulf."<sup>212</sup> No plans were made for reciprocal visits by Iranian naval vessels to Soviet ports, nor did the Shah wish to discuss Persian Gulf security with Moscow. A May 1969 report developed by the State Department's Director of Intelligence and Research further discounted Soviet naval activity in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, assessing that Moscow's maritime presence in these areas was likely "a token one for a number of considerations: distances are great, Soviet naval capabilities remain limited, the closure of the Suez Canal continues to limit the operations of the Soviet Navy, [and] the presence of a Soviet strategic naval force in the Indian Ocean would only arouse concern in India and other Afro-Asian states without providing any substantial military or political advantage."<sup>213</sup>

Similarly, the NSSM-66 report's description of Moscow's diplomatic activity in the region and its treatment of the Soviet threat to Persian Gulf oil appears somewhat perfunctory. It recalled that Moscow's 1963 approval of Kuwaiti membership in the United Nations membership had been contingent on the establishment of a large Soviet diplomatic establishment, and warned that "this quid pro quo policy will no doubt be duplicated with respect to future applications by an Arab state or states in the lower Gulf."<sup>214</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>211</sup> U.S. Embassy Tehran to the Department of State; airgram; "The Soviet Presence in the Indian Ocean;" 19 December 1968; folder DEF 12-5 Iran: Container 1555; RG 59; NACP, College Park, MD.

<sup>212</sup> U.S. Embassy Tehran, "The Soviet Presence in the Indian Ocean."

<sup>213</sup> Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, *The USSR as a Great Power in the Middle East*, 7.

<sup>214</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 9.

the report noted that Persian Gulf oil “would provide the communist world with some advantages,” principally by allowing Moscow to divert Soviet oil exports to Eastern Bloc countries for domestic consumption.<sup>215</sup> Also highlighted were trade agreements the Soviets and several Warsaw pact countries had concluded with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq that involved payment in crude oil.<sup>216</sup> As with the report’s treatment of Soviet naval visits, its description of Moscow’s diplomatic and economic activities in the Gulf lacks nuance and context, thereby coming across as superficial.

The NSSM-66 report devoted comparatively more time to examining the impact of Arab-Persian relations and inter-Arab politics on Gulf stability than to the Soviet threat. It noted that preventing instability in the region was an interest shared by all the riparian states, and frankly admitted that ensuring a stable and secure Gulf depended upon the statesmanship of local rulers to prevail over what the report termed “parochial differences.”<sup>217</sup> Much would depend on the Shah, who had publicly voiced his intention to assume London’s traditional role as the guarantor of Persian Gulf security, with or without Saudi assistance, as well as his belief that the United States should acquiesce to the Iranian ruler’s point of view.<sup>218</sup> While Iran had acquiesced to the UN’s May 1970 conclusion that a majority of Bahrainis desired independence and the Shah had relinquished his claim to the island, Iran’s ongoing dispute with the rulers of Ras al-Kaimah and Sharjah over control of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs remained unresolved, and the report anticipated that the Shah was likely to resort to force to reinforce Iran’s claims to the islands. For rulers on the Arab side of the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia’s King Faisal, concern over the threat posed by radical Arab nationalists to their own internal stability had to be carefully balanced against fears of being seen to cooperate too openly with an activist Iran.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 9.

<sup>216</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 10.

<sup>217</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 8.

<sup>218</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 6, 14.

<sup>219</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 6, 15.

The report characterized Saudi King Faisal as a shrewd leader, well respected by the other Arab rulers in the Gulf. While the king's effective use of oil wealth and political patronage in support of its interests in the Arab peninsula was noted, Saudi capacity to police the Persian Gulf was believed to be limited due to the weakness of its military forces and concern over the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>220</sup> The latter was considered to be of increasing significance, as overt American support for Israel coupled with large Palestinian diasporas in the lower Gulf states complicated the political calculations of Arab rulers, who had to carefully balance commercial and political relationships with the U.S. government and American-owned firms with the threat posed by radical elements that could leverage close relations with Washington to stir up dissent.<sup>221</sup> For this reason, a renewal of open hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbors would have negative repercussions for American citizens and oil companies operating in the region. Tehran's close relationship with Israel only added to Arab distrust of its Persian neighbor, adding another layer of difficulty to Iranian-Arab security cooperation.<sup>222</sup>

Looking into the future, the report identified a series of trends that would shape the Persian Gulf strategic environment and influence the policy options that were recommended to the NSC Review Group. First, it stated that the situation in the Persian Gulf was changing permanently, that the independence of the Trucial States was irreversible, and that local populations would acquire a greater role in regional politics.<sup>223</sup> Second, Iran would emerge as the preeminent Gulf power, Saudi policy toward its Arab neighbors would become more activist in its use of military and economic assistance, and the potential for tension between Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq would increase.<sup>224</sup> Third, market incentives would ensure that Persian Gulf oil would continue to flow to western Europe and Japan but the influence of American oil companies would erode as

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<sup>220</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 15.

<sup>221</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 17–18.

<sup>222</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 15.

<sup>223</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 20.

<sup>224</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 20–21.

local governments renegotiated concessionary agreements.<sup>225</sup> This would reduce the net inflow of dollars that the region provided to the ongoing U.S. balance of payments crisis while also enabling substantial economic development among the oil-rich Gulf states. Fourth, the British would retain significant political and commercial influence in the region and would continue its traditional arms supply relationship with the lower Gulf states.<sup>226</sup> Fifth, it could be expected that the chances for instability on the Arab side of the Gulf would increase, Arab nationalist voices would gain ground in the region, and the Soviet Union would attempt to increase its influence on Gulf affairs.<sup>227</sup> Absent a major crisis in the Arab-Israeli conflict, however, American interests in the Persian Gulf would not be seriously threatened by these challenges as long as Washington conducted its relations with the Gulf riparian states, particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia, in a skillful manner and took care to differentiate between issues that directly impacted American interests and those that could be resolved by local governments.<sup>228</sup>

### **3. U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf**

In developing its menu of policy options for the NSC Review Group to consider, the report discarded three courses of action that were each variants of the do nothing course of action that Kissinger regarded as silly in December 1969.<sup>229</sup> The first was to convince London to reverse its January 1968 withdrawal decision. The report explained that neither the Wilson nor Heath governments, the latter despite public and private statements to the contrary, were likely to reverse Great Britain's scheduled departure from the Persian Gulf. Within the Gulf itself, the retrenchment of British forces from the area had produced a momentum toward a new political order on the Arab side of the Gulf that could not be reversed and the Shah had made it clear that Iran desired no foreign military presence in the Gulf. Reaching a *modus Vivendi* with the Soviets, in which Washington and Moscow

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<sup>225</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 21.

<sup>226</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 21.

<sup>227</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 22.

<sup>228</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 22.

<sup>229</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 23–24.

would agree to maintain a hands-off policy toward the Gulf, was rejected for its impact on the staunchly anticommunist moderate regimes in the region that supported U.S. involvement in the developments of the Gulf. Also militating against this course of action was that it would acknowledge Soviet influence in Gulf affairs and provide Moscow an opening through which it could become more heavily involved in the region. The third rejected policy option was the most passive: the United States would “stand back from the area and hope that a favorable climate for our investments and commercial and political interests would continue through historic momentum and the unaided efforts of the area states.”<sup>230</sup> Concern that Arab radicalism would topple pro-American conservative regimes coupled with a belief that, absent American involvement in the region, neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia could realistically be expected to protect U.S. interests in the Gulf led to this option being quickly rejected.<sup>231</sup>

Having rejected these courses of action, the report provided six policy options to the NSC review group, advising that a combination of several could serve as the basis for the U.S. posture toward the region.<sup>232</sup> The first option was for the United States to assume Great Britain’s traditional role as the guarantor of Persian Gulf security and stability. Specific actions that could underpin this policy included the extension of formal and informal security guarantees and commencement of military aid programs to Kuwait and the Trucial states (individually or as a federation), development of a permanent basing facility for naval and ground forces, and establishment of diplomatic and consular representation in the emerging Arab states of the Gulf.<sup>233</sup> Several arguments in favor of assuming the traditional British role in the Persian Gulf were provided.<sup>234</sup> First, assumption of a prominent role in the Persian Gulf would place the United States in a strong position to protect its interests and it was assumed that the United States could shoulder this new commitment at a modest cost given the considerable American financial stake in

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<sup>230</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 23.

<sup>231</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 23–24.

<sup>232</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 25–26.

<sup>233</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 27–28.

<sup>234</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 25–26.

the region. American security guarantees would be welcomed by the small states of the region and would quell the concerns of some Gulf moderates that believed Washington consistently underestimated the Soviet threat to the region. Soviet and radical Arab moves to counter significant American involvement in the region, such as ascribing American policy to colonialism or imperialism, would be limited by the lack of public objections from the riparian states. A visible and effective American presence would also allow the United States to improve its standing in the region in the aftermath of its visible support for Israel. Finally, Washington's solid and long-standing relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia would enable the United States to assume the British role without alienating its two key allies in the Gulf.<sup>235</sup>

Washington's close relationship with the Saudi and Iranian ruling regimes also provided the basis for several of the arguments against the United States unilaterally shouldering the burden of Persian Gulf security and stability.<sup>236</sup> An aggressive American posture in the region would contravene Iranian and, to a lesser extent, Saudi belief that the riparian states should assume primary responsibility for Gulf security. The Shah was more vocal than King Faisal in giving voice to this viewpoint, and had publicly stated on several occasions his opposition to the continued MIDEASTFOR presence in the region.<sup>237</sup> Additionally, assumption of the British role in the Persian Gulf would necessitate heavy American involvement in all regional disputes, potentially placing the Nixon administration in the uncomfortable position of having to lean toward one side of any potential Saudi-Iranian dispute. Closer to home, a constrained fiscal environment, coupled with domestic political pressure against the United States assuming additional political and military burdens, would complicate Nixon administration efforts to support the diplomatic, military, and naval efforts this policy option required.<sup>238</sup> In the end, this option was

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<sup>235</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 26.

<sup>236</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 26–27.

<sup>237</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 27.

<sup>238</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 27.

deemed impractical by the NSC staff and was quickly eliminated as a realistic course of action when the NSC Review Group discussed the report on June 5, 1970.<sup>239</sup>

A second course of action, also deemed impractical by the NSC staff and discarded during the June 5 NSC Review Group discussion, was for the United States to sponsor a regional security pact comprised of Gulf countries and intended to place “potential meddlers on notice that outside interference would not be tolerated.”<sup>240</sup> Within the Gulf, the combined military power of pact members, particularly that of Iran, would simultaneously serve as a credible deterrent against radical Arab states that sought to disrupt regional security. American initiatives in support of this security pact included encouraging the Iranians, the Saudis, and the Kuwaitis to conduct preliminary discussions that would ultimately lead to the formation of a codified security pact as well as establishing an arms supply relationship with Kuwait and preparing for increased arms sales to the Shah and King Faisal.<sup>241</sup> Fostering a regional security pact would also require Washington to become more heavily involved in the ongoing efforts to form a nine member FAA or encouraging maximum cooperation between Sheikhdoms that opted for statehood outside the FAA framework with the remaining FAA member states. Additionally, the United States would have to be prepared to provide military supply and assistance to the emerging states of the lower Gulf.<sup>242</sup>

Several factors made this a questionable course of action, however. Iran’s close relationship with Israel would complicate the development of an Arab-Iranian pact, as domestic political opposition and Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi radicals could leverage a Gulf security pact with the Shah to weaken conservative Arab regimes.<sup>243</sup> Additionally, it was

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<sup>239</sup> Harold H. Saunders and Richard T. Kennedy to Dr. Kissinger; memo; “Review Group Persian Gulf,” 3 June 1970; folder Senior Review Group Persian Gulf 6/5/70: Container H-046; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA; White House, meeting minutes; “NSC Review Group Meeting Persian Gulf,” 5 June 1970; folder SRG Minutes 1970 Originals (4 of 5): Container H-111; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA.

<sup>240</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 37.

<sup>241</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 38.

<sup>242</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 37–38.

<sup>243</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 37.

believed that low-key informal cooperation between the riparian states, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran, was a more efficacious means of ensuring security cooperation.<sup>244</sup> Imposition of a security pact by the United States was a non-starter, as Secretary Rusk discovered when his hints of a security arrangement produced a whiplash of negative reaction in the region.<sup>245</sup>

Two of the remaining four policy options provided in the NSSM-66 report were too narrowly focused to serve as the basis for an enduring U.S. posture in the region after the British completed their withdrawal in December 1971. Both involved U.S. posture toward the emerging Arab states of the lower Persian Gulf, providing the NSC Review Group with a choice between developing significant bilateral contacts with the new Arab states and establishing a position of influence with them or maintaining the status quo and doing little to improve diplomatic and commercial ties with the FAA, Bahrain, and Qatar.<sup>246</sup> In the case of the former, this would involve the establishment of consular posts, development of technical and economic assistance programs, and encouragement of a more active presence by American-owned companies in the Sheikdoms. The IG believed that the emerging Arab states would be receptive to a low-key relationship with the United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia would not object to these steps, and that improved ties would provide the United States with a cost-effective means of maintaining stability in these areas.<sup>247</sup> Maintenance of the status quo, in which Washington maintained its relationship with the Sheikdoms via a consulate general staff in Dhahran, on the other hand, would allow the United States to concentrate on enhancing its relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia unimpeded by ancillary concerns. Additionally, some contended that basic U.S. interests in these areas would be largely unaffected even if the FAA failed.<sup>248</sup> While determining the optimum U.S. presence in the emerging Arab states was an important issue that required resolution, making this determination would still leave the question of an overall U.S. posture toward

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<sup>244</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 37–38.

<sup>245</sup> White House, “NSC Review Group Meeting Persian Gulf,” 4.

<sup>246</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 33–36.

<sup>247</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 33–34.

<sup>248</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 34, 36.



the region unanswered, as it ignored the largest powers in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Kissinger pointed out during the NSC Review Group discussion of NSSM-66 on June 5 that establishment of a more robust diplomatic presence in the lower Gulf states was something the United States would have to do in any case, regardless of the direction it decided to take vis-à-vis its overall posture toward the region.<sup>249</sup>

This left only two realistic options that could form the basis for American strategy in the Persian Gulf. The first of these was for the United States to vest responsibility for maintaining Gulf security and stability with “a chosen instrument,” either Iran or Saudi Arabia.<sup>250</sup> For the IG, Iran, the region’s most powerful state and possessor of a modern military force and intelligence apparatus that was believed to be well suited for the Persian Gulf strategic environment, was the obvious choice to look after American interests in the Gulf.<sup>251</sup> Vesting Iran with responsibility for Gulf security would necessitate a series of foreign policy actions, such as increasing the amount of military aid provided to the Shah, aiding the Iranian monarch in his negotiations over revenue sharing with western oil companies, and supporting Iran in disputes with its Gulf neighbors, such as the ongoing issue over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs.<sup>252</sup> This course of action did carry risks for the United States, however, primarily related to its impact on the Arab side of the Gulf. Arming and backing the Shah was pregnant with the danger that the Iranian ruler would become heavy-handed in his dealings with the Gulf Arabs, potentially providing openings for radical Arabs outside the Gulf to spread their disruptive influence. Additionally, an Iran-only policy would strain the American-Saudi relationship, which was already under pressure due to Washington’s support for Israel and Saudi perceptions of the Nixon administration’s apparent lack of concern over Soviet inroads in the region.<sup>253</sup> Backing Saudi Arabia as the sole protector of the Gulf appeared even less attractive. Believed to be preoccupied by internal and external threats as well as fears of being labeled

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<sup>249</sup> White House, “NSC Review Group Meeting Persian Gulf,” 3.

<sup>250</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 28, 29.

<sup>251</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 28.

<sup>252</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 29.

<sup>253</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 17, 27–29.

a tool of the Americans, the report cited the Saudi's lack of enthusiasm and military capacity necessary to assume this role.<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, the Saudi option disregarded Iran's position as the Gulf's preeminent military power and it was clear that the Shah would not countenance Saudi suzerainty over the Persian Gulf.<sup>255</sup>

The other option was to foster Saudi-Iranian cooperation via a series of policy initiatives, such as establishing periodic ministerial-level consultations, persuading the Shah to downplay Iran's political and economic relationship with the Israelis, and encouraging intelligence sharing between the two countries.<sup>256</sup> A series of common interests was believed to provide a foundation for this relationship, which included concern over Soviet and radical Arab threats to Gulf stability, shared economic and oil interests, nascent cooperation in military and intelligence matters, and the resolution of Iranian-Saudi disputes, such as the successful November 1968 negotiations of the median line dispute, through diplomatic means.<sup>257</sup> In addition to the risks associated with the course of action discussed above, the IG raised concerns over Iranian heavy-handedness, Arab perceptions of the Saudi regime as a "minor partner" to the Shah, Saudi and Iranian parochialism, and historic Arab-Persian animosity as obstacles to cooperative security in the Gulf.<sup>258</sup>

Having laid out its recommended policy options for NSC Review Group consideration, the report turned to the specific decisions that needed to be made in light of the impending British withdrawal, with particular attention paid to the small U.S. Navy presence in the region, MIDEASTFOR. Operated from British facilities in Bahrain, MIDEASTFOR consisted of three ships (a command vessel and two destroyers) and would represent the only outside military presence in the Persian Gulf once the withdrawal of British forces from the region was completed. The consensus among most policy makers was that while MIDEASTFOR had limited value as a military force, it did have some utility

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<sup>254</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 30–31.

<sup>255</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 30.

<sup>256</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 33.

<sup>257</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 31.

<sup>258</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 32–33.

as a “psychological” presence that would symbolize American interest in the region, providing a needed element of stability in an otherwise rapidly changing Persian Gulf strategic environment.<sup>259</sup> Cold War concerns also factored into arguments for maintaining the small U.S. Navy footprint in the Gulf, as it was widely assumed in Washington that the balance of power in the Indian Ocean area was tipping precariously toward the Soviets.<sup>260</sup> In this environment, withdrawal of MIDEASTFOR would serve to hasten this concerning trend. Objections to maintaining the MIDEASTFOR presence centered on the potential for Iranian objections and the danger of radical elements leveraging this “vestige of Western military imperialism” to weaken conservative regimes.<sup>261</sup> A decision on MIDEASTFOR needed to be made in a timely manner, as the British had granted Washington with the right of first refusal on a portion of their military facilities in Bahrain.

The remaining outstanding issues involved UN membership for, and establishment of American foreign service posts in, the FAA, and the development of an arms policy toward the emerging Gulf countries and Kuwait, which had traditionally relied on London to meet their defense requirements.<sup>262</sup> With respect to U.S. arms policy towards the emerging Gulf states, Arab arms purchases were anticipated to be substantial and American arms sales would buttress Washington’s emerging political position in the emerging lower Gulf states and enable moderate regimes to combat radical threats.<sup>263</sup> Arguments against the establishment of an arms supply relationship included concerns over being dragged into local disputes, hesitation to undercut British arms sales to the region, and the belief in some quarters of the U.S. government that the ability of arms sales to provide political influence and compel a partner government to adopt U.S.-favored policies that may run counter their own best interests was limited.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, “Review Group Persian Gulf,” 3.

<sup>260</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 42.

<sup>261</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 43.

<sup>262</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 45–46.

<sup>263</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 45.

<sup>264</sup> White House, *Future Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 46.

#### 4. Deliberations and Decisions

Despite nearly 11 months of development, the June 5, 1970, NSC Review Group discussion of the NSSM-66 report was somewhat anticlimactic and lasted just 22 minutes. The discussion focused on three subjects. First, and most important, was determining a general strategy for the Persian Gulf. In preparing Henry Kissinger to preside over the meeting, NSC staffers Harold Saunders and Richard Kennedy explained that the NSSM-66 report posed four possible policy options:

1. The U.S. assumes London's traditional role as regional protector;
2. The U.S. backs a chosen instrument, either Iran or Saudi Arabia;
3. Washington pushes Iranian-Saudi cooperation, and;
4. Promotion of "a regional security pact."<sup>265</sup>

Saunders and Kennedy advised Kissinger that options one and four were impractical and explained:

The logical strategy [Saunders and Kennedy emphasis] lies in marrying what is already in fact extensive support for Iran as the unquestioned power in the area with the logic of cooperation between a strong Iran and a weak Saudi Arabia. We are not likely to diminish our relationship with Iran; we do not want to have to choose between Iran and Saudi Arabia; Saudi-Iranian cooperation is the optimum.

This means that the real choice is not really a choice as long as there is no trouble and Saudi-Iranian cooperation continues to grow. The real choice will come when, for instance, the Iranians look as if they are preparing to seize the small Arab-held islands at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. In circumstances like that, we will have to ask ourselves how much political capital to spend with the Shah to restrain Iran.<sup>266</sup>

Saunders and Kennedy went on to describe the first objective of the Review Group meeting as ascertaining that a general consensus existed around a strategy that promoted Saudi-Iranian cooperation while remaining cognizant that Iran was the preeminent Gulf

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<sup>265</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "Review Group Persian Gulf," 1.

<sup>266</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "Review Group Persian Gulf," 1. Emphasis in the original.

power and that the Iranian-American relationship would be pursued within this context. Simultaneously, the United States would do what it could to develop a “working relationship” with the emerging Arab countries of the Gulf. The review group quickly reached consensus on this during its June 5 meeting.<sup>267</sup>

Having agreed to an overall American strategy for the region, Saunders and Kennedy moved on to the final two subjects that were up for Review Group consideration: determining an appropriate U.S. presence in the Gulf (i.e., establishment of embassies, development of aid, education, and cultural programs) and the deciding the future of MIDEASTFOR. With regard to the former, the intent of the American presence was to mold the emerging Arab states of the Gulf into “more effective and stable partners.”<sup>268</sup> Funding limitations, unfamiliarity with the specific needs of the Arab Gulf states, and a lack of codified mechanisms to determine these needs and identify American subject matter experts that could work with Arab governments were the primary problems confronting the Nixon administration.<sup>269</sup> The Review Group agreed that a comprehensive blueprint of an optimum U.S. presence, including a recommendation on the future disposition of MIDEASTFOR, was required and directed the undersecretaries committee to develop it within four weeks.<sup>270</sup> Following completion of this blueprint, a memorandum would be sent at an appropriate time to President Nixon recommending that the United States back Iran as its chosen instrument in the Gulf while simultaneously working to develop Saudi-Iranian cooperation.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, “Review Group Persian Gulf,” 1.

<sup>268</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, “Review Group Persian Gulf,” 2.

<sup>269</sup> White House; talking points; 4 June 1970; folder Senior Review Group Persian Gulf 6/5/70: Container H-046; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1.

<sup>270</sup> White House, “NSC Review Group Meeting Persian Gulf,” 1. Chaired by the Undersecretary of State, the Undersecretaries Committee included the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the President’s National Security Advisor, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Undersecretaries Committee responsibilities included studying issues referred to it by the NSC review group as well as examining matters related to U.S. Government interdepartmental activities overseas.

<sup>271</sup> Harold H. Saunders to Dr. Kissinger; memo; “Seeking the President’s Concurrence on General Policy for the Persian Gulf,” 19 October 1970; folder NSSM 66 (3 of 3): Container H-157; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1.

This time appeared in mid-October, when the British informed the Americans that London would shortly be asking if Washington intended to retain MIDEASTFOR in Bahrain. Recent Kuwaiti requests to purchase American transport planes coupled with the State Department's request for supplemental appropriations supporting the establishment of diplomatic representation in the emerging Gulf countries provided additional impetus for a presidential decision.<sup>272</sup> Accordingly, on October 22, 1970, Kissinger provided President Nixon with a five-page memorandum that sought the president's concurrence with the recommendations that emerged from the June 5 Review Group.<sup>273</sup> Drafted under the supervision of Harold Saunders, the document emphasized that maintenance of London's significant political presence in the region and the emergence of nationalist aspirations in the Gulf states militated against the development of a security vacuum that could invite Soviet and radical Arab exploitation. American interests in the region were viewed as being congruent with those of its allies, but the document frankly admitted that the sources of Persian Gulf instability seemed "relatively unresponsive to U.S. power."<sup>274</sup>

In light of this constraint, the document went on to explain that the principle task confronting the United States was in developing "the best possible international framework" that would enable a political environment to emerge in the aftermath of British military retrenchment from the region that was conducive to American and allied interests.<sup>275</sup> Briefly describing the five strategy options discussed during the June Review Group meeting, Kissinger explained that the most logical strategy would lie in the development of a framework that sought to:

- promote Saudi-Iranian cooperation as the mainstay of a stable regional system but

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<sup>272</sup> Saunders, "Seeking the President's Concurrence on General Policy for the Persian Gulf," 1.

<sup>273</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

<sup>274</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

<sup>275</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

- to recognize that Iran is in fact the preponderant power in the Gulf and
- to do what we can to develop a working relationship with the new political entities in the lower Gulf.<sup>276</sup>

The memorandum advised that the Saudi and Iranian ruling regimes recognized the importance of regional cooperation and that Washington should support their efforts to develop an indigenous framework for the political evolution of the Gulf. Additionally, maintenance of a close relationship between Washington and Tehran would serve to mitigate the effects of the fall of the House of Saud, should radicals stage a successful coup d'état in Saudi Arabia.<sup>277</sup>

Working in conjunction with this framework would be an independent American presence that emphasized private and governmental technical and educational assistance to aid in the development of the Gulf states. Noting that the significant oil wealth of the Persian Gulf negated the provision of capital assistance as a foreign policy tool, Kissinger recommended that, following establishment of an adequate American diplomatic presence in the emerging lower gulf countries, programs “emphasizing technical and educational assistance, exchange, and effective use of private as well as public resources” be implemented as the basis for “a growing U.S. presence consistent with the strategy of promoting regional responsibility for stability.”<sup>278</sup> Supplementing these efforts would be the continuance of the U.S. Navy’s small MIDEASTFOR presence in the region. London had offered the United States the right of first refusal on British facilities in Bahrain and the small naval presence was regarded by American allies as demonstrative of American concern for the region. Finally, Kissinger recommended that the president direct the State and Defense departments to provide recommendations on outstanding arms requests from Kuwait and the emerging lower Gulf states as a means of buying time for an informed arms

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<sup>276</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

<sup>277</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

<sup>278</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

sale policy to be developed.<sup>279</sup> Nixon concurred with all of the recommendations provided by the October 22 memorandum. These decisions were codified on November 7, 1970, with the release of National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 92.

### C. CONCLUSION

The NSSM-66 study and the decisions promulgated by NSDM-92 set the overall posture for American security policy in the Persian Gulf that would remain until the fall of the Shah in February 1979. While NSSM-66 did not provide specific guidance on the longevity of the new American strategic posture in the Persian Gulf, internal NSC documents accompanying NSDM-92 as it made its way to the oval office characterized the document as laying out a short-term strategy that would be followed up by a further study examining long-term American interests and objectives in the Persian Gulf.<sup>280</sup> This document, entitled *Long Term U.S. Strategy Options in the Persian Gulf*, was developed during the autumn of 1970 and forwarded to Kissinger on December 30. The document laid two strategy options in addition to the posture provided by NSDM-92: encouraging a continued strong British security role in the Gulf and development of a high profile, “independent and innovative” U.S. posture for the region wherein Washington would demonstrate a willingness to diverge with London over Gulf issues, undertake political initiatives to maintain order between the Gulf states, and, if it would be beneficial, withdraw MIDEASTFOR from the region.<sup>281</sup> Ultimately, this paper had no significant impact on American security policy and was simply filed away.

Overall, the NSSM-66 study did an admirable job of presenting the complex security environment of the Persian Gulf and articulating a coherent set of American

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<sup>279</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 22, 1970,” *FRUS*, vol. XXIV, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, 1969–1972; Jordan, September 1970, doc. 89.

<sup>280</sup> Harold H. Saunders, “Seeking the President’s Concurrence on General Policy for the Persian Gulf,” 1; Dick Kennedy to Henry A. Kissinger; memo; “Persian Gulf,” 30 December 1970; folder NSSM 66 (3 of 3): Container H-157; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1. Kennedy’s memorandum to Kissinger was attached to a short paper developed by Chester A. Cocker entitled *Long-Term U.S. Strategy Options in the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>281</sup> Kennedy, “Persian Gulf,” 17.



strategic objectives in the region that were well grounded and pragmatic in nature. When these factors are coupled with a domestic political climate that was not conducive to Washington assuming additional security commitments, the Nixon administration's decision to rely on an indigenous self-regulating system that relied on Iranian-Saudi cooperation is understandable and appropriate for the strategic environment circa 1970. What the administration failed to do was adequately examine the feasibility of Arab-Persian cooperation. This is surprising given that the NSSM-66 report correctly ascribed the primary causes of instability to political and social factors indigenous to the region and identified several significant obstacles to regional cooperation. This failure precluded the Nixon administration from developing policies designed to overcome these obstacles or mitigate the risks they posed to American interests in the Persian Gulf. It also prevented the administration from considering how it could leverage the tools available to it (i.e., military aid and sales, technical education and assistance) to develop effective policies that supported the centerpiece of its Persian Gulf strategy, cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. As a result, the Nixon and Ford administrations would be required to confront this issue in follow-on studies of the Persian Gulf conducted in 1973 (NSSM-181) and 1976–1977 (NSSM-238).

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#### IV. FRESH THINKING ON THE PERSIAN GULF: 1973

By March 1972, several important tasks related to NSDM-92 had been completed. This included the accreditation of the American ambassador to Kuwait as the United States' first ambassador to Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman as well as the State Department's completion of its plans for establishing missions in three of the four new Gulf States, the only exception being Qatar. Additionally, the NSC Undersecretaries Committee, as a direct result of NSDM-92, developed recommendations related to the provision of technical and educational assistance to the emerging Gulf states. Kuwait was placed on the list of states eligible to purchase American arms using Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits while a military supply policy for the remaining Gulf Arab states had been promulgated on August 18, 1972, with the issuance of NSDM-186.<sup>282</sup>

While these tasks were necessary, they did not resolve the key issue that remained from the NSSM-66/NSDM-92 exercise: ensuring close cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. On March 31, 1973, Richard Helms, who had recently concluded his tenure as CIA director and arrived in Tehran as the newly appointed American ambassador to Iran, provided Washington with a gloomy assessment of the state of Arab-Persian relations. The president had earlier directed Helms to provide him with a "running assessment of stability in the Persian Gulf states," and the CIA had provided its former director with an Arabic speaking officer to act as his eyes in the region.<sup>283</sup> Helms focused his report on the stability of the Gulf Arabs states, most of which had just recently emerged as independent countries, and concluded "where there is a sense of local nationalism and accomplishment-in Saudia, Kuwait, and Qatar-stability can be predicted. Where there are internal divisions,

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<sup>282</sup> White House, *U.S. Military Supply Policy for the Lower Persian Gulf States and Oman*, National Security Decision Memorandum 186 (Washington, DC: White House, 1972), [https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-nixon/nsdm\\_186.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-nixon/nsdm_186.pdf). NSDM-186 authorized U.S. government support for private armament firms' sales of "reasonable amounts" of defense articles; authorized the transfer of U.S. military equipment under the Foreign Military Sales Act in cases where commercial sources were inadequate and the provided equipment contributed to regional cooperation and did not require the presence of American military personnel in the receiving states; and, directed that sale of weapons and other military equipment that could destabilize the Gulf would be "carefully reviewed in the light of broader U.S. interests in the area."

<sup>283</sup> Richard M. Helms to Henry Kissinger, "Persian Gulf 31 March 1973," [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/73\\_1499527.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/73_1499527.pdf), 1.

such as Bahrain (Shia-Sunni), the UAE (Dubai-Abu Dhabi) and Oman (tribal vs. settled and Dhufari vs. Oman) instability can be expected.”<sup>284</sup>

Helms was less sanguine in his assessment of the prospects for effective Iranian-Arab cooperation, which he correctly identified as the cornerstone of American policy in the region, explaining:

The Arabs feel that the Iranians in general and the Shah in particular are so contemptuous of them and are so arrogant in their dealings with them that true cooperation is not possible. If the U.S. can guide the two parties away from possible areas of conflict, we will be doing as much as we can truly hope to do. Not only do the Arabs sense and resent Iranian contempt, they also fear Iranian colonialism in the Gulf. There is not one Arab state in the region that is not fully aware that the Iranians are capable of taking over any or all of them any time they chose. The Arabs, therefore, approach the question of cooperation, particularly military cooperation, with understandable reluctance. Each time Iran says to a country like Kuwait-”don’t fear Iraq, we’ll protect you”-or responds rapidly to a request for aid-such as from Oman-this only rubs the Arab noses in their own inadequacies and increases suspicion and resentment. Logically, the Arabs and Iranians should work together, but emotions militate against this. One of the key roles the U.S. must play in the region is to assure that emotions are kept suppressed and are not permitted to break down the uneasy truce between the two parties.<sup>285</sup>

Kissinger forwarded a summary of Helms’s report to President Nixon on April 24.

At about the same time he was provided with Kissinger’s summary, President Nixon was also growing increasingly concerned over potentially malign Soviet intentions toward the Middle East and South Asia. Several leaders, including the Shah and King Faisal, expressed concerns that “the Soviet Union is intensifying its diplomatic, economic, and military activity throughout” the eastern Mediterranean, the Near East, the Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia and that these activities represented a “concerted Soviet effort to achieve hegemony there for the dual purpose of containing China and dominating a

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<sup>284</sup> Richard M. Helms, *The Arab States of the Persian Gulf* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1973), 19, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/73\\_1499527.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/73_1499527.pdf).

<sup>285</sup> Helms, *The Arab States of the Persian Gulf*, 20–21.

major center for supply of the world's energy.”<sup>286</sup> The Shah had raised his concerns a year earlier, during President Nixon's May 1972 visit to Tehran, and stressed the importance of Persian Gulf oil to the economies of the United States and Western Europe. The Shah shared his fears of Soviet machinations and theorized that Moscow could establish a coalition of Iraqi Baathists, Kurds, and communists in an attempt to exert control over the region.<sup>287</sup> He further explained that the Soviet threat necessitated that the Iranians, like the Israelis, have the military capacity to fend for themselves in the region, and pressed for additional U.S. Air Force advisors, and more modern weapons, such as the F-14 and F-15 fighter jets, as well as laser guided bombs. Nixon, overruling the advice of his staff, acceded to the Shah's request the next day.<sup>288</sup>

These fears, coupled with Helm's negative view of Iranian-Arab cooperation and NSC staffer concerns over the state of U.S.-Saudi relations, led the Nixon administration in May 1973 to reexamine American security policy in the Persian Gulf over the course of two closely related studies. Directed by NSSM-181 and NSSM-182, and completed later that summer, neither of these studies altered the overall American security posture in the Persian Gulf that had been promulgated by NSDM-92 in November 1970. Their significance lies in their overall discounting of the Soviet threat to the region, and the continuation of NSSM-66's emphasis on indigenous political and economic forces (e.g., Arab-Persian relations, the ongoing Arab-Israeli dispute, increasing oil wealth) as the

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<sup>286</sup> White House, *Implications for U.S. Policy of Probable Lines of Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia*, National Security Study Memoranda 182, (Washington, DC: White House, 1973), [https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm\\_182.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm_182.pdf). Henceforth referred to as *NSSM-182*; Harold H. Saunders and Richard T. Kennedy to Dr. Kissinger; memo; “SRG Meeting on NSSM 182-Implications for U.S. Policy of Probable Lines of Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia;” 12 July 1973; folder SRG Meeting Soviet Strategy in Near East/South Asia, NSSM 182: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 2.

<sup>287</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, May 30, 1972,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972 (Washington, DC, 2006), doc. 200.

<sup>288</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, May 30, 1972,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, doc. 200; “Memorandum of Conversation, May 31, 1972,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, doc. 201; “Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of State Rogers and Secretary of Defense Laird, June 15, 1972,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, doc. 205; “Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, undated,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, doc. 210.

primary shapers of the Persian Gulf strategic environment. Additionally, both studies reaffirmed the NSDM-92 decision to rely on regional cooperation as the cornerstone of American security policy in the region, despite and Helm's rather pessimistic view of the prospects for achieving it.

#### **A. NSSM-181 AND -182: A NEW LOOK AT THE GULF**

On April 25, 1973, NSC staff members Harold H. Saunders and William B. Quandt forwarded a draft NSSM to National Security Advisor Kissinger for signature.<sup>289</sup> Saunders and Quandt explained in a cover memo that while Washington enjoyed strong relations with Iran, American standing vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia stood on shaky ground in the face of several significant changes taking place on both sides of the Persian Gulf. Foremost among these was Washington's increasing recognition of Saudi Arabia's status as the center of gravity of world oil production. Possessing the only oil reserves believed capable of meeting rising global demand, the kingdom's energy resources were transforming Saudi Arabia into a "significant factor in the international economy."<sup>290</sup> Quandt and Saunders were concerned that the Saudi Arabia could use its newfound economic power against the United States. The two staffers cited Saudi fears that Washington had "placed its bets on Israel and Iran" as well as Faisal's wariness of the Shah's growing military power and his belief that the Iranian military buildup would enable Tehran to control the entire Persian Gulf.<sup>291</sup> The Shah's negative assessment of Saudi Arabia as an effective security partner was an additional factor supporting Saunders's and Quandt's thesis. The Shah's views undermined the cornerstone of American security policy in the region, Saudi-Iranian cooperation, and could place Washington in the position of having to choose between its two key regional allies.

Iranian, Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Omani perceptions of Iraqi and PDRY activities of in the region, the Soviet-supported radical regimes, further complicated matters. The March

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<sup>289</sup> Harold H. Saunders and William B. Quandt to Dr. Kissinger; memo; "NSSM on Arabian Peninsula Policy;" 25 April 1973; folder National Security Study Memorandums NSSM 181 (2 of 2); Container H-200; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1.

<sup>290</sup> Saunders and Quandt, "NSSM on Arabian Peninsula Policy," 1.

<sup>291</sup> Saunders and Quandt, "NSSM on Arabian Peninsula Policy," 2.

1973 border crisis between Iraq and Kuwait and fears of the PDRY threat to North Yemen/the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), Saudi Arabia, and the Dhofar province in Oman provided ample evidence, in the eyes of the conservative states of the region (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, YAR, and Oman), that Moscow maintained aggressive intentions toward the region.<sup>292</sup> Saunders and Quandt thought Washington's arm's length posture toward regional security was viewed by the conservative governments as a sign of American disinterest to what they viewed as Soviet "advances" into the Gulf.<sup>293</sup>

All was not lost, however. These factors provided the United States with an opportunity to strengthen relations with the conservative regimes in the region, principally Saudi Arabia. King Faisal's growing financial reserves and his requirement for American military equipment and technical expertise pointed toward the development of a joint U.S.-Saudi strategy that would elevate that country to a position comparable to Israel and Iran. Saunders and Quandt also urged that the United States' overall security posture for the region be reexamined via an NSSM.<sup>294</sup>

As Saunders and Quandt were initiating a fresh look at American security policy in the Persian Gulf, President Nixon, influenced by the Shah and King Faisal, was expressing concerns over Soviet intentions in the area. The Shah viewed Soviet bases in Iraq and India as constituting a pincer movement aimed at controlling Pakistan, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf.<sup>295</sup> While not as strident as the Shah, King Faisal was alarmed by Soviet aid to Iraq and the PDRY, believing it posed a threat to Persian Gulf stability.<sup>296</sup> Looking

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<sup>292</sup> On March 20, 1973, Iraqi forces seized a Kuwaiti police outpost and occupied several square miles of Kuwaiti territory. Iraq eventually withdrew these forces in the face of Arab League pressure and the deployment of 15000 Saudi troops to Kuwait. In Oman, the PDRY-supported Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) continued an insurgency against the Sultan of Oman in that country's Dhofar province. This rebellion ultimately failed in the face of Iranian military and Saudi financial support.

<sup>293</sup> Saunders and Quandt, "NSSM on Arabian Peninsula Policy," 1.

<sup>294</sup> Saunders and Quandt, "NSSM on Arabian Peninsula Policy," 5.

<sup>295</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "SRG Meeting on NSSM 182-Implications for U.S. Policy of Probable Lines of Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia," 2.

<sup>296</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "SRG Meeting on NSSM 182-Implications for U.S. Policy of Probable Lines of Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia," 2.

ahead to the Shah's upcoming visit to the United States, as well as a potential American diplomatic mission to Saudi Arabia, Saunders and Quandt recommended that an NSSM examining Soviet strategy in the region be issued in response to the Shah's and King Faisal's concerns.<sup>297</sup> Kissinger concurred with the recommendations provided by his staff and on May 10, 1973, NSSM-181 (*U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf*) and NSSM-182 (*Implications for U.S. Policy of Probable Lines of Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia*) were issued.

### **1. Development of the Studies**

NSSM-181 directed the NSC Interdepartmental Group (IG) for the Near East and South Asia to "review and evaluate our present policy in light of recent developments in the area" and provide its completed study to the NSC Senior Review Group (SRG) no later than June 22, 1973.<sup>298</sup> After identifying American interests in the region, the IG was directed to answer 16 questions. Foremost among these was the primary issue that remained unresolved from the NSSM-66 study: the state of Saudi-Iranian cooperation, the manner through which the two Persian Gulf states could most effectively contribute to the security of the region (particularly Kuwait, Oman, and the Yemen Arabic Republic (YAR)), and the specific steps the United States could take to improve regional cooperation generally and the Iranian-Saudi bilateral relationship in particular. The United States' bilateral relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran were to be examined, with emphasis on developing closer cooperation on mutual strategic interests, such as the recycling of Arab petroleum revenues into increased oil production for consuming countries. The IG was

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<sup>297</sup> Saunders and Quandt, "NSSM on Arabian Peninsula Policy," 5.

<sup>298</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf*, National Security Study Memorandum 181, (Washington, DC: White House), [https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm\\_181.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm_181.pdf). Henceforth referred to as *NSSM-181*. The National Security Council Senior Review Group was established on September 14, 1970, with the promulgation of NSDM-85. Chaired by the National Security Advisor, the group consisted of the Undersecretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the CIA Director, and the JCS Chairman. The SRG replaced the NSC Review Group and was tasked to review papers en route to the NSC and decide whether the study would be forwarded for NSC consideration, sent to the National Security Advisor for decision, or returned to the study's originators for revision. White House, *The National Security Council Senior Review Group*, National Security Decision Memoranda 85 (Washington, DC: White House), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-nixon/nsdm-85.pdf>.



instructed to examine a greater Kuwaiti role in safeguarding regional security, with particular emphasis on American involvement in the kingdom's defense requirements. More narrowly, the IG was directed to review Washington's arms policies to the region and ascertain if the official American presence in the Persian Gulf was appropriate, given the importance of American interests in the area.<sup>299</sup> In answering these questions, NSSM-181 instructed the IG to take under consideration Iran's and Saudi Arabia's growing economic and military muscle, the potential for Iraqi and PDRY-inspired regional instability, and the impact of Soviet, western European, and Japanese policies on the region. Finally, potential policy options were to be identified and discussed in the report.

NSSM-182 assumed a much broader focus, directing an NSC ad hoc group, under the leadership of the secretary of state, to undertake a study of Soviet strategy over a large area comprised of the eastern Mediterranean, Near East, Arabian Peninsula, Persian Gulf, and South Asia.<sup>300</sup> As in NSSM-181, the ad hoc group was directed to provide an assessment of U.S. interests in these regions, albeit with an emphasis on the manner in which these interests were impacted by Soviet objectives. The latter necessitated a close examination of Soviet policies that could be expected to be developed and implemented through 1978. With regard to the Persian Gulf, this included Soviet military assistance to Iraq and the YAR and its support for radical groups, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), Moscow's military presence in the region, and its economic and political relations with Iran, Kuwait, and the other Gulf states.

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<sup>299</sup> White House, *NSSM-181*. The complete listing of research questions listed in NSSM-181 was: "1. What is the state of regional cooperation and, in particular, Saudi-Iranian cooperation? What steps can the U.S. take to strengthen it? 2. What role would the United States like to see Kuwait play and what can the U.S. do to encourage it? In light of Kuwait's current defense needs, what is an appropriate relationship between Kuwait and other nations in the area? What are possible U.S. roles in responding to Kuwait's defense needs? 3. What measures can be taken to strengthen the U.S.-Saudi and U.S.-Iranian bilateral relationships? In particular, how can a sense of cooperation toward common strategic objectives be developed? How can commercial and financial ties be strengthened, including consideration of steps the U.S. could take to encourage oil-producing countries to use oil revenues to increase production? 4. What are the prospects for stability in the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain? 5. How can Saudi Arabia and Iran contribute most effectively to the security of the area and in particular Kuwait, Oman, and the YAR? What is the appropriate role for Jordan? What are the options for the U.S. in relation to the cooperation among these governments? 6. Is U.S. arms supply policy in this area appropriate? 7. Is the U.S. official presence in the area appropriate as to numbers and level?"

<sup>300</sup> White House, *NSSM-182*.

Finally, the NSSM-182 report was to provide feasible strategy and policy options that the Nixon administration could implement to protect American interests. The study was to be provided to the NSC SRG no later than July 1, 1973.

## **2. U.S. Strategic Interests**

Taken together, NSSM-181 and 182 provided a lengthy list of strategic, regional, and bilateral interests that did not stray far beyond those described in NSSM-2 and NSSM-66 during 1969 and 1970. Several of these interests reflected Cold War concerns: the avoidance of a direct confrontation or, worse, a nuclear conflict, with the USSR over the region; maintaining American political and economic influence in the region while preventing the expansion of Soviet influence; preserving access to militarily important port and airfield facilities to facilitate the insertion of American military power into the region; maintaining communications and intelligence facilities in the area; and, discouraging Soviet and Chinese-sponsored “destabilizing activity” in the region.<sup>301</sup> American technological and managerial expertise would provide a critical enabler for these objectives, by limiting Soviet influence while simultaneously drawing Gulf states closer to the United States.

Closely related to these Cold War objectives were several political interests that were more regionally focused. Ensuring the safety and security of “stable, independent, modernizing regimes” in Iran and Saudi Arabia from the predations of radical elements linked to the Soviet Union, primarily Iraq and the PDRY, was of primary importance.<sup>302</sup> Fear of the Soviet and radical threat to Gulf stability was of great concern to both the Shah and King Faisal, a sentiment that provided a strong impetus for the two leaders to continue to pursue close relations with the United States.<sup>303</sup> These sentiments were shared by the

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<sup>301</sup> White House; *NSSM-182*; undated; folder: SRG Meeting, Soviet Strategy in Near East/South Asia, NSSM-182: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1–4. Henceforth referred to as *NSSM-182 Report*; White House; *NSSM-181 Paper Peninsula/Gulf*; undated; folder SRG Meeting-Arabian Peninsula, NSSM-181, 7/20/73: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1, 4. Henceforth referred to as *NSSM-181 Report*.

<sup>302</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 2.

<sup>303</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 6.

smaller states on the Arab side of the Gulf, all of which were assumed to desire a closer commercial and official relationship with the United States.<sup>304</sup> More broadly, Persian Gulf states represented ten votes in the United Nations that could be used to suit American purposes, so long as Washington maintained good relations with, and access to, key regional leaders.<sup>305</sup> These relationships could be threatened by a renewed outbreak of open hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbors, however, as a fresh round of fighting could draw in the Gulf Arab states either directly (via Saudi action in the Red Sea against Israeli SLOCs) or indirectly (via provision of arms to Egypt by the Gulf Arabs or the use of the oil weapon).<sup>306</sup> Achieving a settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict would eliminate this danger and deflate the threat posed to the Gulf monarchies by radical elements, reducing the likelihood of a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the Middle East.<sup>307</sup>

Significantly, both studies reaffirmed the Nixon administration's November 1970 decision, promulgated with NSDM-92, to rely on regional cooperation as the basis of its Persian Gulf security policy. Effective security cooperation remained hampered, however, by several factors that had been identified in NSSM-66 in 1969/1970: Arab-Iranian distrust, intra-Arab disputes, Saudi military and diplomatic weakness, and Arab leaders' fears of being seen as not sufficiently vigilant in their defense of Arab interests against encroachment from the Shah.<sup>308</sup> Despite these obstacles, there had been several promising signs that the riparian states would be able to shoulder the burden of maintaining stability in the Persian Gulf. Iran and Saudi Arabia had provided military support for Oman and the YAR in their ongoing operations against PFLOAG in Dhofar and the PDRY, respectively, while Kuwait and the UAE had provided financial assistance.<sup>309</sup> When coupled with ongoing efforts by the Shah to develop cooperative relationships with the Gulf Arabs,

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<sup>304</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 7.

<sup>305</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 1.

<sup>306</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 4.

<sup>307</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 1–6, 15–16; White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 4.

<sup>308</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 12.

<sup>309</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 13–14.

NSSM-182 concluded that no significant reason existed for the United States to alter its reliance on regional cooperation as the lodestone of its Persian Gulf security policy.<sup>310</sup>

Unsurprisingly, American economic interests centered on the region's vast oil reserves, NSSM 182 explaining that "our most important commercial, and particularly financial, interests will be intimately linked to the development of oil output, especially in the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia."<sup>311</sup> Rising U.S. oil imports, coupled with increased global demand for fossil fuels, underlined the importance of the Gulf's oil exporting states increasing the production and sale of oil "at reasonable economic prices and without unacceptable political conditions," such as the United States withdrawing its support to Israel.<sup>312</sup> Closely related to expanded production was ensuring free transit through the region's waterways and ensuring that the growing reserves of Arab and Iranian petrodollars found a useful outlet for reinvestment, ideally via the purchase of American goods and services, both as a means of lessening Washington's ongoing balance of payments problems and as a demonstration of confidence in the dollar and the overall U.S. economy.<sup>313</sup> Additionally, and in keeping with Washington's arm's-length posture toward the region, the increasing wealth of the oil producing states of the Gulf provided an indigenous source of financial aid for the poorer states of the region, principally Oman, the YAR, and Jordan.<sup>314</sup> Ensuring that American-owned companies would retain an important role in the production and sale of Persian Gulf oil and that the region would maintain "liberal attitude" toward private American investment in the area completed the list of American economic interests.<sup>315</sup>

NSSM-181's depiction of the Persian Gulf strategic environment closely mirrored that of NSSM-66, in that it focused predominantly on indigenous forces as the principle

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<sup>310</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 5, 22–23.

<sup>311</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 2.

<sup>312</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 2.

<sup>313</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 3.

<sup>314</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 5.

<sup>315</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 3.

threat to American interests and deemphasized the dangers posed by the Soviet Union. Overall, the study concluded that conditions in the Gulf remained conducive to U.S. interests.<sup>316</sup> Washington's close ties and shared interests with the Shah and with King Faisal provided the cornerstone for the United States' favorable position in the region. This favorable position was buttressed by concerns shared by the newly independent Gulf Arab states over the dangers posed by Soviet/radical threats in the region, which pushed them toward the pursuit of a more engaged American presence in the region, both governmental and commercial. The report cautioned, however, that a range of factors, previously discussed in 1969/1970 during the development of NSSM-66, threatened Washington's current "advantageous state of affairs."<sup>317</sup> These included dangers associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict, the combination of increasing global demand for the region's petroleum resources and the dangers of rising "economic nationalism" by Gulf oil producers, growing assertiveness by the Shah, and dangers to the "conservative political and social order" that underpinned American relations with Iran and the Gulf Arabs.<sup>318</sup> On a more granular level, territorial disputes (Iraq-Kuwait, Saudi-UAE), an ongoing PDRY-supported insurgency in Oman's Dhofar province, and ethnic and sectarian rivalries (Arab vs. Persian, Sunni vs. Shia, Arab vs. Persian, Kurd, Israeli) were identified as the principle uncertainties shaping the Persian Gulf strategic environment.<sup>319</sup>

The policy decisions codified in November 1970 by NSDM-92 drove the most significant differences between NSSM-66's and NSSM-181's depiction of the Persian Gulf strategic environment. Unlike the earlier study, the drafters of NSSM-181 were not starting from a clean slate in the spring of 1973; the policy course set by NSDM-92 had altered the Persian Gulf strategic environment in three interrelated ways. First, the cornerstone of Washington's policy, cooperation between regional powers, had enjoyed some initial success, as evidenced by direct Saudi and Iranian military support to Oman and Yemen. Kuwait and the UAE had also provided the Yemenis and Omanis with financial support.

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<sup>316</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 6.

<sup>317</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 8.

<sup>318</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 8.

<sup>319</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 10.

Unfortunately, many of the impediments to effective regional cooperation that had been flagged by NSSM-66 (Arab-Iranian distrust, Saudi military and diplomatic deficiencies, ongoing intra-Arab territorial disputes) remained.<sup>320</sup>

The second major difference were linked to the Nixon administration's decision to support a Saudi and Iranian military that would enable them to defend the smaller Persian Gulf states from the region's hostile Arab powers, Iraq and the PDRY.<sup>321</sup> While NSSM-181 posited that this regional military buildup would, over time, provide sufficient military capability and capacity to maintain regional stability, it impacted the strategic environment in four important ways.<sup>322</sup> First, Washington's sales of sophisticated military equipment to Iran and Saudi Arabia necessitated a large U.S. and foreign advisory footprint, both government and contractor, to provide necessary training and maintenance support. This was required to mitigate Tehran's and Riyadh's significant manpower and human capital deficiencies. Second, the rapid modernization of Iranian military capabilities reinforced Arab fears of Persian heavy-handedness, as the newly armed Shah would feel less constrained to consult with the United States and more confident in asserting "what he sees are Iran's over-riding strategic interests in the area."<sup>323</sup> This fear made the Gulf Arabs wary of publicly appearing to cooperate too closely with Iran.<sup>324</sup> Third, robust arms sales to Iran and Saudi Arabia threatened to upend Washington's low-key policy of maintaining a modest defense relationship with Kuwait and the lower Gulf Arab states. As Washington's relationship with Kuwait and the lower Gulf Arabs matured, both started requesting a closer relationship with Washington and the sale of more sophisticated military equipment.<sup>325</sup> This raised concerns that "the proliferation of jet aircraft and other heavy weapons in the peripheral states of the Peninsula may contribute to a system of overall regional security but may also impede progress in that direction if these acquisitions

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<sup>320</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 11–12.

<sup>321</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 11.

<sup>322</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 11.

<sup>323</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 11–12, 19.

<sup>324</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 13.

<sup>325</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 32–33.

increase mutual suspicions and delay progress toward resolution of territorial and other differences among regional states.”<sup>326</sup> Finally, any sale of sophisticated military equipment, such as the F-4 Phantom II fighter/bomber, raised concerns that these could be used against Israel.

All of these factors contributed to the third way through which NSDM-92 altered the strategic environment: it required the United States to carefully calibrate its bilateral relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia to ensure the continued viability of the Nixon administration’s decision to rely on regional cooperation as the basis of its Persian Gulf security policy. Pursuing a closer relationship with the Shah was deemed “unrealistic,” as this would require Washington to acknowledge the Shah’s “hegemonic ambitions in the Persian Gulf and the neighboring Indian Ocean region,” to the detriment of its relationship with the Gulf Arabs.<sup>327</sup> A closer U.S.-Iran relationship would also lend credence to King Faisal’s suspicion that Washington favored Persian interests over Saudi/Arab interests in the region.<sup>328</sup> A more distant relationship with Iran also carried risk, however, as this would make the Shah less likely to coordinate its policies with Washington while pushing him toward the Europeans and the Japanese for investment and trade opportunities.<sup>329</sup>

Problems existed on the Arab side of the Gulf as well. NSSM-181 characterized the U.S.-Saudi relationship as “strained,” with King Faisal believing that American “policies and actions fell short of (Washington’s) repeated assurances of U.S. interest in Saudi Arabia’s security and territorial integrity.”<sup>330</sup> The report expressed fears that King Faisal considered the decisions codified in NSDM-92 to be the first step toward a policy of gradual disengagement from the region, not unlike that of the British, which could place the security of the Saudi regime at risk. Washington’s support for Israel continued to be a

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<sup>326</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 48.

<sup>327</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 19.

<sup>328</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 24.

<sup>329</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 19-20.

<sup>330</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 24-25.

major complicating factor.<sup>331</sup> King Faisal believed that, absent a significant policy initiative that forced an Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied during the 1967 war, American interests and the interests of pro-American Arab governments would be threatened by violent outbursts emanating from the Arab street. Popular opinion was also pushing Arab oil producers to limit production or embargo oil shipments as a means to “force the ‘right’ political atmosphere” vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>332</sup>

Despite the Shah’s and King Faisal’s rather grim views of Moscow’s intentions toward the region and the Kremlin’s support of leftist regimes in Iraq and the PDRY, NSSM-181 asserted that “the threat of Soviet overt military action against the sovereignty and independence of Persian Gulf/Arabian peninsula states has lessened and is no longer a cause of immediate concern.”<sup>333</sup> This was due both to improvements in the U.S.-Soviet relationship, which would curb Moscow’s appetite for leveraging any local tensions to advance their interests in the region, as well as the Kremlin’s difficulty balancing its overt support for Iraq with its desire for better relations with Tehran. A shared interest in regional stability further constrained Soviet behavior, as the Kremlin would “not want a major destabilization that could have unpredictable results, encourage U.S. intervention, strain U.S.-Soviet relations, and even lead to a confrontation between them and the U.S.”<sup>334</sup> Overall, NSSM-181’s short treatment of the Soviet threat to U.S. interests in the region largely mirrored that provided by NSSM-66 three years earlier.

While the Soviet-centric NSSM-182 report went into much greater detail, its conclusions about Moscow’s intentions toward the Gulf and the Soviet Union’s regional diplomatic standing aligned with NSSM-181’s much shorter discussion. If anything, NSSM-182 painted a gloomier picture of Moscow’s standing in the region, noting that Moscow had “made little headway in getting diplomatic entry into the Gulf states or Saudi

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<sup>331</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 22, 25.

<sup>332</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 23–24.

<sup>333</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 14.

<sup>334</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 15.



Arabia.”<sup>335</sup> NSSM-182 postulated that the basic aim of Soviet policy in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf was the curtailment of American influence.<sup>336</sup> Moscow pursued this goal via two avenues: the Arab-Israeli conflict and its relationship with Iraq and the PDRY. Regarding the former, the report theorized that the lack of progress toward a negotiated peace would increase pressure on the Gulf states to weaponize its oil production, both of which would erode Washington’s standing in the region.<sup>337</sup> Additionally, continuation of the Israeli-Egyptian status quo increased pressure on Cairo to use military means to break the current impasse, which would result in Israeli reprisals, all to the detriment of American standing in the Arab states.<sup>338</sup> Resolving the Arab-Israeli crisis thus remained an American priority.

The Soviet relationship with Iraq and the PDRY actually complicated Moscow’s position in the region, a June 1973 CIA National Intelligence Estimate explaining “in seeking to establish themselves in the Gulf, the Soviets frequently find their interests and objectives in conflict.”<sup>339</sup> Moscow had increased its financial support to Baghdad and Aden, at least in part, to mitigate the Soviet’s declining relationship with Egypt, as evidenced by Sadat’s July 18, 1972, expulsion of 20,000 Soviet air force and military personnel.<sup>340</sup> These arms sales reinforced the Shah’s concern that Moscow harbored bad intentions toward the Iran and the Persian Gulf, to the detriment of Soviet attempts to improve its relationship with Tehran. Washington took a more measured view of the Soviet-Iraqi relationship, however, and when an Iraqi-Soviet military agreement was concluded in late 1971, estimated to have increased Moscow’s military aid to Baghdad to \$750 billion, the State Department explained to the American embassies in Tehran, London, and Moscow, “we do not think the Soviets have increased military aid to Iraq as

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<sup>335</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 14.

<sup>336</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 11.

<sup>337</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 11.

<sup>338</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 9–10.

<sup>339</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *National Intelligence Estimate*, “Problems in the Persian Gulf,” (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1973), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1973-06-07A.pdf>, 5.

<sup>340</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 11.

part of aggressive policy in Gulf aimed at Iran.”<sup>341</sup> Additionally, Iraq’s menacing behavior toward its Arab neighbors, in particular Kuwait, coupled with the Baathist government’s vehement anti-Israel rhetoric (and lack of direct involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict) complicated Moscow’s efforts to develop relationships with the newly independent Gulf Arab states and further deteriorated Soviet-Egyptian relations.<sup>342</sup> Coupled with Moscow’s support for the radical PDRY regime, Soviet efforts at improving its standing in the Gulf repeatedly came into direct conflict with their efforts to deepen their existing ties with Iraq and the PDRY.

Similarly, the April 9, 1972, conclusion of a 15-year treaty of friendship between Moscow and Baghdad, structured along the lines of similar agreements with Egypt and India, was viewed with equanimity in Washington. In the immediate aftermath of the treaty’s conclusion, the State Department acknowledged that it symbolized “recent Soviet advances in the area and reflects the considerable and increasing Soviet presence in Iraq.”<sup>343</sup> These advances came at a cost, however, in that they impeded Moscow’s parallel goal of improving its relationship with Tehran, both through the direct support of Iran’s principle regional adversary and by reinforcing the Shah’s fear of Soviet encroachment in the region. Internal instability further undermined Iraq’s utility as a Soviet ally and forced Moscow to devote resources toward fostering “cooperation among Iraq’s squabbling political groupings,” and Baghdad was assessed as having little faith that Moscow would support Iraq’s regional ambitions.<sup>344</sup> Turning toward Iran, NSSM-182 concluded, “unless

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<sup>341</sup> “The U.S. Department of State, Telegram 12737 from the Department of State to the Embassies in Iran, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union, January 22, 1972,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, doc. 295.

<sup>342</sup> White House; memo; “Iraqi Politics in Perspective;” 18 May 1972; folder Iran Visit (CHEROKEE) (PART 1): Container 481; National Security Council Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1–4. This document was provided to Henry Kissinger under a May 17, 1972, cover memo as background reading for an upcoming visit to Iran.

<sup>343</sup> Theodore L. Elliot to Mr. Henry A. Kissinger; memo; “Preliminary Analysis of Iraqi-USSR Treaty;” 13 April 1972; folder Iraq Vol I: Container 603; National Security Council Country Files-Middle East; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1.

<sup>344</sup> “Research Study Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, August 23, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976 (Washington, DC, 2012), doc. 230.

and until the Shah disappears from the scene, the best the Soviets can realistically hope for is an arm's length relationship.”<sup>345</sup>

While both NSSM-181 and 182 portrayed the Persian Gulf strategic environment as largely conducive to American interests in the region, Arab-Iranian distrust, intra-Arab political dynamics, the rise of Saudi Arabia as an economic power and the relationship of Arab oil to the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, combined with Washington's reliance on regional cooperation, produced a series of problems for American security policy that, arguably, should have been examined more closely by the Nixon administration in 1970. These included: balancing the Shah's intent to be the guarantor of regional security with the requirement for Iran to maintain sound relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arabs; managing the Nixon administration's evolving bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia, in light of the Arab-Israeli conflict and strong support for the Shah; maintaining the United States' comparatively restrained military, economic, and diplomatic relationship with the other Gulf Arab states; and, identifying steps that could be undertaken to improve the level and effectiveness regional cooperation in the Gulf.<sup>346</sup> Ultimately, the questions pertaining to the Shah's regional ambitions and methods to improve regional cooperation would never be fully resolved before they became irrelevant with the fall of the Shah in February 1979.

### **3. U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf**

Given its expansive focus on Soviet policy in a vast region spanning the eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia, the policy options prescribed in NSSM-182 were quite broad. Of high priority, both in terms of improving Soviet-American relations and reducing the threat of superpower conflict, and, more narrowly, to American security interests in the Persian Gulf, was the initiation of a process that could lead to a durable peace and prevent another round of open Arab-Israeli

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<sup>345</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 14, 18.

<sup>346</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 18.

warfare.<sup>347</sup> With regard to the Persian Gulf, NSSM-182 provided two broad alternatives.<sup>348</sup> The first was a continuation of the 1970 NSDM-92 arm's length policy. Within this construct, the United States would continue to rely on regional cooperation, particularly vis-à-vis ongoing crises in Yemen and Oman, to maintain regional security and stability. Washington's input to Gulf security would remain limited to robust sales of military equipment to Iran, Saudi Arabia, and, to a lesser extent, Kuwait, supported by a military advisory presence that was "the minimum absolutely essential for efficient operations."<sup>349</sup> In Saudi Arabia, these efforts would be supplemented by manpower training and developmental efforts intended to improve Riyadh's ability to defend its territory and that of the other Gulf Arabs. Simultaneously, the United States would be alert to any opportunities to improve its relationship with Iraq.<sup>350</sup>

A second option was to assume a more active role in maintaining Persian Gulf security and stability. It should be noted, however, that this course of action did not advocate for the direct employment of military force to protect American regional interests in the Gulf; rather, it proposed an incremental increase in Washington's diplomatic involvement in regional crises and the expansion of U.S. military sales and advisory programs, as well as the provision of non-military developmental aid and technical assistance. Thus, this "active role" remained somewhat circumscribed by the policy decisions promulgated by NSDM-92 in 1970. Accordingly, military facets of this strategy were limited to naval visits, consideration of an augmented Indian Ocean naval presence,

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<sup>347</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 37–39. Options discussed included maintaining a close dialogue with Moscow on events that could lead to a resumption of hostilities; when possible, publicly support Egypt on important issues, such as objecting to Israeli settlements on territory occupied during the 1967 war, to demonstrate that American policy is not entirely pro-Israeli; increase its consultations with the Saudis in an effort to induce King Faisal to exert a restraining influence on Cairo; and, improving U.S. - Egyptian diplomatic dialogue.

<sup>348</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 41.

<sup>349</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 42.

<sup>350</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 42. With regard to the Soviets, under this course of action, NSSM-182 also suggested engaging with Moscow to determine ways to constrain or terminate ongoing hostilities between Yemen and the PDRY; developing a modus Vivendi that would avoid an Indian Ocean naval competition; support Iranian efforts to induce Moscow to exert a restraining influence on Baghdad; and, recognize Soviet restraint in providing arms to Iraq by exercising similar restraint in U.S. arms sales to its allies in the region.

and United States Air Force (USAF) demonstration flights.<sup>351</sup> Additionally, under this option, a more active American role in Oman and Yemen that included development of military assistance programs, establishment of a military advisory presence in both countries, and expanding non-military developmental assistance via financial aid and technical training would receive greater emphasis.<sup>352</sup> Concurrently, the American military advisory presence in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait would be augmented and rely more on uniformed military as opposed to private contractors. Diplomatically, Washington would foster joint Iranian-Saudi consultations aimed at improving regional cooperation and would also take an active role in mediating a negotiated settlement on ongoing territorial dispute between the UAE and Saudi Arabia.<sup>353</sup> The Nixon administration would encourage more active Pakistani and Jordanian economic and military involvement in the region and reinvigorate its high-level dialogue with its regional allies to ensure they stayed abreast of the latest developments in U.S.-Soviet relations.<sup>354</sup>

While NSSM-181's comparatively narrow focus on the Persian Gulf allowed it to provide more finely detailed policy options, the report's drafters were also working within narrow decision space delineated by the policy framework codified by NSDM-92. As discussed above, the United States was not in a position to drastically recalibrate its relations with Tehran and could neither pursue a closer relationship nor greatly distance itself from the Shah. This limited American policy options to two choices. First, the Nixon administration could remain on its current course and continue to urge Tehran to prioritize coordination with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states in developing its security policies.<sup>355</sup> This would require Washington to maintain a continuing dialogue with Tehran and to clearly articulate and consult on security issues of common concern. This included the state of Arab-Persian relations and, as needed, expressing displeasure when Iranian

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<sup>351</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 44.

<sup>352</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 43.

<sup>353</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 43.

<sup>354</sup> White House, *NSSM-182 Report*, 44.

<sup>355</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 20.

actions ran counter to maintaining a cooperative Gulf security environment.<sup>356</sup> This course of action placed the United States in an uncomfortable position, however. Maintaining good relations with the Gulf Arab states, the NSSM-181 report explained, would require Washington to object to unilateral Iranian actions that ran contrary to Arab interests. This, in turn, risked alienating the Shah. From the Iranian perspective, it made the United States vulnerable to Iranian pressure to deliver more effective cooperation from the Saudis and greater flexibility from King Faisal when Arab and Persian regional interests clashed.<sup>357</sup> Overall, NSSM-181 was pessimistic that the United States could produce substantial modifications in Arab behavior.

A second option was to “drop any pretense that for the foreseeable future the Saudis will have either the capability or the will to intervene militarily in neighboring states” and accept the fact that Iran was “the only country in the region with sufficient military power to use force for policy objectives.”<sup>358</sup> Under this option American security policy would focus on the Shah as the principal provider of security in the region. In practice, this would require a muscular Iranian security policy requiring active intervention in a range of contingencies that threatened to disrupt regional stability, such as an Iraqi move against Kuwait, a PDRY invasion of Oman, or a revolution in any portion of the UAE.<sup>359</sup> To provide the basis for this proactive Iranian security posture, Tehran could be encouraged to develop a series of bilateral security arrangements with the Gulf states while Washington simultaneously leaned on King Faisal to not actively oppose them. To assuage Arab sensitivities to this policy, the Nixon administration would ensure that these arrangements recognized current territorial boundaries and the Arab character of the western side of the Persian Gulf and that the Shah would coordinate closely with Riyadh to avoid provoking a Saudi-Iranian military clash.<sup>360</sup> While acknowledging that this course of action was pragmatic in its presentation of relative Iranian-Saudi capabilities and political will to

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<sup>356</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 21.

<sup>357</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 21.

<sup>358</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 21.

<sup>359</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 21.

<sup>360</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 21–22.

maintain Gulf stability, the political realities associated with Arab acceptance of U.S.-sanctioned Persian regional hegemony militated against it being a realistic policy option. Additionally, this course of action would reinforce Faisal's suspicions that Washington prioritized its relationship with Tehran at the expense of Saudi Arabia.<sup>361</sup>

In light of the strains on U.S.-Saudi relations, NSSM-181 laid out two "imperative" courses of action that had to be undertaken.<sup>362</sup> The first was to convince King Faisal that progress could be expected toward a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, or, if circumstances made this impossible, seek opportunities to demonstrate that Washington was "prepared to show a bit more daylight between (the United States) and Israel."<sup>363</sup> The second involved assisting the Saudis with the development of their natural gas resources and finding productive areas, both domestic and abroad, wherein the kingdom could invest its significant wealth.<sup>364</sup> In addition to these two courses of action, NSSM-181 posed a third area that required immediate attention: ensuring that, in King Faisal's eyes, the American commitment to protect Saudi Arabia from perceived threats to the kingdom's interests remained credible.<sup>365</sup> Three approaches to this problem were offered.

The first option would entail acknowledging that political and military deficiencies limited Saudi ability to effectively maintain security and stability in the lower Gulf Arab states and urging King Faisal to reach some sort of practical compromise with the Shah that would enable the Tehran to intervene on the Arabian peninsula when circumstances required.<sup>366</sup> The Saudis would assume responsibility for security on the Peninsula once the kingdom had developed the required military capability and capacity. Selling this decision to Faisal would be difficult, however, as it would appear to the Saudi monarch that Washington was favoring Iranian over Saudi interests. Mollifying these concerns

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<sup>361</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 22.

<sup>362</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 26.

<sup>363</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 26.

<sup>364</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 27.

<sup>365</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 27.

<sup>366</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 28.

would most likely require Washington to make private assurances that it would work to “discourage Iranian free-wheeling or other encroachments” on Arab interests in the region.<sup>367</sup> These efforts would most likely antagonize the Shah.

Conversely, the second course of action proposed closer U.S.-Saudi cooperation to more quickly develop Saudi military capability and capacity to allow the Saudis to shoulder the responsibility for security in the Arabian Peninsula in as short a time as possible. Under this course of action, Washington would approve all “reasonable” Saudi requests for military sales, to include equipment intended for transfer to other countries (which would be replaced via additional American FMS).<sup>368</sup> To enable the rapid integration of new equipment, training for Saudi military personnel would be stepped up, and the development of a Saudi quick reaction force capable of rapid intervention in neighboring countries would be considered. Saudi manpower limitations militated against this, however, as the kingdom would be hard-pressed to provide additional personnel for the accelerated training programs. Additionally, closer cooperation with the Saudis ran the risk of damaging American relations with the other Gulf Arabs, as Washington could be viewed as favoring Saudi regional objectives over their own.<sup>369</sup> Enhanced Saudi military capability could also be viewed by the Shah as threatening to Iran’s interests on the Arab side of the Gulf, although NSSM-181 concluded that the Iranian monarch would be “unlikely to complain of a course of action that would enable the Saudis to better bear their defense responsibilities at home and in certain neighboring states.”<sup>370</sup> The third course of action was narrowly tailored to increasing direct American involvement in Yemen and Oman in accordance with previous Saudi suggestions, and called for modest FMS and military advisory programs and augmented economic aid.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 28.

<sup>368</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 29.

<sup>369</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 29.

<sup>370</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 29–30.

<sup>371</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 30.



Embarking on this course of action would represent an abandonment of prior policy, which emphasized Omani/Yemeni reliance on Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the UK to meet their defense needs and minimized American presence in what NSSM-181 termed the peripheral states of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>372</sup> NSSM-181 viewed this policy as increasingly frayed, as growing American interests and presence in the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman increased pressure for more formalized American diplomatic presence, arms supply relationships, and, in the case of Oman and Yemen, the direct provision of military and economic aid.<sup>373</sup> In part, these peripheral states sought to deepen their ties with the United States in part to offset Washington's close ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran and inoculate the smaller states of the Gulf from political pressures from their larger neighbors.<sup>374</sup> A complicating factor was ongoing budgetary pressure, which militated against significant expansion of the U.S. regional diplomatic footprint and the pursuit of new arms and technical assistance relationships. These factors raised three issues related to American policy toward the peripheral Arab states of the Gulf.

The first involved the question of affording full diplomatic representation to the Lower Persian Gulf states and Oman from the status quo and establishing at least four additional embassies.<sup>375</sup> Under the current policy, the ambassador in Kuwait was also the designated American representative in these states. Two alternatives were provided: to simultaneously upgrade relations and establish embassies within each state of the lower Gulf or to take a phased approach wherein relations were upgraded based as American interests dictated, with precedence placed on establishing diplomatic presence in the UAE and Oman.<sup>376</sup> The second issue involved American arms policy toward the Lower Gulf States, with three courses of action being identified.<sup>377</sup> The first was to continue the present policy of only supplying equipment required for internal security purposes and deny

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<sup>372</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 30.

<sup>373</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 34–35.

<sup>374</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 34–35.

<sup>375</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 37.

<sup>376</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 37–38.

<sup>377</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 40–41.

requests for heavy weapons, such as combat aircraft and tanks, which were provided by the British. The second option would be to support American arms makers against the British and other foreign suppliers while insisting that any sales be concluded on a government-to-industry basis, which would minimize the involvement of the U.S. government.<sup>378</sup> The third option was to adopt a more overt official presence and negotiate arms sales on a government-to-government basis.

This option involved direct provision of military and economic aid to Yemen and Oman. American policy since 1970 had relied on Saudi Arabia to bear the burden in this arena; this was problematic, as Saudi assistance had been slow and both Oman and Yemen were wary of becoming too dependent on their larger neighbor.<sup>379</sup> Three initiatives, not mutually exclusive, presented themselves. The first was to continue a hands-off policy and continue to rely on Saudi, and, to a lesser extent, Jordanian, military and economic assistance, with Washington proactively encouraging Riyadh and Amman to transfer U.S.-manufactured weapons and coordinating these efforts. The second was to provide police equipment and training to improve Yemeni and Omani internal security forces, which would address internal threats while avoiding the instigation of an arms race between Yemen and the Soviet-supplied PDRY. A third option was to depart from existing policy and allow armament sales to both Yemen and Oman, albeit with other countries providing the funding, and provide American military training and expertise.<sup>380</sup>

While all these policy options tackled important components of American security policy in the Persian Gulf, they did not address its cornerstone: reliance on regional cooperation to protect American interests. The deepening of Washington's relations with the Gulf Arab states, whether through enhanced diplomatic representation or military sales, certainly helped to solidify American influence on the Arab side of the Gulf and strengthened regional states' ability to look after their own security. This came at a cost, however, in that more robust military sales threatened to undermine regional cooperation

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<sup>378</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 42–43.

<sup>379</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 43–45.

<sup>380</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 45–46.

by increasing “mutual suspicions and (delaying) progress toward resolution of territorial and other differences among regional states.”<sup>381</sup> This illustrated the principle flaw in the Nixon administration’s 1970 decision, codified in NSDM-92, to adopt a hands-off approach to the region that relied on regional cooperation despite the Arab-Persian and intra-Arab rivalries that threatened its attainment. NSSM-181 tackled this issue head-on, by asking “do we—can we—continue to maintain a relatively low profile, indirect involvement in regional security concerns or should we begin to map out, and work toward, development of a regional collective security system in which our national interests will be accommodated while serving the broader interests of the states within the region.”<sup>382</sup> Ideally, this system would bring Saudi Arabia and Iran more closely together, improving mutual confidence between the Shah and King Faisal, enabling them to more effectively tackle mutual problems. Failure to develop this framework would necessitate Washington taking a more active role in “coordinating the policies and activities of the regional states and,” if “radical” threats to Yemen, Oman, and Kuwait warranted, “acting directly (against) threats to stability in the area.”<sup>383</sup> Five policy options were offered.

Three of the five policy options that were provided were regionally focused. The first involved finding some means of reaching a compromise, primarily by leaning on the Shah, between Iran and the UAE over the final resolution of the Tunbs/Abu Musa Island dispute. The second was to press Abu Dhabi Sheik Zayed, potentially by using future U.S. arms sales as leverage, to meet King Faisal “better than halfway” and resolve a festering UAE-Saudi territorial dispute over control of the Burayami Oasis.<sup>384</sup> A third option would urge the Jordanians to develop a quick reaction force that could be rapidly deployed to the Arab Gulf states to combat instability under the belief that Jordanian forces would be palatable to Arab rulers, who would be hesitant to accept Iranian military assistance.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 48.

<sup>382</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 47.

<sup>383</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 48.

<sup>384</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 50–51. The Burayami Oasis disagreement was settled in 1974 when the Saudis recognized the UAE’s claims to the area in return for oil concessions and a small strip of territory along the Persian Gulf that separated Qatar from the UAE.

<sup>385</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 51.

These three policy options were not mutually exclusive; all could be adopted simultaneously. Their adoption, however, would not necessarily improve the overall state of cooperation in the Persian Gulf.

The two remaining policy options offered by NSSM-181 were more broadly focused and aimed directly at improving Gulf cooperation. One option would be for Washington to encourage the Arab states to develop a system of bilateral and multilateral alliances. These alliances could be formal or informal arrangements and would codify mutual security responsibilities and encourage combined planning for a range of contingencies on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>386</sup> Arab military weakness and disunity militated against these alliances being effective, at least for a period of several years. Thus, their effectiveness, and therefore responsibility for security and stability on the Arabian Peninsula, would continue to lie with Iran, which would confirm Arab suspicion of the Shah and, to a lesser extent, the United States. The latter threatened to remind Arab governments of the discredited Baghdad Pact.<sup>387</sup> This would require Washington and Tehran to tread very carefully to avoid stoking Arab fears and distrust. A second regional option would be to support, or even sponsor, the development of regional institutions intended to improve the overall level of cooperation between the Gulf States.<sup>388</sup> These institutions would resolve issues of common interest, such as reducing pollution in the Persian Gulf, cooperating on development projects, and linking the wealthy oil-producing states with the less-fortunate Arab states that relied on foreign aid to finance their internal economic development.<sup>389</sup> As in the option described above, the NSSM-181 report warned that Washington would have to carefully avoid fostering an environment wherein the weaker Arab states came to rely too heavily on one regional partner, such as the Saudis, or, even worse, the United States.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 49.

<sup>387</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 49.

<sup>388</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 52.

<sup>389</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 52–53.

<sup>390</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 53.

NSSM-181 concluded on a pessimistic note that foreshadowed the policy direction set forth by President Reagan in 1981 and the direct introduction of American combat troops to protect Saudi Arabia and restore Kuwaiti territorial integrity in 1990/1991. Noting that even if the policy options prescribed by NSSM-181 were successful, they were probably incapable of overcoming Arab-Persian distrust and Saudi “inadequacies” that hampered the development of effective regional cooperation.<sup>391</sup> In a short statement that would be proven correct 17 years later, NSSM-181 continued:

Consequently, if serious threats arise to the independence or stability of friendly states in the region, we will have to take a more direct role in coordinating military and economic aid to Yemen and Oman from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, and others. This would require a reevaluation of our existing or proposed military presence and security assistance policies in those states to make certain that we could effectively perform this role.<sup>392</sup>

While not developed in defense of Oman or Yemen, the commencement of Operations Desert Shield/Storm in 1990/1991 would prove the authors of NSSM-181 correct in their assessment of Saudi inability to protect their, and their Arab neighbors’, territory absent significant American assistance.

#### **4. Deliberations and Decisions**

NSSM-181 and -182 were quickly completed and the SRG assembled on July 13, 1973, to discuss NSSM-182 and examine the thesis that the Soviets were engaged in a concerted effort to achieve hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, Persian Gulf, and Southern Asia. This objective was of particular importance, given a series of upcoming visits of foreign leaders, including the Shah, who had espoused this viewpoint. A second objective was to start to develop a strategy for these regions that would provide overarching direction for American policies in these different regions.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 53.

<sup>392</sup> White House, *NSSM-181 Report*, 53.

<sup>393</sup> Harold H. Saunders and Richard T. Kennedy to Dr. Kissinger; memo; “SRG Meeting on NSSM-182;” 12 July 1973; folder SRG Meeting Soviet Strategy in Near East/South Asia, NSSM-182: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1–2.

In preparing Kissinger for this meeting, Hal Saunders and Richard Kennedy urged the national security advisor to advocate for a strategy that gave new emphasis on ongoing programs in these regions, thereby creating the impression of a reinvigorated American presence and interests, while also encouraging the ongoing development of a web of evolving bilateral relationships among regional powers, such as the backchannel King Faisal-Shah relationship and a growing Jordanian-Saudi security relationship in Oman.<sup>394</sup> In Saunders's and Kennedy's view, encouraging regional interrelationships would "provide a broader dimension to U.S. Policy" that would, in effect, create a policy of "diffusion" that enables "enough local resistance so that the Soviet thrusts could be absorbed without damage."<sup>395</sup> Simultaneously, Washington could continue to foster its close relations with key players in the region, such as Iran, Israeli and Ethiopia. The two NSC staffers concluded by recommending that Kissinger advise that American policy in these regions be reinvigorated to provide the appearance of greater attention in response to the Soviet initiatives and that NSSM-182 be revised via the addition of a specific strategy for this region that incorporated Saunders's and Kennedy's views.<sup>396</sup> While the NSSM-182 meeting minutes remain inaccessible to researchers due to national security concerns, it appears that Kissinger concurred with Saunders and Kennedy and directed that NSSM-182 be revised.<sup>397</sup> Other than this revision, NSSM-182 had no further impact on American security policy and seemingly disappeared into the ether; of the 248 NSSMs issued during the Nixon/Ford Presidencies, NSSM-182 is the sole report that had no final status when the Carter administration assumed office in January 1977.<sup>398</sup>

The State Department completed its NSSM-182 revision, actually a separate paper, on July 19. While concluding that Soviet policy in the diverse regions examined by NSSM-

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<sup>394</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "SRG Meeting on NSSM-182," 3.

<sup>395</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "SRG Meeting on NSSM-182," 3.

<sup>396</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "SRG Meeting on NSSM-182," 3-4.

<sup>397</sup> Saunders and Kennedy, "SRG Meeting on NSSM-182," 4; Christine Dodson to the Office of the Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense; memo; "Final NSSM Status Report," 8 November 1977; folder Admin Files: Container H-297; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 17.

<sup>398</sup> Dodson, "Final NSSM Status Report," 17.

182 was not guided by an overarching strategic design, the paper argued that American policy had to take into consideration the concerns of key leaders and governments, many of which were suspicious of Soviet activities and feared that U.S.-Soviet détente would “blur America’s perception, awareness, and responsiveness to continued Soviet probes of soft spots and creeping expansionism.”<sup>399</sup> The paper proposed two potential strategies. The first proposed that Washington more actively counter Soviet actions that threaten American interests. The second focused on resolving regional conflicts in an effort to reduce Soviet opportunities to leverage them to expand their own, or erode American, influence in key regions. Echoing his response to the strategic options the State Department originally provided in NSSM-182, Hal Saunders again expressed his dissatisfaction to Kissinger, explaining that the two potential strategies were not sufficiently orthogonal and thus provided no real alternatives.<sup>400</sup> In response, Saunders provided Kissinger with two alternatives that reiterated the two recommendations that he and Kennedy provided the national security advisor in preparation for the July 13 NSSM-182 SRG. The first option proposed what Saunders termed a “neo-containment strategy” that emphasized strong American support for key regional powers that would, echoing the policy decision’s promulgated by NSDM-92, use their military forces to “support other friendly governments without necessarily involving ourselves militarily.”<sup>401</sup> The second reiterated Saunders’s and Kennedy’s earlier recommendation to encourage the ongoing development of regional bilateral partnerships that would develop a web of informal alliances that could withstand any Soviet thrust.<sup>402</sup> Curiously, given Saunders’s criticism that the State Department had

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<sup>399</sup> Department of State; *A U.S. Strategy for the Region of the Soviet Southern Flank, From the Subcontinent to the Eastern Mediterranean and Horn of Africa*; undated; folder SRG Meeting-Arabian Peninsula, NSSM-181, 7/10/73: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 6.

<sup>400</sup> Harold H. Saunders to Henry Kissinger; memo; “Analytical Summary: A U.S. Strategy for the Region of the Soviet Southern Flank;” 19 July 1973; folder SRG Meeting-Arabian Peninsula, NSSM-181, 7/20/73: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 4.

<sup>401</sup> Saunders, “Analytical Summary: A U.S. Strategy for the Region of the Soviet Southern Flank,” 4–5. Saunders also provided Kissinger with an addendum to the State Department paper that provided greater detail on each of his two recommended options. This paper also included implications for existing U.S. policy if either of these options were pursued. Harold H. Saunders; memo; “Towards a Regional U.S. Strategy;” undated; folder SRG Meeting-Arabian Peninsula NSSM-181 7/20/73: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 12–20.

<sup>402</sup> Saunders, “Analytical Summary: A U.S. Strategy for the Region of the Soviet Southern Flank,” 5.

not provided Kissinger with true strategic options, Saunders recommended that encouragement of regional partnerships should be pursued concurrently with his first recommendation of strengthening regional powers.<sup>403</sup> Saunders concluded by recommending that Kissinger direct the State Department to make a third attempt at crafting a strategy.

Both the State Department Paper and Saunders's addendum were on the agenda when the SRG met again on July 20, 1973, ostensibly to discuss the NSSM-181 study. A third topic to be discussed was a draft paper developed at the direction of Kissinger that examined contingency options related to potential instability that threatened the Saudi ruling regime.<sup>404</sup> In preparing Kissinger for this discussion, the NSC staff recommended that five specific decisions be considered by the SRG. The first would reaffirm Saudi-Iranian cooperation as the cornerstone for American security policy in the region, but cautioned that this could mean increasingly having to urge restraint on the Shah while simultaneously encouraging and strengthening the Saudis to play a more prominent international role.<sup>405</sup> The second decision built off this latter point, and proposed visible Saudi participation in ongoing talks on trade and international monetary reform.<sup>406</sup> The third decision was narrowly scoped toward enhancing diplomatic presence in the UAE and Oman.<sup>407</sup> The fourth, in keeping with NSDM-92, proposed upgrading developmental presence in Oman and Yemen while continuing to rely on the Saudis and other Arab states,

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<sup>403</sup> Saunders, "Analytical Summary: A U.S. Strategy for the Region of the Soviet Southern Flank," 5.

<sup>404</sup> Harold H. Saunders to Dr. Kissinger; memo; "SRG Meeting on NSSMs 181 and 182-Regional Strategy and the Arabian Peninsula/Persian Gulf;" 19 July 1973; folder SRG Meeting-Arabian Peninsula NSSM-181, 7/20/73: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1-3.

<sup>405</sup> Saunders, "SRG Meeting on NSSMs 181 and 182-Regional Strategy and the Arabian Peninsula/Persian Gulf," 2.

<sup>406</sup> Saunders, "SRG Meeting on NSSMs 181 and 182-Regional Strategy and the Arabian Peninsula/Persian Gulf," 2; William B. Quandt; memo; "Analytical Summary: NSSM-181 U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf;" 19 July 1973; folder SRG Meeting-Arabian Peninsula NSSM-181, 7/20/73: Container H-068; National Security Council Institutional Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 5.

<sup>407</sup> Saunders, "SRG Meeting on NSSMs 181 and 182-Regional Strategy and the Arabian Peninsula/Persian Gulf," 2.



as well as the British in Oman, for security assistance.<sup>408</sup> The final decision related to recent Kuwaiti arms requests, to include interest in the long-range F-4 fighter/attack aircraft, with the NSC staff recommending that the U.S. government work to temper Kuwaiti requests to legitimate defense needs. This decision would be followed up by a more formal announcement of U.S. defense policy vis-à-vis Kuwait at a later date.<sup>409</sup>

While the SRG met for 55 minutes on July 20, 1973, neither NSSM-181 nor American security policy in the Persian Gulf were discussed. Following a rather bizarre discussion over allowing the Shah to fly in the new F-14 fighter aircraft during the Iranian ruler's upcoming visit to the United States, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Joseph Sisco briefly discussed the paper the State Department developed in the aftermath of the July 13 SRG meeting.<sup>410</sup> Kissinger then turned the discussion toward the Shah's visit that was scheduled for the following week. Sisco explained that the Shah was concerned that the Nixon administration's focus on détente in Europe was making it slow to recognize threatening Soviet activities in the Persian Gulf. Sisco recommended reminding the Shah that Washington considered him to be the region's "primary element of stability" and that the Iranian ruler was being relied on "to draw out Faisal and move him toward greater cooperation."<sup>411</sup> The discussion then turned toward contingency planning in response to a fall of the Saudi government.<sup>412</sup> The SRG meeting produced three decisions.<sup>413</sup> First, a paper would be developed that provided greater detail

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<sup>408</sup> Quandt, "Analytical Summary: NSSM-181 U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf," 7.

<sup>409</sup> Quandt, "Analytical Summary: NSSM-181 U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf," 7; Saunders, "SRG Meeting on NSSMs 181 and 182-Regional Strategy and the Arabian Peninsula/Persian Gulf," 3.

<sup>410</sup> "Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, July 20, 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 23.

<sup>411</sup> "Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, July 20, 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 23.

<sup>412</sup> With respect to this contingency planning, Ambassador Helms worked closely with the Shah to examine potential Iranian intervention in the event of instability in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan. See note seven, "Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, July 20, 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 23.

<sup>413</sup> "Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, July 20, 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 23.

on American courses of action in response to instability in the Gulf Arab states. Second, the Department of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff would examine the role of Naval presence in support of the above. Lastly, State would work toward upgrading the level of diplomatic representation in the region.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

The July 13 and 20 SRG discussions, and by association NSSM -181 and -182, directly shaped the American talking points that were developed in preparation for the Shah's July 1973 visit to Washington. Talking points for President Nixon and for National Security Advisor Kissinger lauded the Shah's leadership, emphasized the necessity of improved Iranian-Saudi relations, and underlined the importance of the Shah redoubling efforts to "win the confidence of Faisal and other Arab leaders on the Arab side of the Gulf so that there can be a genuinely cooperative effort" at maintaining regional security.<sup>414</sup> Additionally, much of Kissinger's July 24 meeting with the Shah, attended by Saunders and Helms, was devoted to Iranian planning to support contingencies in Saudi Arabia in the event that radical forces overthrew the ruling regime. Kissinger emphasized the importance of keeping these talks secret, advising the Iranian monarch to discuss them with no one except Ambassador Helms.<sup>415</sup> Also in line with American policy, the Shah's discussions with Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger focused on Iranian purchases of newly developed American combat aircraft, such as the F-14 and F-15 fighters and the A-10 attack aircraft, and on the development of a blue water Navy capable of influencing events in the Indian Ocean, all of which were necessary to deter Iran's enemies, who were characterized by the Shah as "Russian puppets."<sup>416</sup> In his visit's final meeting with

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<sup>414</sup> Harold H. Saunders to Dr. Kissinger; memo; "Your Meeting with the Shah of Iran, 5:00 PM, Tuesday, July 24;" 24 July 1973; folder Visit of the Shah of Iran, July 17, 1973 (1 of 1): Container 920; National Security Council Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 3; Henry A. Kissinger to President Nixon; memo; "State Visit by the Shah of Iran Background Paper;" 23 July 1973; folder Visit of the Shah of Iran, July 17, 1973 (1 of 1): Container 920; National Security Council Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 1, 4.

<sup>415</sup> White House; memo; "Memorandum of Conversation, Tuesday, July 24, 1973, 5:00-6:40 PM;" undated; folder Iran Oil (1 of 3): Container 137; National Security Council Files; RNPL, Yorba Linda, CA, 10.

<sup>416</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, July 24, 1973, 4:00 PM," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976, doc.26.

Kissinger on July 27, the Iranian ruler repeated a statement he had made earlier in the day at a Press conference that was simultaneously prophetic and ironic, explaining “Iran should not be looked at as just another Middle Eastern country. In five to ten years’ time it will be very different and stand out from its neighbors.”<sup>417</sup>

While neither NSSM-181, NSSM-182, nor the State Department Paper that emerged from the July 13 NSSM-182 SRG, directly altered the direction of American Persian Gulf security policy from that prescribed by NSDM-92 in 1970, together they comprise an important marker in its evolution for several reasons. First, the studies and related SRG discussions reconfirmed the 1970 NSDM-92 decision to pin American hopes on the ability of the Shah and King Faisal to develop their own military capabilities and cooperate on regional security issues. Second, NSSM-181 and -182 continued the earlier NSSM-66 study’s elevation of local political, economic, and social forces as the primary factors impacting the Persian Gulf strategic environment. Third, both studies, like NSSM-66, discounted the impact of Soviet policy on the region in general and on American national security interests in particular. Indeed, the same indigenous political, economic, and social factors that shaped the Persian Gulf strategic environment served as constraints to what the Soviets could realistically achieve in the region. This trend of elevating indigenous forces and minimizing the Soviet threat to the region would continue through the end of the Kissinger era of American foreign policy, and would be reflected in the Ford administration’s 1976 Persian Gulf Study.

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<sup>417</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, July 27, 1973, 5:00 PM,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 30.

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## V. THE PROBLEMS ARE REGIONAL: 1976–1977

While American Persian Gulf security policy remained guided by the tenets codified in NSDM-92 in 1970, the regional strategic environment continued to evolve during the period bookended by the 1973 NSSM-181/182 exercise and the commencement of the next NSSM-directed study of the Persian Gulf in February 1976. Important developments included the settlement of the Saudi-UAE dispute over the control of the Burayami Oasis and the resignation of President Nixon and elevation of Gerald Ford to the Presidency in 1974, as well as the assassination of Saudi King Faisal and conclusion of the Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq in 1975.<sup>418</sup> In Washington, the Ford administration completed studies that examined American security policy toward Oman (NSSM-217) and nuclear cooperation with Iran (NSSM-219).<sup>419</sup> While important, these events were overshadowed by more significant and related developments that originated well before the British retrenchment from the region: the emergence of the Persian Gulf as the world's premier oil-producing region and the concomitant accrual of vast oil revenues by Iran and Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>418</sup> Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, 43. The Algiers agreement was concluded in March 1975. Iraq agreed to recognize Iranian control over half of the Shatt al Arab waterway in return for Iran returning disputed territory and ending its support for the long-running Kurdish rebellion against Baghdad. The Shah and Saddam Hussein signed the agreement.

<sup>419</sup> White House, *Security Policy Toward Oman*, National Security Study Memorandum 217 (Washington, DC: White House, 1975), <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0310/nssm217.pdf>. NSSM-217 directed the NSC Interdepartmental Group for the Near East and South Asia to examine Oman's importance to the Persian Gulf and the United States, assess the need for the United States to expand its role in training and equipping Omani forces, study the need for U.S. military access to Omani facilities, and if required, determine what impact increased U.S. military presence in Oman would have on the Persian Gulf security environment. The study was completed in March 1975, but no specific decisions or actions emerged from it; White House, *U.S.-Iran Agreement on Cooperation in Civil Uses of Atomic Energy*, National Security Study Memorandum 219 (Washington, DC: White House, 1975), <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0310/nssm219.pdf>. NSSM-219 directed an NSC representative oversee an ad-hoc group examining study issues surrounding a future nuclear agreement with Iran. This included the "sale of American nuclear reactors and materials, Iranian investment in U.S. nuclear enrichment facilities, and other appropriate nuclear transactions in the future." The study resulted in NSDM-292 being issued on April 22, 1975. NSDM-292, among other things, guided U.S. nuclear negotiations with Tehran, specifically: "permit U.S. material to be fabricated into fuel in Iran for use in its own reactors and for pass-through to third countries with whom we have agreements"; "set the fuel ceilings reflecting the approximate number of nuclear reactors planned for purchase from U.S. suppliers," and; "continue to require U.S. approval for reprocessing of U.S. supplied fuel."

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the global oil market was experiencing tremendous change. The explosive economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s produced a worldwide surge in demand for petroleum, consumption in the free world alone increasing from 19 to 44 million barrels per day between 1960 and 1972.<sup>420</sup> American surplus production capacity, traditionally the supply of last resort in times of crisis, disappeared in 1970 when U.S. production reached its peak of 11.3 million barrels per day. Accordingly, American oil imports rose from 19 percent to 36 percent as a share of total consumption between 1967 and 1972.<sup>421</sup> The elimination of American surplus production capacity shifted the world oil market toward the countries of the Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East, the location of the largest proven petroleum reserves. The countries of Western Europe, rebuilding their industrial base in the aftermath of the World War II, were the first to experience this shift, starting in the late 1940s as Middle East oil began to supplant American sources.<sup>422</sup>

American companies had long possessed large stakes in most of the major oil-producing countries, as oil concessions provided the West with a modicum of control over Middle East oil. The toppling of Libya's King Idris in 1969 by a group of Army officers under the leadership of Muammar Qaddafi, however, coupled with the changing global market conditions highlighted above, resulted in Middle East governments asserting stronger control over their most valuable resource. Following Libya's example, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) demanded larger shares of oil profits, with the Shah being one of the most vocal proponents of increased oil prices.<sup>423</sup>

These shifts in the global oil market received close attention in Washington. In 1969, the Nixon Administration completed an in-depth examination of the costs and benefits of lifting long-standing controls on petroleum imports. Domestically, the economic benefits of oil market liberalization had to be weighed against the concerns of

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<sup>420</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 549.

<sup>421</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 549.

<sup>422</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 404.

<sup>423</sup> In 1973 OPEC was comprised of eleven states: Iran, Venezuela, Indonesia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Libya, and Algeria.

American producers, primarily in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Alaska, and Wyoming.<sup>424</sup> From a national security perspective, ensuring that the energy needs of the civilian economy were satisfied, either from domestic or secure foreign sources, was the primary strategic imperative for policy makers.<sup>425</sup> The general consensus within the interagency environment was that the United States should favor western hemisphere sources over those of the Middle East and elsewhere. Noting the importance of assuring an uninterrupted supply of oil for the long-term benefit of the United States, on January 15, 1971, the Nixon Administration directed the Interagency Oil Task Force to develop a paper that examined the major economic and political impacts of the world oil situation. The resulting report identified “serious disruption or damage to the economies of Western Europe, Japan, and the United States as a result of an interruption of supply” and “very large and sudden increases in the cost of oil” as the most significant long-term dangers associated with the altered global oil market.<sup>426</sup> The CIA discounted the likelihood of any aggressive Soviet move to seize the oil-rich Persian Gulf, given the relatively weak communist movements within the region.<sup>427</sup>

Several studies identified the Arab-Israeli conflict as the most likely cause of any politically motivated disruption of oil supplies to the United States and the West. The intelligence community, in reports generated in November 1970 and May 1973, discounted this possibility, noting the low likelihood of close Arab coordination in 1971 and the relative quiet of the Arab-Israeli dispute in early 1973.<sup>428</sup> An August 1973 report further

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<sup>424</sup> “Memorandum to the Files, March 29, 1969,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974 (Washington, DC, 2011), doc. 3.

<sup>425</sup> “Draft Paper Prepared in the Department of State, undated,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 7; “Memorandum From the Director of the White House Energy Policy Staff (Freeman) to the Executive Director of the Cabinet Task Force on Oil Import Control (Areeda), October 21, 1969,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 12.

<sup>426</sup> “Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, January 24, 1971,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 80.

<sup>427</sup> “Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, August 28, 1969,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 8.

<sup>428</sup> “National Intelligence Estimate, November 14, 1970,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 61; “Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, January 24, 1971,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 80; “National Intelligence Analytical Memorandum, May 11, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 185.

explained that in the event of an outbreak of Israeli hostilities, Arab oil producers would maneuver to enact an oil embargo against the United States. The efficacy of the oil weapon would be weakened, however, by the difficulties inherent in inter-Arab cooperation, making an Arab embargo a slim possibility.<sup>429</sup>

Other voices would prove to be more prescient. A July 1972 NSC staff memorandum to Henry Kissinger addressed the political and foreign policy implications of the changing oil market. The memorandum presented the changed market conditions as a dangerous and “decisive shift in the balance of power” toward the oil-producing countries, providing them with “a weapon for coercion or blackmail” that the United States could not dismiss, particularly in the context of the Arab-Israeli dispute.<sup>430</sup> The paper cautioned that the oil weapon could disrupt American relationships with key allies, as a restriction in the supply of oil would result in anxious bids to secure supplies of petroleum and would also have dire impacts on national economies (e.g., balance of payment issues for oil producers and consumers) and American national security (e.g., availability of fuel for the U.S. Navy).

Closely related to the changing oil market were equally significant adjustments to American monetary policy made in response to an ongoing dollar crisis brought about by the Bretton Woods system. Entering effect on January 1, 1946, the Bretton Woods system established a gold exchange standard wherein the U.S. dollar served as the primary reserve asset in the global economy, with other countries pegging the value of their currencies in terms of the U.S. dollar or gold. Under Bretton Woods, the United States pledged to allow foreign governments to exchange their dollar holdings for gold at \$35 per ounce, the value that had been set by the Roosevelt administration in 1934. This guarantee provided

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<sup>429</sup> “Memorandum from Phillip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), August 11, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 192.

<sup>430</sup> The White House, Memorandum from Robert D. Hormats, Richard T. Kennedy, and John D. Walsh of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), July 11, 1972,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 127.



currencies backed by dollar reserves a direct gold backing.<sup>431</sup> Within the Bretton Woods construct, American balance of payments deficits provided much of the liquidity that underpinned global trade and contributed to the rebuilding of Europe and Asia in the postwar period.<sup>432</sup>

The agreement also carried with it significant problems that were cause for concern to the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. The dollar's position as the system's key currency required Washington to consistently run large balance of payments deficits to ensure that sufficient global liquidity existed to support international trade. The growing supply of dollars in relation to the U.S. gold supply made Washington vulnerable to foreign requests to convert their dollar holdings to gold. An American failure to make good on its promises to exchange gold for dollars could undercut faith that the value of the dollar was actually worth as much as gold at the official price of \$35 per ounce. Loss of confidence in dollar-gold convertibility would have far-reaching bad effects on the global economy, and on U.S. standing in the world.<sup>433</sup> Bretton Woods also removed currency devaluation as a tool Washington could use to increase exports of American-produced goods and improve its balance of payments position.

By August 1971 the balance of payments deficit, coupled with speculative attacks on the dollar (which saw \$120 million move to France and \$353 million to Japan), and a request by the Bank of England for Washington to guarantee \$3 billion of its dollar holdings, pushed the Nixon administration into action.<sup>434</sup> In response, Nixon called his top economic advisors, minus Kissinger, who was completely in the dark about the gathering, to Camp David over the weekend of August 14 and 15. Emerging on the evening of August 15 on national television, President Nixon announced a range of initiatives that would

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<sup>431</sup> Diane B. Kunz, *Butter and Guns: America's Cold War Economic Diplomacy* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 10–11.

<sup>432</sup> Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971*, 3.

<sup>433</sup> Thomas Pugel, *International Economics* 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 507.

<sup>434</sup> Kunz, *Butter and Guns: America's Cold War Economic Diplomacy*, 203.

become known as his New Economic Policy. In addition to a series of domestic initiatives, Nixon announced that the United States would close the gold window and suspend the convertibility of U.S. dollars into gold.<sup>435</sup> To improve Washington's balance of payments position, the president also imposed a 10 percent surcharge on all imports into the United states, which amounted to a de facto devaluation of the dollar against foreign currencies.<sup>436</sup> This was followed up over the fall and early winter by G-10 discussions wherein the United states raised the issue of a potential dollar devaluation and a 10 to 15 percent increase in the official price of gold. In December, in what became known as the Smithsonian Agreement, the price of gold was raised from \$35 to \$38 per ounce, which translated to an 8.5% devaluation of the dollar.<sup>437</sup> Additionally, American trading partners agreed to allow their currencies to appreciate against the dollar and to keep the gold window closed. Global financial turmoil continued, however, into 1972 and 1973, which culminated in March 1973 when the world's major economies, including the United States, departed from the Bretton Woods system and agreed to allow their currencies to float freely.

These shifts in American monetary policy had significant impacts on the Persian Gulf. Like all commodities, oil was priced in dollars. The real price of oil had remained relatively constant, and at times declined, over the years that the Bretton Woods system had been in effect.<sup>438</sup> The December 1971 agreement to raise the price of gold to \$38 per ounce, which (as noted above) amounted to an 8.5% devaluation of the dollar, was met with an identical rise in the posted price of OPEC oil. Similarly, on February 12, 1973, when the price of gold was raised from \$38 to \$42.22 per ounce, OPEC responded by successfully negotiating an 11.9 percent increase (above the prices that went into effect on January 1, 1973) in the price of its oil to offset the inflationary impact of the increased cost

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<sup>435</sup> Kunz, *Butter and Guns: America's Cold War Economic Diplomacy*, 203–204. The domestic components of the New Economic Policy included a 90 day period of price and wage controls and establishment of a price review board, a one-year 10% job development tax credit, repeal of a 7% tax on automobile purchases, and a one-year acceleration of personal income tax exemptions. These were offset by a \$4.7 billion reduction in federal spending, a 10% cut in foreign aid, and a postponement in revenue sharing of three months.

<sup>436</sup> Kunz, *Butter and Guns: America's Cold War Economic Diplomacy*, 205.

<sup>437</sup> Kunz, *Butter and Guns: America's Cold War Economic Diplomacy*, 209.

<sup>438</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 778.

of gold on its oil revenues.<sup>439</sup> But the damage to the actual purchasing power of OPEC's large dollar holdings caused by the 1971 and 1973 devaluations could not be undone by tit-for-tat oil price increases. OPEC oil producers were starting to question the wisdom of increasing oil production in light of the two devaluations of the dollar, the Kuwaiti oil minister going so far as to ask "what is the point of producing more oil and selling it for an unguaranteed paper currency? Why produce the oil which is my bread and butter and strength and exchange it for a sum of money whose value will fall next year by such-and-such a percent?"<sup>440</sup> When combined with the emerging political environment in the greater Middle East, American monetary policy was serving to increase the strength of the Arab oil weapon.<sup>441</sup> It also constituted an additional motive for OPEC to raise prices, by way of making up ground lost to the effects of dollar inflation.

Nixon administration concern over Arab oil continued into the summer of 1973. An August NSSM report discussed broad goals designed to mitigate the changes to the global oil market (e.g., energy self-sufficiency initiatives), and concluded that American policy should avoid situations wherein "moderate Arabs use oil as a means to pressure the United States on its policies with respect to the Arab-Israeli problem," the primary concern being preservation of the Saudi regime against radicalism.<sup>442</sup> A September 1973 study conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Office of Economic Research concluded, "an all-Arab embargo of the United States alone is extremely unlikely except in the context of a new Arab-Israeli war."<sup>443</sup> The study's authors deemed that such a war was unlikely within the next two to three years. One month later, on October 6, the forces of Egypt and Syria attacked Israel, instigating the Yom Kippur War and the unleashing of the oil weapon against the United States.

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<sup>439</sup> Parra, *Oil Politics: A Modern History of Petroleum*, 157, 160.

<sup>440</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 577.

<sup>441</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 577.

<sup>442</sup> "Memorandum from Phillip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), August 11, 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 192.

<sup>443</sup> "Paper prepared by Office of Economic Research, Central Intelligence Agency, September 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 206.

The Yom Kippur War and the associated oil embargo provided the United States with its first significant crisis in a Middle East economic and security environment that had been transformed by changes in the global energy market. While the Nixon Administration considered diplomacy to be the most efficacious means of ending the embargo, the use of coercive measures against Saudi Arabia received attention throughout November 1973. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger discussed the possible use of force to secure Middle East oil at a meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group in early November and informed the British Ambassador to the United States on November 15 that “it was no longer obvious to him that the U.S. could not use force.”<sup>444</sup> Kissinger echoed this sentiment on November 21, telling assembled media members that “if pressures continue unreasonably and indefinitely, then the United States will have to consider what countermeasures it may have to take. We would do this with enormous reluctance, and we are still hopeful that matters will not reach this point.”<sup>445</sup> Kissinger reinforced this sentiment in a November 27, 1973 telegram to the American ambassador in Riyadh:

We have to now downplayed talk of retaliation and want to keep our emphasis on one simple line of argument: the Arabs and the world in general need a settlement at least as much as we do; our continuing involvement is essential if progress is to be made towards a settlement; and they will not get the kind of U.S. involvement that is necessary unless [the] situation on the oil front is returned to normal. This is not a threat but a statement of fact based on [the] objective situation as it relates to public support for effective U.S. involvement in [the] peacemaking process with all the implications this has for U.S.-Israeli relations.<sup>446</sup>

On this same day, George H. W. Bush, then the chairman of the Republican National Committee, received a note informing him that rumors were circulating in Riyadh that the United States was contemplating military action against Saudi Arabia, and that the Saudis were “suspicious and nervous (that) the U.S. is planning such moves.”<sup>447</sup> While this rumor

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<sup>444</sup> “Editorial Note,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 244.

<sup>445</sup> “Editorial Note,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 244.

<sup>446</sup> “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia, November 27, 1973, 1337Z,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 248.

<sup>447</sup> “Notes from Peter Rousel to George H. W. Bush, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, November 27, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 250.

appears to have had no basis in fact, Kissinger had ordered several studies examining coercive measures that could be directed against the Arab members of OPEC should the embargo be continued.<sup>448</sup>

On November 30, Kissinger was handed a short memorandum from the CIA that outlined several options to end the embargo.<sup>449</sup>

Option 1: Leverage Anwar Sadat or the Iranian Shah to convince King Faisal to end the embargo in full, or to look the other way while exports to Europe or Japan were surreptitiously shipped to the United States.

Option 2: Send messages to King Faisal via unidentified channels (excised from the memorandum) indicating America contemplation of “serious” action vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia.<sup>450</sup>

Options three and four were excised from the declassified memorandum. However, the last paragraph contains language that indicates that these last two options were increasingly kinetic in nature:

If the situation seemed to warrant such severe measures in the future, a great deal more thinking would have to be done on this topic. Among other things, we would need a careful assessment of Saudi capacity to destroy the oil production capacity of the country in the case of militarization. Industry sources judge this to be very high.<sup>451</sup>

Force never appeared to be a truly viable option. By January 1974, the CIA concluded that “King Faisal has the leverage to translate his (oil) assets into effective pressure on us in a way we cannot match with ours without destroying the very objective we seek,” namely maintaining conservative Arab governments in power and ensuring the

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<sup>448</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 880.

<sup>449</sup> “Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders to Secretary of State Kissinger, November 30, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 255.

<sup>450</sup> “Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders to Secretary of State Kissinger, November 30, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 255.

<sup>451</sup> “Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders to Secretary of State Kissinger, November 30, 1973,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 255.

unimpeded flow of oil.<sup>452</sup> Fortunately, the Saudis informed the Nixon administration that the embargo would be lifted prior to the January 1974 State of the Union Address, providing a modicum of good news for the embattled president. Unfortunately, Syrian and Algerian hostility resulted in the embargo remaining in place until March 18, when unimpeded oil exports once again flowed to the United States.

The October 1973 oil crisis was comprised of three distinct actions. First, the cartel announced a 70 percent increase in the price of oil from \$3.01 to \$5.12 per barrel, a decision that was intended to offset the inflationary impact of the December 1971 and February 1973 devaluations of the U.S. dollar and, ultimately, the delinking of the dollar from gold.<sup>453</sup> This decision was made independently of Arab planning for the Yom Kippur War. Second, on October 17, OPEC announced that oil production would be cut by five percent each month (using September 1973 as the baseline) until Arab political objectives were met, which over the next few days would emerge as Israeli compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.<sup>454</sup> Third was the October 20 announcement of a 100 percent embargo on all oil shipments to the United States (later extended to the Netherlands) in response to Washington's provision of \$2.2 billion in military aid to Israel.<sup>455</sup> While the embargo was partially relaxed in December, and completely eliminated vis-à-vis the United States on March 18, 1974, in December 1973, mainly at Iran's urging, the price of oil leapt to \$11.65 per barrel.<sup>456</sup>

In a little over two months the price of oil had increased 387 percent. Paradoxically, despite the Saudi and Iranian leading roles in driving oil prices up, mutual interests ensured that ties between Washington and its two key Gulf allies would tighten over the next several years. Increased Saudi oil revenues turned an overall budget deficit of \$89 million in 1969

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<sup>452</sup> "Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders to Secretary of State Kissinger, November 30, 1973," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVI, Energy Crisis 1969–1974, doc. 255. See note 2.

<sup>453</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 587, 595.

<sup>454</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 589. UNSCR 242, issued in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War, called for, among other things, the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the territories it occupied during the war and highlighted the necessity of achieving a "just settlement of the refugee problem" in Israel/Palestine.

<sup>455</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 590–591.

<sup>456</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 607.

to a budget surplus of \$967 million in 1972/1973 and by 1974 reached over \$22 billion.<sup>457</sup> The Nixon and, later, the Ford, administration, confronting a significant balance of payments crisis, sought to ensure that Saudi (and Iranian) oil revenues were invested in the American economy. The Saudis had an interest in ensuring their oil wealth translated into internal development, profitable investment, and security from external threats. Accordingly, in June 1974, Saudi Arabia and the United States established Joint Commissions on both Economic Cooperation and Security Cooperation. In 1975, Saudi Arabia embarked on a five-year \$142 billion development plan (that was exceeded by \$40 billion), a dramatic increase over its previous 5-year \$9.2 billion plan.<sup>458</sup> Saudi investment in the United States grew by several orders of magnitude, reaching \$60 billion by 1976.<sup>459</sup> By 1978, the inflow of Saudi dollars into the United States reached \$10.06 billion against \$5.3 billion in U.S. oil payments to Saudi Arabia.<sup>460</sup> American foreign military sales (FMS) to Saudi Arabia experienced a similar expansion, the value of all U.S.-Saudi FMS agreements growing from \$305 million in 1972 to over \$5 billion in 1975.<sup>461</sup> In 1975 alone, American -Saudi FMS agreements totaled \$1.993 billion, second only to Iran. This was a cause for concern for the Saudi government, given that Iran was viewed as being in a better position to more quickly convert its oil wealth into military power.<sup>462</sup>

The total value of American FMS sales to Tehran stood at \$2.8 billion by early 1975.<sup>463</sup> Like Saudi Arabia, Iranian oil revenues had experienced significant growth, expanding fourfold from 1973 (\$4.1 billion) to 1974 (\$17.4 billion) alone.<sup>464</sup> While Iran operated under fewer FMS constraints than Saudi Arabia, the Shah was eager to turn Iran's

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<sup>457</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 168.

<sup>458</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 172.

<sup>459</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 126.

<sup>460</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 128.

<sup>461</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 127.

<sup>462</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 175, 177.

<sup>463</sup> Lt Col Cavoli; memo; "Major Foreign Military Sales Programs With Iran;" April 1975; folder Iran Military (1): Container 6; NSC Middle East and South Asia Staff Files 1974-1977; National Security Advisors Files; Gerald R. Ford Library (GRFL), Ann Arbor Michigan, 1.

<sup>464</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 170.

oil wealth into greater military capability and capacity. By May 1975, the Shah was expressing interest in further modernizing and expanding Iran's air force by purchasing, in addition to the F-14 fighter, 280 to 300 of the new F-16 and upwards of 240 of the even newer F-18.<sup>465</sup> He found a receptive environment in Washington, as American policy, in the words of one Department of Defense staffer, was to "give the Shah pretty much what he wants, in the apparent expectation that he will serve, for the mid-term at least, as a 'strong point' for U.S. policy in the Gulf area."<sup>466</sup> This was despite the fact that "increasing signs of possible future disagreements (Persian Gulf as a 'closed sea,' withdrawal of major powers from the Gulf, support for Arabs in event of future Arab-Israeli war, raw material pricing policy)" threatened to complicate U.S.-Iranian relations.<sup>467</sup> As NSSM-66 noted in 1970, growing military power fueled the Shah's more hegemonic regional aspirations, which alarmed the Saudis and eroded prospects for effective regional cooperation. Saudi fears were further amplified by the Algiers agreement between Iran and Iraq, which meant that Iranian military capability could be redirected toward the Arab side of the Gulf. This precedent had already been established in 1974 when Tehran deployed a combat brigade and supporting aviation to Oman to assist in the defeat of PFLOAG, which, while effective in altering the tide of battle, spotlighted Saudi inability to police the Arab side of the Gulf.<sup>468</sup>

American concerns over the Shah's appetite for American military equipment provided the impetus for the final examination of American Persian Gulf security policy of the Nixon/Ford/Kissinger era. Spurred on by a September 1975 memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, on February 13, 1976, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft issued NSSM-238 directing an interagency group to reexamine American security policy in the Persian Gulf. While the study was completed

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<sup>465</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, May 16, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 126.

<sup>466</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, May 16, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 126.

<sup>467</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, May 16, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 126.

<sup>468</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 178.



in May 1976, its length and complexity, coupled with interagency squabbling and Jimmy Carter's defeat of President Ford in the 1976 election, ensured that no new policy direction would emerge from the NSSM-238 exercise. A short summary was completed in late 1976 and provided to the incoming Carter administration as a turnover document. As such, NSSM-238 provides a clear line of demarcation separating the Persian Gulf policies of the Nixon/Ford/Kissinger era from those of the incoming Carter administration.

#### **A. NSSM-238: PASSDOWN TO THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION**

Secretary of Defense Schlesinger provided the impetus for NSSM-238 on September 2, 1975, when he personally handed President Ford a memorandum expressing his concerns over Department of Defense activities in Iran. Schlesinger provided Ford a brief history of American policy toward Iran before turning his focus on three factors that, in his view, had drastically changed Washington's relationship with Tehran.<sup>469</sup> The first was the 1968 announcement that London would end its protective role in the Persian Gulf and withdraw its military forces from the area by 1971. The second was the drastic rise in oil prices that had effectively eliminated financial constraints on Iranian military spending. The third occurred during President Nixon's May 1972 visit to Tehran when he agreed to sell the Shah F-14 and F-15 fighter aircraft and laser-guided munitions and also provide uniformed U.S. military technicians to enable the Iranians to integrate these advanced systems into their arsenal. Additionally, the policy guidelines that had emerged from Nixon's visit ceded final decision authority to Tehran and removed the requirement that U.S. arms sales to Iran be based on American assessments of Iranian defense requirements.

These factors combined to produce several issues that gave Schlesinger pause. First, the secretary of defense pointed toward the shortage of trainable Iranian manpower and delays in the construction of the infrastructure needed to support the sophisticated weapons that Tehran was eagerly purchasing.<sup>470</sup> This raised doubts as to the ability of Iran to absorb

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<sup>469</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>470</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

and assimilate the sophisticated military capabilities it planned to purchase. Iranian military construction expenditures between 1973 and 1978 were estimated at over \$5 billion spread over 300 projects, a workload that in Schlesinger's estimation would be difficult for the United States to complete and was completely beyond Iranian capabilities. Schlesinger also cited Iranian military pay and housing, which lagged behind the civil sector, as well as corruption and a top-heavy decision-making apparatus that failed to delegate authority. Schlesinger concluded that "there is no prospect that Iranian forces will be [in] respectable fighting shape for years to come," although "this may not be important against other Gulf nations."<sup>471</sup> Failure to successfully integrate sophisticated capabilities into its arsenal could result in Tehran blaming the United States for its own limitations.<sup>472</sup>

All of this raised a second issue for the American secretary of defense. While Iran purchased military equipment from a range of countries, the United States was the Shah's supplier-of-choice. Accordingly, the American military advisory presence in Iran, both civilian contractor and uniformed military, had grown significantly and was expected to reach, with dependents, a total of 17,000 personnel by 1976, up from about 12,000 in 1975.<sup>473</sup> This large American footprint provided a sizeable target for Iranian terrorist groups, Schlesinger warned, and created a tight and expensive housing market, and, more narrowly for uniformed military personnel, stressed available medical and commissary facilities. Finally, every uniformed American military advisor assigned to Iran drained the pool of available manpower to support U.S. operations. The Defense Department had repeatedly told the Shah that further increases in uniformed advisors would not be forthcoming. More broadly, Schlesinger cited Arab fears of potential malign Iranian intentions, Tehran's propensity to transfer American military equipment to third parties,

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<sup>471</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>472</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>473</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142. Schlesinger wrote that Department of Defense uniformed advisors would grow from 760 in 1973 to 1,708 in 1976, plus an additional 2,300 dependents. The Defense Department estimated that 50 retired military personnel a month were arriving in Iran to commence work as civilian contracted advisors. Total civilian contract advisors, plus their dependents, were projected to grow from 8,300 in 1975 to 12,800 in 1976.

Congressional concerns that the United States was feeding a regional arms race, and the danger posed by diverging American and Iranian interests in the Gulf.<sup>474</sup>

In light of these concerns, the secretary of defense saw three policy options that could limit any negative impact to U.S. interests in the region. The first was to maintain the status quo and continue along the current course prescribed by American policy wherein no real limits were placed on the Shah's appetite for U.S. military equipment and advisory assistance.<sup>475</sup> Alternatively, Washington could revert back to the pre-May 1972 policy wherein foreign military sales were conducted only in response to American-validated requirements. A third option would entail the United States adopting a new policy that avoided new commitments to Iran and limited future involvement with Tehran in what Schlesinger termed a "damage-limiting strategy."<sup>476</sup> While offering no specific recommendation on these three options, Schlesinger concluded his memo by recommending that President Ford direct the NSC to review American security interests in Iran and the Persian Gulf and reevaluate arms supply policies toward Tehran over two timeframes: zero to five years and five to ten years into the future.<sup>477</sup>

Three weeks later, two NSC staffers, Clinton E. Granger and Robert B. Oakley, forwarded a memorandum to Secretary of State Kissinger that discussed Schlesinger's proposed study. While agreeing that the study had merit, the two staffers proposed expanding its focus from Iran to the wider Persian Gulf, as "the problems are regional and because we would not wish to single out Iran as an object of special concern."<sup>478</sup> Granger and Oakley recommended that the study, in addition to the issues raised by Secretary of

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<sup>474</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>475</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>476</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>477</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to President Ford, September 2, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 142.

<sup>478</sup> "Memorandum from Clinton E. Granger and Robert B. Oakley of the National Security Council Staff to Secretary of State Kissinger, September 23, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 145.

Defense Schlesinger, be broadened to include the growing importance of the region's oil, current and future U.S. interests, and how Washington could best leverage its security relations with Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to advance these interests. Granger and Oakley concluded by telling Kissinger that, if he concurred with their recommendation, an NSSM would be developed and forwarded to the secretary of state in January, following the completion of a review of Israeli arms requests and the development of a better appreciation of Congressional attitudes toward arms sales and further developments in OPEC's oil pricing.<sup>479</sup> Kissinger concurred with Oakley's and Granger's recommendation, and with President Ford's approval, forwarded a memorandum to Schlesinger on October 10, 1975, informing him that the president agreed with the secretary of defense's recommendation, but that the study's focus would be expanded to the entire Persian Gulf region. Accordingly, a NSSM would be issued in the next sixty to ninety days.<sup>480</sup> National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft initiated this study on February 13, 1976, when he signed NSSM-238.

## **1. Development of the Study**

Entitled *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, NSSM-238 directed the Interdepartmental Political-Military Group to examine American political and strategic interests in the region and develop short- and medium-term policy alternatives with "particular emphasis on Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait."<sup>481</sup> To provide context, the report was also to examine the "strategic, economic, and political importance to the United States of the area and key individual countries over the next ten years," with specific

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<sup>479</sup> "Memorandum from Clinton E. Granger and Robert B. Oakley of the National Security Council Staff to Secretary of State Kissinger, September 23, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 145.

<sup>480</sup> Henry A. Kissinger to the Secretary of Defense; memo; "Proposed Study of U.S. Defense Relationships With Iran;" 10 October 1975; folder NSSM 223 Review of U.S. Policy on Arms Transfers (6); Container 35; National Security Council Institutional Files 1974–1977; GRFL, Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>481</sup> White House, *National Security Study Memorandum 238*, "U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf," (Washington, DC: White House, 1976), <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0310/nssm238.pdf>, 1. Established by the issuance of NSDM 2 on January 20, 1969, NSC Interdepartmental Groups were chaired by an Assistant Secretary of State. Interdepartmental Groups were responsible for making decisions on interdepartmental issues, including those arising from NSC decisions, preparation of policy papers for the NSC, and development of contingency papers on potential crisis areas for NSC review.

emphasis on the region's oil and financial resources and any requirement for military access to bases and key installations.<sup>482</sup> The impact of foreign labor, changes wrought by modernization, Soviet influence, and lingering regional differences on the stability of the moderate Gulf states was specifically identified as a key focus area. In keeping with the policy direction set by NSDM-92, the study was to include discussion of the prospects for regional cooperation. Western European, Japanese, and Soviet economic and political influence in the region was also to be examined, with particular emphasis on the ability of any of these outside powers to supplant the United States "in various areas of activity or individual countries."<sup>483</sup> Finally, the Interdepartmental Political-Military Group was directed to study the points raised by Secretary of Defense Schlesinger in his September 2 memorandum to President Ford, specifically the costs and benefits associated with American arms policy toward the region, the economic and social impacts of large U.S. arms programs and associated advisory footprint on key Gulf allies, the strains imposed by the latter on the U.S. military, and Congressional attitudes on foreign military sales.<sup>484</sup>

Based on its analysis of these factors, the NSSM-238 report was to provide policy options regarding arms supply and provision of military training, transfer of technology and co-production, economic policies, recommendations related to regional relationships, guidelines for U.S. bases and military installations in the Gulf, as well as codified implementation procedures geared toward improving the performance of existing and future policies.<sup>485</sup> NSSM-238 directed that the study be submitted to the NSC Senior Review Group by March 15, 1976.

Unfortunately, the NSSM-238 report was too long and complex to properly influence presidential-level decisions. The Interdepartmental Group had provided the SRG with no fewer than 106 separate policy options, "some of which are so narrow and technical

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<sup>482</sup> White House, *National Security Study Memorandum 238*, 1.

<sup>483</sup> White House, *National Security Study Memorandum 238*, 2.

<sup>484</sup> White House, *National Security Study Memorandum 238*, 2.

<sup>485</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, National Security Study Memorandum 238 (Washington, DC: White House, 1976), <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0310/nssm238.pdf>, 2.

as not to warrant presidential consideration while others are so broad and amorphous that their approval would provide little or no meaningful guidance.”<sup>486</sup> A working level draft that had not been reviewed by key interagency principals was forwarded to Brent Scowcroft on May 21, 1976.<sup>487</sup> The NSC staff, noting the original study’s complexity and length, reported to Scowcroft on September 18, 1976, that “there is no likelihood of reaching Agency consensus on a policy paper for Presidential consideration and decision without (a) summary of basic findings and an identification of key issues requiring decision in the near future.”<sup>488</sup> As a result of its dissatisfaction with the Interdepartmental Group’s paper, the NSC staff drafted an executive summary that identified “the key issues which will affect U.S. policy over the next decade” and limited its policy recommendations to security issues in two key areas, security assistance and access to facilities, that required “high-level policy decisions at this time.”<sup>489</sup> Various iterations of this summary were reviewed by the interagency in the waning months of the Ford administration, with a final copy, dated January 17, 1977, provided to the incoming Carter administration as an input into its own review of Persian Gulf security.

## **2. U.S. Strategic Interests**

Following a brief introduction and a short history of American policy in the Gulf, the report asserted that the West’s increasing appetite for the region’s oil, coupled with the economic impact of the dramatic rise in oil prices in late 1973, had “greatly increased the importance of the Persian Gulf to the United States and the world as a whole.”<sup>490</sup> The

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<sup>486</sup> Robert B. Oakley to Brent Scowcroft; memo; “NSSM-238: United States Policy in the Persian Gulf,” 18 September 1976; folder NSSM-238 U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf (2 of 3) (4): Container 42; National Security Council Institutional Files 1974–1977; GRFL, Ann Arbor, MI, 1.

<sup>487</sup> George S. Vest to Brent Scowcroft; memo; “NSSM-238: U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf,” 26 October 1976; folder NSSM-238 U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf (2 of 3) (3): Container 42; National Security Council Institutional Files 1974–1977; GRFL, Ann Arbor, MI, 1.

<sup>488</sup> Oakley, “NSSM-238: United States Policy in the Persian Gulf,” 1.

<sup>489</sup> Oakley, “NSSM-238: United States Policy in the Persian Gulf,” 1.

<sup>490</sup> White House; *Executive Summary, NSSM-238: U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*; 17 January 1977; folder NSSM-238 U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf (3 of 3) (3): Container 42; National Security Council Institutional Files 1974–1977; GRFL, Ann Arbor, MI, 4. Henceforth referred to as *NSSM-238 Report*.

report predicted that the importance of Persian Gulf oil to the United States, which then supplied 25 percent of all American oil imports, would grow.<sup>491</sup> Additionally, the dramatic increase in oil prices had enabled Gulf oil producers to accumulate approximately \$53 billion in cash reserves, half of which were Saudi-controlled.<sup>492</sup> These reserves were largely directed toward Eurocurrency and other offshore money markets, creating a large pool of capital that stood outside the ability of the U.S. government to control.<sup>493</sup> Increased Saudi and Iranian oil revenues had enabled both countries to expand their regional influence and assert a greater political and economic impact globally. Recycling of Gulf oil revenues was particularly important to the recovery of Western European economies from an ongoing global recession. This reality was recognized in Western European capitals and in Tokyo, all of which appeared to be “prepared to pay a relatively high political price if necessary to obtain assured supplies of oil, and are actively attempting to expand their markets for military and industrial equipment as well as consumption items.”<sup>494</sup>

American policy objectives in the Persian Gulf, which NSSM-238 presented as “supplementing the essentially security-oriented policy guidelines of NSDMs 92 and 186” were, in reality, not dramatically different from those that NSSM-66 discussed in 1970.<sup>495</sup> Economically, ensuring continued access to the region’s oil for the United States and its allies at “reasonable prices” and, in light of Washington’s ongoing balance of payment problems, “maintaining a vigorous and increasing level of exports to and investments from the Gulf states” remained paramount.<sup>496</sup> Politically, ensuring Saudi and Iranian support for American policy objectives, in particular those related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, south Asian stability, ongoing problems on the African continent, and the global economic

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<sup>491</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 4.

<sup>492</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 5.

<sup>493</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, “The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970–1990,” in Leffler and Westad, eds., *The Global Cold War vol. 3, Endings*, 29–31.

<sup>494</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 5.

<sup>495</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 6.

<sup>496</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 6.

picture, was emphasized.<sup>497</sup> Finally, ensuring that the Soviets did not obtain a dominant position over the region remained a key security objective.<sup>498</sup> This mandated continued U.S. access to sensitive communication facilities and key infrastructure, such as ports and airfields, while also ensuring the free flow of maritime traffic through the region's sea lanes.<sup>499</sup>

Overall, NSSM-238 assessed that American policy had been successful in achieving these objectives.<sup>500</sup> This success had been delivered via the "balanced use of three foreign policy instrumentalities."<sup>501</sup> The first, NSSM-238 explained, was the provision of security force assistance and training, which enabled regional pro-American states, in particular Iran and Saudi Arabia, to maintain their own internal security and simultaneously develop the capability to maintain regional security in accordance with direction set forth by NSDM-92 in 1970.<sup>502</sup> Saudi and Iranian reliance on American security force assistance was expected to increase over the next ten years as the two Gulf powers tried to assimilate the increasingly sophisticated military equipment being acquired from the United States, providing Washington with "a policy asset of significant importance, which is not currently available to any other external power."<sup>503</sup> Iranian and Saudi dependence on American arms, training, and technical expertise provided an "impetus for the military establishments, and to a lesser degree, the governments of these countries to act in a manner generally consistent with U.S. interests."<sup>504</sup>

The second was Washington's staunch political support for the Saudi and Iranian governments as each pursued policies toward the Persian Gulf, greater Middle East, Indian

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<sup>497</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 6.

<sup>498</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 6.

<sup>499</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 6.

<sup>500</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 7.

<sup>501</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 14.

<sup>502</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 8.

<sup>503</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 9.

<sup>504</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 8–9.



Ocean, and Africa that ran parallel to American interests.<sup>505</sup> In the Gulf, strong American political support for Tehran and Riyadh had helped spur a cooperative approach between Iran and Saudi Arabia toward helping the smaller Gulf states confront internal security challenges, albeit “not always with the speed or manner we would have chosen.”<sup>506</sup> The Saudis and Iranians had provided cooperative assistance to Oman, helping to stave off a PDRY-instigated rebellion that was supported by Iraq, Libya, the Soviet Union, and Cuba. Saudi-Iranian cooperation had also helped North Yemen turn away from cooperation with Iraq. Outside of the immediate Persian Gulf, Tehran had continued to supply its oil to the United States and Israel during the 1973–1974 Arab oil embargo, and provided economic assistance to India and Afghanistan. The Shah had also supported Pakistan and provided economic assistance to India and Afghanistan while Saudi Arabia had advocated against higher oil prices favored by other OPEC oil-producers and continued to sell its oil to the West.<sup>507</sup>

The third instrument was the economic cooperation that spurred Iranian and Saudi economic development and assisted both countries’ development of policies that would enable them to become more prominent participants in the global economy, that ensured increased trade with and investment in the United States, and maximized oil production and minimized the impacts of future OPEC price increases.<sup>508</sup> These efforts were also assessed as being fairly successful, as the Gulf oil producers had “acted in a generally responsible manner in their handling of petro-dollar investments in the West and in increasing assistance bilaterally and multilaterally to developing nations, although on a highly selective basis.”<sup>509</sup> These same states had also been avid purchasers of American goods, although this trade was sensitive to Washington’s support for Israel.

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<sup>505</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 14–15.

<sup>506</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 7.

<sup>507</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 7.

<sup>508</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 15.

<sup>509</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 8.

Washington's position in the Persian Gulf was not without its problems, however. Foremost among these was the domestic disruption in the Gulf oil-producing states wrought by rapid wealth accumulation and modernization, both military and nonmilitary. "Rapid modernization and the introduction of advanced technology, extensive reliance on foreign manpower, and rapid urbanization" stressed available manpower and infrastructure, and threatened to spur inflation, problems that, if left unaddressed, "could be seriously destabilizing to the traditionalist Gulf regimes."<sup>510</sup> Domestic unrest could stoke popular pressure against these regimes and push them into adopting policies contrary to American interests in the region. Rapid military modernization induced similar worries, as the Saudis and Iranians were hard-pressed to operate and maintain with their available manpower the sophisticated military equipment purchased from the United States, necessitating the large American advisory footprint that so concerned Schlesinger and adding to the social and economic stresses for both and potentially threatening internal stability.<sup>511</sup> Extensive Saudi and Iranian arms purchases also threatened to spur a regional arms race, decreased the prospects for Arab-Persian cooperation, and invited Congressional concern over the Ford administration's management of Foreign Military Sales. American questioning of Tehran's and Riyadh's arms purchases stirred up Saudi and Iranian sensitivities to the detriment of Washington's bilateral relationships with its principal Gulf allies.<sup>512</sup> Finally, the Saudis had put Washington on notice that the future of their relationship with the United States was heavily dependent upon progress toward an acceptable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>513</sup>

The United States' arms supply policy toward the smaller Gulf Arab states, codified by NSDM-186 in 1972, was experiencing similar stresses. The smaller Gulf states, noting Iranian and Saudi arms purchases, had been increasingly and more insistently urging Washington to supply them with more sophisticated arms, such as missiles and fighter

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<sup>510</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 10, 26–27.

<sup>511</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 10, 13, 16.

<sup>512</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 13, 17–18.

<sup>513</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 10.

aircraft.<sup>514</sup> They had put Washington on notice that future decisions related to American access to militarily important facilities would be linked to the weapons systems the United States supplied them.<sup>515</sup> This placed the Ford administration in a difficult position, as more robust arms sales to Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE could be perceived by the Shah, King Khalid and Prince Fahd as a lessening in Washington's reliance on Iran and Saudi Arabia to maintain regional stability. Additionally, more robust arms sales to the smaller Gulf states could instigate a lower-level arms race among them, stoking long-standing regional rivalries and distrust. This latter point was concerning in light of NSSM-238's conclusion that "incipient movement towards regional cooperation remains troubled by subsurface rivalries and mutual suspicions, and effective formal regional cooperation remains elusive."<sup>516</sup> The report theorized that the prospects for Arab cooperation with Iran, acknowledged as possessing a "growing preponderance" of the region's military strength, depended upon the struggle in the Arab states between "the ideological appeal of Arab nationalism and the pragmatic approach of the traditional regimes."<sup>517</sup> Overall, NSSM-238 painted a dark picture concerning the prospects for effective regional cooperation, concluding that "there is no demonstrable desire by the smaller states to content themselves with a regional security umbrella from their larger neighbors."<sup>518</sup> Finally, the increasingly active role of the Persian Gulf states, especially Iran and Saudi Arabia, in the politics and diplomacy of the Indian Ocean region, South Asia, and the broader Middle East carried the danger of opening the Gulf "increasingly to the rivalries of these areas."<sup>519</sup>

Fortunately for Washington, these problems paled in comparison to those confronting Moscow. Like NSSM-66 and -181, NSSM-238 devoted comparatively little attention (one page in a 40-page report) to the Soviet threat to American interests in the

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<sup>514</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 18a.

<sup>515</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 19.

<sup>516</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 10.

<sup>517</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 11.

<sup>518</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 18A.

<sup>519</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 10.

region, explaining, “the extent and nature of (Soviet) influence in the Gulf area cannot be predicted with confidence.”<sup>520</sup>

The NSSM-238 report theorized that four factors would shape Moscow’s prospects for increasing its influence in the region at the expense of Washington’s.<sup>521</sup> The first was Moscow’s balancing of its desire for good relations with the Gulf states, most of which were more closely allied with the United States, with its support for the region’s radical regimes. The second involved the Gulf states’ perception of the Cold War balance of power and of the West’s responsiveness to their economic and security requirements. Third was the evolution of the ongoing Arab-Israeli crisis and regional perceptions of American policy toward resolving it. The final factor involved the interrelationships between the Gulf states and the stability of the region’s three principal powers, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.<sup>522</sup>

Overall, NSSM-238 assessed that the trends driving Soviet (and Iraqi) influence in the region had not “advanced to the point where a change in U.S. policy would appear to be required.”<sup>523</sup> This short assessment was complemented by a December 1976 CIA study that concluded that the Soviet position in the Gulf had steadily degraded since 1973. Entitled *The Soviets in The Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula-Assets and Prospects*, the study provided a detailed examination of Soviet interests in the Persian Gulf, the tools Moscow employed in support of these interests, an assessment of the level of success of Soviet foreign policy in the region, and a prediction of Moscow’s future prospects.<sup>524</sup>

Overall, the CIA placed Soviet interests in the Persian Gulf in five categories.<sup>525</sup> The first was Moscow’s “basic interest” in an area of the world that was close to its

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<sup>520</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 23.

<sup>521</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 24.

<sup>522</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 24.

<sup>523</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 15a.

<sup>524</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1976), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00889A000900070001-3.pdf>, vii-viii.

<sup>525</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 1–2.

southern flank, in particular its position between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, areas wherein the Soviet naval presence had expanded in recent years.<sup>526</sup> This led Moscow toward enhancing its relations with Middle Eastern, east African, and south Asian littoral states. Despite this interest, the Persian Gulf, as an enclosed body of water, was believed to be peripheral to Soviet maritime strategy.<sup>527</sup> Moscow's principal objective vis-à-vis the United States in the region was a negative one: to prevent Washington from establishing a dominant presence in the Gulf.<sup>528</sup> Closely related was the Soviet concern over growing Iranian and Saudi ability, considered to be Washington's regional surrogates, to intervene in regional affairs to the detriment of Soviet interests. In this vein, Moscow viewed what had long been the centerpiece of American security policy toward the region, regional cooperation, as anathema to Soviet Persian Gulf interests.<sup>529</sup> Finally, an enhanced position in the Persian Gulf would strengthen the Soviet Union as a significant voice in the affairs of the greater Middle East, especially in light of Egypt's shift toward the United States in the aftermath of the 1973 war with Israel.<sup>530</sup>

Soviet economic interests in the Persian Gulf revolved around oil and gaining greater access to hard currency.<sup>531</sup> While the Soviet Union was self-sufficient in its oil production and was a net petroleum exporter, the NSSM-238 report asserted that increased domestic consumption coupled with predicted production shortfalls would force Moscow into a decision to cut its own consumption or decrease its exports to Eastern and Western Europe, the latter an important stream of hard currency. The CIA study theorized that Moscow would opt to increase its oil imports to support domestic consumption and

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<sup>526</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00889A000900070001-3.pdf>, 1.

<sup>527</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00889A000900070001-3.pdf>, 1.

<sup>528</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00889A000900070001-3.pdf>, 1.

<sup>529</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00889A000900070001-3.pdf>, 2.

<sup>530</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 2.

<sup>531</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 2, 3.

continue to export its own oil to support its eastern European allies and to gain access to western European hard currency.<sup>532</sup> The Gulf oil-producing states were an obvious source of both oil and hard currency. A final objective of Soviet Gulf policy was to demonstrate support for “national liberation” movements fighting against the “feudalist Gulf Sheikdoms, including Saudi Arabia.”<sup>533</sup> Moscow employed five tools to accomplish these objectives: bilateral contacts, economic inducements, military aid, propaganda, and subversion.<sup>534</sup>

Overall, the CIA study painted a gloomy picture of the Soviet Union’s position in the Gulf, asserting that “the Soviet position in the area, has, however, deteriorated since the 1973 Middle East war, and the prospects of a resurgence are not impressive.”<sup>535</sup> Foremost among the several factors contributing to this decline was the staunch anticommunism, particularly with regard to Saudi Arabia and Iran, which permeated the region and impeded Moscow’s efforts to develop strong bilateral relations with most of the Gulf states.<sup>536</sup> This was reinforced by the Gulf oil-producers’ great wealth accrued since 1973, which served to increase Saudi and Iranian assertiveness on regional security issues and strengthen the Saudi position vis-à-vis the other Gulf Arabs, who would be loath to anger their larger neighbor by strengthening relations with Moscow.<sup>537</sup> This dramatic rise in oil revenues had also drawn each Gulf State closer to the United States, which provided Tehran and Riyadh with a much more profitable partner for trade and investment than the Soviet Union. A second major factor was the contradictions inherent in the Soviet Union’s regional objectives, best illustrated by Moscow’s desire for improved bilateral relations

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<sup>532</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 3.

<sup>533</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 3.

<sup>534</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 4–13.

<sup>535</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, vii–viii.

<sup>536</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 5.

<sup>537</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 25.

with Iran and the wealthy Gulf Arabs versus its ideological support for radical elements devoted toward their overthrow.<sup>538</sup> Both these factors impeded Moscow's ability to tap these countries' considerable hard currency reserves. In any case, the region's strong economic relationship with the West made Soviet economic inroads into the Gulf exceedingly difficult.

Even Moscow's position vis-à-vis its most important Gulf partner nation, Iraq, was weakening in the aftermath of the 1973 war and the 1975 Algiers agreement. Iraq was viewed as pursuing a more independent foreign policy that leaned more toward true nonalignment.<sup>539</sup> In light of the Iraqi regime's newfound pragmatism, Western countries, particularly France, had supplanted the Soviet Union as Iraq's main economic partner and the United States had become a major supplier of Iraq's non-military imports, which reached \$120 million during the first eight months of 1974.<sup>540</sup> This obviously worked to the detriment of Soviet interests. Further complicating Moscow's position, the Soviet Union's contradictory regional objectives, such as its support for Syria and courting of the Shah, undermined its relationship with Iraq. By late 1976, the United States' interest section in Baghdad (the United States had no official embassy) assessed the Iraqi regime as consisting of "a group of prickly and hardened revolutionaries who accept socialist principles but act very much on the basis of their perceptions of Iraq's national interests," and expressed doubt that "Iraq would be a willing tool of [the] Soviets on any issue they perceive as touching on their Arab nationalism."<sup>541</sup>

### **3. U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf**

Having identified American interests in the Persian Gulf and discussed the region's strategic environment, NSSM-238 went on to list eight key issues that American policy

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<sup>538</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviets in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula: Assets and Prospects*, 25.

<sup>539</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Telegram From the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State, October 24, 1974, 1130Z," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 263

<sup>540</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 25.

<sup>541</sup> "Telegram from the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State and the Embassy in Iran, November 6, 1976, 0733Z," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973–1976, doc. 319.

would need to grapple with over the next ten years. Three of these issues, Washington's security relationships with the major Gulf powers, its arms sales policies toward the smaller Gulf states, and issues surrounding the American military footprint in the region, were specifically called out as requiring decisions early in 1977.<sup>542</sup> Regarding arms sales to Iran and Saudi Arabia, the authors of NSSM-238 provided a set of specific procedures that would ensure that future arms requests would pass through a systematic interagency review process and be more closely managed.<sup>543</sup> The report provided no such procedures to govern arms sales to the smaller Gulf states and, beyond providing a discussion that reviewed the problems inherent in the current U.S. policy of limited involvement, provided no concrete recommendations. On the American military presence in the region, NSSM-238 advised that "a policy decision is required in the near future to determine the level of U.S. military presence in the Gulf area in the context of overall U.S. interests, the strategic balance in the Indian Ocean region (particularly vis-à-vis the USSR), and the long-term nature of our relationship with Iran."<sup>544</sup> The remaining five issues were not specific areas requiring decisions, but were rather a list of issues that would help shape the future Persian Gulf strategic environment: energy, Soviet influence, Iraq, economic issues, and the impact of modernization.<sup>545</sup>

Each of these issues, the NSSM-238 explained, could be resolved within the context of one of three broad security postures. The first was to continue along the course set forth by the policies and procedures codified by NSDM-92 and NSDM-186.<sup>546</sup> This would entail maintaining the scope and scale of arms sales to Iran and Saudi Arabia and continuing close cooperation with each on their economic development. Similarly, the United States would maintain its passive stance on regional cooperation. The second option was to reduce American regional involvement, in particular by placing constraints on

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<sup>542</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 15–22.

<sup>543</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 18.

<sup>544</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 22.

<sup>545</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 23–28.

<sup>546</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 30–31.



Washington's arms-supply relationships with Iran and the Arab side of the Gulf.<sup>547</sup> The United States would tailor its arms sales to Iran based on its own assessments, as opposed to the Shah's, of Iran's legitimate defense requirements. Arms sales would be more directly linked to improved security cooperation between the Gulf states. With regard to the smaller Gulf states, Washington would encourage the British to assume a more active military training and advisory role. The American military advisor footprint in the region would be kept as limited as possible, and the Middle East Force would be withdrawn from Bahrain to a strictly afloat command. Third, Washington could expand its security involvement in the region, and liberalize its arms sales policies to all Gulf states along the lines of its current policy toward Iran. Simultaneously, the United States could seek to expand its military presence throughout the region.<sup>548</sup> The report did not provide a recommendation on which of these broad postures to choose and concluded with a short discussion of some specific and somewhat granular security-related questions, such as management of arms sales and use of regional port and airfield facilities.

#### **4. Deliberations and Decisions**

Despite its length and complexity, NSSM-238 did not alter the broad contours of American security policy in the Persian Gulf. Like NSSM-181 and -182 before it, NSSM-238 helped shape American policy-makers' understanding of the region, but the lack of a follow-on decision to adopt a new course ensured that NSDM-92 continued to drive American policy. When the SRG finally met to discuss the study on January 5, 1977, the Ford administration had only 15 days remaining before the inauguration of President-elect Jimmy Carter. Therefore, no specific policy decisions were intended to emerge from this meeting. Instead, the SRG was intended to discuss the NSSM-238 study and approve the NSC-developed executive summary as an "historical and strategic framework of current U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf" that identified "priority political and security issues that

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<sup>547</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 31–32.

<sup>548</sup> White House, *NSSM-238 Report*, 33.

will require high-level policy consideration in 1977.”<sup>549</sup> This summary would be provided to the incoming Carter administration. Second, the SRG would review and approve a set of specific procedures to govern the management of American security assistance programs in the Persian Gulf. Third, the SRG would discuss “the general implications of U.S. policy on security issues in the Persian Gulf for U.S. economic and energy policy.”<sup>550</sup>

SRG participants proposed several changes to the NSSM-238 summary and a revised draft was completed as a turnover document to the Carter administration. The Department of the Treasury did not concur with the final document, arguing that it should not have been completed ahead of NSSM-237, which examined American energy policy.<sup>551</sup> This discrepancy was rectified via the inclusion of a statement that any follow-on consideration of Persian Gulf security-related issues should parallel considerations related to energy policy.<sup>552</sup> When this revised document was completed, the Treasury Department objected a second time “on the basis that (the NSSM-238 summary) did not give sufficient treatment to economic and financial options.”<sup>553</sup> The NSC staff noted this objection in the NSSM-238’s covering memorandum and also incorporated several changes recommended by Treasury into the final document. These actions were completed on January 17. The document was forwarded to the Carter administration, and portions of the document were incorporated into its Arms Transfer Policy Review that was directed by Presidential Review Memorandum 12 (PRM-12) on January 26, 1977. Portions of the PRM-12 study were incorporated in follow-on arms transfer studies. No specific decisions emerged as a result of NSSM-238 or PRM-12.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> White House to the Deputy Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the Director of Central Intelligence; memo; “SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf,” 23 December 1976; folder NSSM-238, U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf (2 of 3) (1); Container 42; National Security Council Institutional Files 1974–1977; GRFL, Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>550</sup> White House, “SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf.”

<sup>551</sup> Robert B. Oakley to Brent Scowcroft; memo; ““SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf;” 17 January 1977; folder NSSM-238-U.S. Policy Towards the Persian Gulf (3 of 3) (3); Container 42; National Security Council Institutional Files 1974–1977; GRFL, Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>552</sup> Oakley, “SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf.”

<sup>553</sup> Oakley, “SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf.”

<sup>554</sup> Dodson, “Final NSSM Status Report,” 21.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

The NSSM-238 report was the fourth and final study that examined American security policy in the Persian Gulf during the Nixon/Ford/Kissinger era. It fit the template that had been established by NSSM-66 in 1969/1970 and sustained by NSSM-181 and NSSM-182 in 1973: American strategic interests clearly articulated, a rather comprehensive appreciation of the indigenous political, military, economic, and social forces that defined the Persian Gulf security environment, and a measured view of the Soviet threat to the region. By January 1977, it was assessed that the Soviet position in the Persian Gulf was declining and, given the contradictions in Moscow's regional objectives and the overall climate in the Gulf, had little prospect of improvement. The region's oil wealth, Washington's close economic relationship with all of the Gulf's wealthy oil-producing states, and the staunch anti-communist attitudes prevalent in the region provided effective barriers to Soviet encroachment. Furthermore, the Persian Gulf region was assessed to be of relatively low priority to Moscow, and the prospect of the Soviets seizing the area by force was not considered to be a realistic threat to American interests in the region. NSSM-238, when paired with the December 1976 CIA study, provides a definitive line of demarcation between the broad Nixon/Ford view of the overall Persian Gulf strategic environment and its measured assessment of Soviet threats to American interests in the Persian Gulf versus the more narrow, Cold War-centric, alarmist viewpoint that would shape the Carter and Reagan administrations' views of the region. This nuanced viewpoint would be shifted aside by the staunch Cold War beliefs that shaped the incoming Carter administration's view of the region.

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## **VI. CONTAINMENT HAS BEEN FULLY BREACHED: 1977–1980**

While the Carter administration incorporated portions of NSSM-238 into its arms transfer policy review, the Ford administration's study did not have a significant impact on Persian Gulf security policy.<sup>555</sup> Nor did the new administration conduct its own Persian Gulf study that would serve as the basis for development of a new security policy. The Carter administration would, however, oversee a decided shift in American policy away from the arm's-length approach of the Nixon/Ford years and toward a deeper and more military-centric level of involvement in the Persian Gulf security environment. This shift was the resultant of the Cold War perspective through which the new administration viewed the region. This perspective resulted in the Carter administration's Persian Gulf security policy being shaped by three interrelated beliefs:

- The Soviet Union is confidently and successfully executing an offensive strategy designed to improve its geostrategic position vis-à-vis the United States. In contrast, the United States is becoming tentative and indecisive in the face of Soviet "victories" and "gains."
- The Soviet Union aggressively exploits regional instability to enhance its prestige and influence.
- The security of the Persian Gulf and its petroleum resources is essential to the survival of the West and of Japan, and vulnerable to Soviet encroachment.

These beliefs were present from the start of the Carter administration and were at odds with the Ford administration's assessment of the Persian Gulf strategic environment, articulated in NSSM-238 and the December 1976 CIA estimate, that the Soviet position in the Persian Gulf was declining and, given the contradictions in Moscow's regional objectives and the overall climate in the Gulf, had little prospect for improvement.

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<sup>555</sup> Dodson, "Final NSSM Status Report," 21.

These beliefs shaped how the Carter administration viewed events in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan over the course of 1977 and 1978, which appeared to confirm its worst fears about Soviet power and expansionism. Likewise, the January 1979 fall of the Shah and the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were also viewed through the prism formed by these three beliefs, which further stoked the administration's fear that Moscow stood poised to seize the Persian Gulf. As a consequence, from its earliest days the Carter administration was poised to more deeply embed the United States into the Persian Gulf security environment.

#### **A. U.S. STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND KEY BELIEFS**

The Carter administration arrived in Washington in January 1977 with the conviction that American foreign policy was “in need of broad renovation,” that the international position of the United States was “not good,” and that the United States should assume a posture of “subtle inspiration” and “cooperative leadership” to “help in the shaping of a new international system.”<sup>556</sup> This situation was, in part, the result of significant social, political, and economic changes that required U.S. foreign policy to move beyond a myopic focus on great powers and adopt a more holistic point of view that included the entire international community. Compounding matters, an “overemphasis on realpolitik and an exaggerated preoccupation with the Soviet threat” had placed the United States “badly out of synch with the Third World, with little awareness of the need for economic, political, and social change or sympathy for ideological diversity.”<sup>557</sup> These convictions spurred the new administration toward designing a foreign policy that would enable the United States “to play in the world as constructive a role as the one that it did play shortly after World War II.”<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter; memo; “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal;” 12 January 1978; folder Weekly Reports to the President 42–52b(1/78-3/78): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical File: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; Jimmy Carter Library (JCL), Atlanta, GA, 1–2, 6–7.

<sup>557</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 2.

<sup>558</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 7.

With this world view in mind, the Carter administration's initial foreign policy was designed around ten central goals. The first was to deepen political cooperation with Western Europe, Japan, and "other advanced democracies" via the further institutionalization of bilateral and multilateral consultative relationships and to improve macroeconomic policy coordination.<sup>559</sup> While strengthening ties with the advanced democracies, the Carter administration would simultaneously engage emerging regional "influentials," such as Venezuela, Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, India, and Indonesia, in order to "weave a worldwide web of bilateral, political, and, where appropriate, economic cooperation."<sup>560</sup> These ties with emerging regional powers would be reinforced via the strengthening and imaginative use of existing institutions, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). An emphasis on human rights complemented these efforts and would be manifested through American actions and example, as well as through bilateral and multilateral initiatives intended to influence other states to prioritize human rights. Finally, the Administration would emphasize nuclear nonproliferation and prioritize restricting the overall flow of arms from outside powers into the Third World.<sup>561</sup>

Despite the new administration's criticism that the Nixon and Ford administrations had overemphasized the Soviet Union, its remaining objectives were decidedly Cold War-focused. First, Carter administration policy would maintain requisite conventional and strategic (i.e., nuclear) military capability and capacity sufficient to deter Soviet military action and lesson Moscow's ability to exert political pressure on the United States.<sup>562</sup> This included both a modernized and "reconceptualized" defense posture that was appropriate to the changes in the strategic environment (discussed above) and the development of capabilities that would enable the United States to deter or respond to Soviet military

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<sup>559</sup> White House; memo; "Ten Central Objectives;" undated; folder Four Year Goals (4/77): Container 23; Subject File; Donated Historical File: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 4.

<sup>560</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 4.

<sup>561</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 4–5.

<sup>562</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 4–5.

intervention in the Third World.<sup>563</sup> To further offset perceived Soviet advantages in conventional (i.e., nonnuclear) military forces, and prevent Moscow from being able to concentrate its forces against Western Europe or the Middle East, the Carter administration would normalize U.S. relations with the Peoples' Republic of China. Preventing the Soviets from expanding their influence in the Middle East and Africa would be enabled via an Arab-Israeli peace settlement and the development of a coalition of moderate black African leaders and the transition to a biracial democracy in South Africa, respectively. Finally, the new administration's overall approach toward the Soviet Union would entail aspects of cooperation (e.g., pushing arms *limitation* talks toward arms *reduction* talks and working to ameliorate sources of tension) and competition (e.g., supporting U.S. allies to resist Soviet pressure and countering Soviet ideological appeal via a more affirmative stance on human rights).<sup>564</sup> The end goal of the Carter administrations approach to the Soviet Union was to make détente "more comprehensive and more reciprocal."<sup>565</sup>

Within the Persian Gulf, the Carter administration sought to maintain the United States' "present advantage" in the region, while simultaneously developing policies appropriate for the "foreseeable problems of the 1980s."<sup>566</sup> While these problems were undefined, the initial proposed policy initiatives displayed a large degree of continuity from the course charted by NSSM-66 and NSDM-92 in 1970. At least through 1977 and 1978, the Carter administration would continue to encourage the Gulf states to cooperate with each other on political, economic, and security-related matters, while simultaneously engaging the smaller Gulf states in more frequent and direct dialogue, to include visits by senior Carter administration officials.<sup>567</sup> The only significant diversion from previous policy was a proposed expansion of U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf and in the

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<sup>563</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 5.

<sup>564</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 4.

<sup>565</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 4

<sup>566</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 29.

<sup>567</sup> White House, "Ten Central Objectives," 29.



Indian Ocean if talks with the Soviets over the militarization of these areas did not progress satisfactorily.<sup>568</sup>

Saudi Arabia and Iran would remain as the centerpieces of U.S. policy. With regard to the former, the Carter administration hoped to more fully incorporate Saudi financial power both within the region and globally, to include a more prominent Saudi role in the IMF and the establishment of an institutionalized relationship between OPEC and OECD.<sup>569</sup> The administration also eyed Saudi capital as a key enabler of an institutionalized “Arab Marshall Plan” for the greater Middle East and as a sponsor for large-scale Egyptian and Sudanese development projects.<sup>570</sup> On the opposite side of the Gulf, the Carter administration would develop mechanisms supporting U.S.-Iranian consultations on Persian Gulf security matters, while simultaneously being prepared to mediate expected Arab-Persian tensions.<sup>571</sup> It was hoped that Tehran could play a stabilizing role with respect to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Also in keeping with Nixon/Ford era policy, the Carter administration would continue to press for increases in Saudi oil production, which provided 22 percent of U.S. oil imports and 7 percent of overall U.S. petroleum consumption.<sup>572</sup> American allies were even more dependent on the region, the Persian Gulf providing two-thirds and three-fourths of Western Europe’s and Japan’s oil imports, respectively.<sup>573</sup>

Despite this continuity in its initial policy initiatives, the Carter administration departed from the Nixon and Ford administrations’ consistent elevation of indigenous political, social, and economic forces as the principal drivers of the Persian Gulf strategic

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<sup>568</sup> White House, “Ten Central Objectives,” 29.

<sup>569</sup> White House, “Ten Central Objectives,” 16–17.

<sup>570</sup> White House, “Ten Central Objectives,” 16.

<sup>571</sup> White House, “Ten Central Objectives,” 17.

<sup>572</sup> “Briefing Prepared in the Department of State, undated,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabia Peninsula (Washington, DC: 2015), doc. 143.

<sup>573</sup> White House to the Secretary of State and the Director of the United States International Communications Agency; memo; “Afghanistan and Iran Paper,” 24 March 24 1980; folder Afghanistan 3/80: Container 1; Brzezinski Material: Brzezinski Office File; Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

environment over Cold War and Soviet influences. On a per-year basis, the Carter administration completed more NSSM-like studies, termed Presidential Review Memorandums (PRM) by the new administration, than during the Nixon/Ford years.<sup>574</sup> Nevertheless, it did not complete an NSC-level assessment of the Persian Gulf. Most importantly, the Carter administration departed from the Nixon/Ford era perspective that consistently deemphasized the Soviet threat to the region and instead viewed the region much more narrowly, through a Cold War lens. This perspective resulted in the Carter administration's views of the region and its regional policies being shaped by three interrelated beliefs.

The first of these beliefs was that the *Soviets were confidently and successfully executing an offensive strategy designed to improve its geostrategic position vis-à-vis the United States. In contrast, the United States had been tentative and indecisive in the face of Soviet "victories" and "gains."* This belief predated the administration's January 1977 assumption of power. The new national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in an unpublished book he had prepared for release in 1977, argued that the Soviet's détente policy since 1975 had become increasingly assertive in an effort to "deter the United States from responding effectively to the changing political balance."<sup>575</sup> In executing this policy, Brzezinski explained, Moscow combined elements of cooperation with the United States with elements of competition in order transform the global status quo. This strategy had allowed the Soviets to achieve what Brzezinski termed a "selective détente" wherein Moscow had cooperated with the United States in areas that cemented a parity relationship while simultaneously, and with apparent impunity, aggressively exploited regional instability to advance its interest and influence at the expense of the United States.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> White House, *Establishment of Presidential Review and Directive Series/NSC*, Presidential Directive/NSC 1 (Washington, DC: White House, 1977), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pd/pd01.pdf>. Presidential Review Memoranda (PRM) replaced the Nixon/Ford-era NSSMs. The purpose of PRMs was to direct various departments and agencies to conduct specific reviews and analyses. To promulgate Presidential decisions on national security matters, the Carter administration replaced NSDMs with Presidential Directives (PD/NSC).

<sup>575</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 148.

<sup>576</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter; memo; "NSC Weekly Report #47;" 17 February 1978; folder Weekly Reports to the President 42–52 (1/78-3/78): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 149.

Brzezinski summarized his views in a February 1976 memorandum to President Carter and they were reflected in the administration's initial four-year goals discussed above.<sup>577</sup>

Adding to these concerns, the Carter administration feared that unfavorable trends in the U.S.-Soviet military balance would enable Moscow to more assertively pursue their interests, especially in the Third World and Persian Gulf. These trends were the focus of an early Carter administration strategic-level review that was directed by Presidential Review Memorandum Ten (PRM-10). Issued on February 18, 1977 and entitled *Comprehensive Net Assessment and Military Force Posture Review*, PRM-10 was comprised of two closely related efforts.<sup>578</sup> The first was conducted under the auspices of the Policy Review Committee (PRC) under the overall supervision of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and examined the range of potential military strategies available to the United States. It also assessed each strategy's implications for military force levels and posture as well as new capabilities that each would require. This effort also examined the ability of a smaller arsenal of strategic (i.e., nuclear) weapons to deter Soviet attack and also reexamined the viability and desirability of the U.S. nuclear triad. Finally, the study assessed each military strategy's ability to achieve U.S. objectives in specific contingencies and identified key issues for presidential consideration.<sup>579</sup>

The second part of the study was much broader and was conducted by the Special Coordination Committee (SCC) under the overall chairmanship of National Security Advisor Brzezinski. This "dynamic net assessment" comprised a review of "the overall trends in the political, diplomatic, economic, technological, and military capabilities of the

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<sup>577</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 149.

<sup>578</sup> White House, *Comprehensive Net Assessment and Military Force Posture Review*, Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 10 (Washington, DC: White House, 1977), 1. Henceforth referred to as *Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 10*; White House, *The National Security Council System*, Presidential Directive/NSC 2 (Washington, DC: White House, 1977), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pd/pd02.pdf>. The Policy Review Committee (PRC) was intended to "develop national security policy for Presidential decision in those cases where the basic responsibilities fall primarily within a given department but where the subject also has important implications for other departments and agencies." Leadership of specific PRCs was based off the subject matter under consideration. The Special Coordination Committee (SCC) was led by the National Security Advisor and would "deal with specific cross-cutting issues requiring coordination in the development of options and the implementation of Presidential decisions."

<sup>579</sup> White House, *Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 10*, 1.

United States, its allies, and potential adversaries.”<sup>580</sup> This effort also examined the strategies and objectives of U.S. adversaries and identified alternative strategies and objectives for the United States. The scholar Samuel P. Huntington was enlisted to oversee the project’s working groups and task forces. Brown’s and Brzezinski’s efforts ran concurrently and were to be carefully coordinated. Together, they were intended to provide alternative military strategies and identify “the major defense programs and other initiatives required to implement them.”<sup>581</sup> Both PRM-10 studies were completed and discussed by the PRC and SCC on July 6 and 7, 1977, respectively. Together, they informed the Carter administration’s national strategy that was codified on August 24, 1977 in Presidential Directive (PD) 18 (PD/NSC-18).

The PRM-10 studies, in particular the Brzezinski/Huntingdon comprehensive net assessment, highlighted several trends that underlined the administration’s concerns over the evolving Cold War balance of power. First was the growth in Soviet nuclear and conventional military forces that had resulted in an “overall asymmetrical equivalence” between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>582</sup> The most concerning pro-Soviet military trends were in strategic (i.e., nuclear) forces, conventional forces in Europe, and force projection capabilities, especially with regard to the Persian Gulf.<sup>583</sup> Second, the net assessment theorized that the Soviet Union’s growing military power would make it “more prone to use military power for political purposes.”<sup>584</sup> While the United States was assessed to hold important advantages in the nonmilitary aspects of national power, the

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<sup>580</sup> White House, *Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 10*, 1–2.

<sup>581</sup> White House, *Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 10*, 2.

<sup>582</sup> White House; memo; “Meeting of the Special Coordination Committee, July 7, 1977, Summary of Conclusions,” 7 July 1977; folder USSR 1980–1995: Container 114; Vertical File; JCL, Atlanta, Georgia, 1; Samuel Huntington, “Agenda Paper for July 1 Meeting of PRM/NSC-10 Net Assessment Group,” June 29, 1977, NLC-17-4-9-11-8, 1–4.

<sup>583</sup> Unknown; “Questions for Discussion at SCC Meeting, July 7, 1977,” undated; folder PRM-10 (Comprehensive Net Assessment and Military Force Posture Review) 7/77: Container 38; Brzezinski Material: General Odom File; Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor; JCL, Atlanta, GA; Huntington, “Agenda Paper for July 1 Meeting of PRM/NSC-10 Net Assessment Group,” 2–4.

<sup>584</sup> White House, “Meeting of the Special Coordination Committee, July 7, 1977, Summary of Conclusions,” 3; Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #21,” 15 July 15 1977; folder Weekly Reports (to the President) 16–30 (6/77-9/77): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

PRM-10 net assessment expressed concern that the “dynamic” Soviet/Cuban role in Africa could tilt the overall diplomatic balance in this region toward the Soviets.<sup>585</sup> The greater Middle East and, more narrowly, the Persian Gulf were identified as the most important region of the third world for both the United States and the Soviet Union. Even more narrowly, the PRM-10 net assessment asserted that “from their viewpoint, the Soviets would be hard-pressed to find a better spot than Iran for a crisis-confrontation with the U.S.”<sup>586</sup> In light of the above, prudence required that the United States acquire military forces above and beyond what was required for a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict that could be used for crisis management and local wars, with the most likely sites being the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Korea.<sup>587</sup> President Carter directed the development of these forces when he signed PD/NSC-18 on August 26, 1977.<sup>588</sup>

Carter administration concerns over these pro-Soviet trends in the military aspects of national power became more pronounced over the course of 1978. In the fall of that year, the NSC developed a follow-on study to PRM-10 that was entitled Comprehensive Net Assessment 1978 (CNA-78). Updated in December 1978, and using PRM-10 as a starting point, CNA-78 reaffirmed the broad conclusions, discussed above, identified in the earlier studies. While CNA-78 assessed that nearly all trends in the non-military components of national power favored the United States, military trends appeared to be favoring Moscow.<sup>589</sup> Pro-Soviet trends in the nuclear balance between the two superpowers had “become significantly more pronounced” and assessments of key metrics (e.g., measurements of total megatonnage of nuclear weapons) indicated that the U.S. position

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<sup>585</sup> Huntingdon, “Agenda Paper for July 1 Meeting of PRM/NSC-10 Net Assessment Group,” 7.

<sup>586</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #92;” 30 March 1979; folder Weekly Reports (to the President) 91–101 (3/79-6/79): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 7.

<sup>587</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Weekly Report #21,” 2.

<sup>588</sup> White House, *U.S. National Strategy*, Presidential Directive/NSC-18 (Washington, DC: White House, 1977), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pd/pd18.pdf>, 4–5.

<sup>589</sup> White House; memo; “Comprehensive Net Assessment 1978 Overview;” undated; folder Weekly Reports (to the President) 91–101 (3/79-6/79): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 2. Henceforth referred to as CNA-78. CNA-78 was sent to President Carter as Tab (A) to Brzezinski’s March 30, 1979, NSC Weekly Report #92.

in the overall strategic balance would experience a steady decline into the 1990s.<sup>590</sup> CNA-78 presented a mixed picture of the conventional military balance between the two superpowers. While it asserted that full implementation of the Carter administration's long-term defense program would slow or halt the growing Soviet *quantitative* advantage in Europe, the decline of the U.S. dollar coupled with Soviet political initiatives and continued pro-Soviet trends in power projection, earlier identified in PRM-10, threatened this sunny assessment.<sup>591</sup> Additionally, overall trends related to technology and research and development threatened to erode or eliminate the U.S./NATO *qualitative* military advantage over the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.<sup>592</sup> Taken together, these trends in the strategic and conventional military balance threatened the overall asymmetrical military equivalence between the United States and the Soviet Union that had been identified in PRM-10. The Carter administration feared that the loss of military equivalence would translate into a corresponding loss of political power that would "constrain U.S. action, most immediately in the Persian Gulf area but also in other areas."<sup>593</sup>

Soviet success in achieving a more selective détente and in achieving asymmetric military equivalence with the United States, as Brzezinski explained to President Carter in January 1978, had meant that the Soviet Union had been projecting a sense of confidence in the overall conduct of its foreign policy and had come to enjoy a "monopoly in the area of ideological competition."<sup>594</sup> This enhanced Soviet confidence predated the Carter administration, Brzezinski explained, using Moscow's successful intervention in the Angolan civil war to support his argument. More troubling, Soviet confidence had continued to grow as, in addition to Angola, Moscow appeared to be making gains in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Soviet ambitions in these areas continued unabated and carried the risk that Moscow's behavior in the Third World could ultimately upend the

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<sup>590</sup> White House, CNA-78, 3.

<sup>591</sup> White House, CNA-78, 4, 10.

<sup>592</sup> White House, CNA-78, 6.

<sup>593</sup> William E. Odom, Memorandum to Reginald Bartholomew and Fritz Ermarth, "CNA-78 and PRM-42," November 20, 1978, NLC-12-15-4-7-1.

<sup>594</sup> Brzezinski, "NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal," 2, 10.

basis for cooperation in the overall U.S.-Soviet relationship.<sup>595</sup> This sense of vulnerability became more acute as events over the course of 1978 in Africa, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and southwest Asia seemed to confirm Carter administration fears over Soviet behavior, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff explaining to Secretary of Defense Brown in September 1978:

In this decade the Soviets have become increasingly confident in their ability to forcefully promote their interests in the area. It appears they are striving to gain ultimate control over critical raw materials, particularly oil; foster a more friendly government in Afghanistan; and generally strengthen the Soviet position at the expense of the West. The Soviets are adept opportunists and have reason to hope for significant gains in the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. These gains, if realized, will impact so profoundly on key Middle East and Persian Gulf states that, without compensating measures by the West and the United States, in particular, these states may be forced to accommodate the Soviets to the jeopardy of the West and, particularly, to the North Atlantic Alliance.<sup>596</sup>

Given these concerns, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that a comprehensive strategy for the Middle East and Persian Gulf be developed to serve as the basis for American security policy in the region for the next ten years.<sup>597</sup>

Compounding matters, as the Soviets were gaining confidence, American allies, in the estimate of the Carter administration, were growing increasingly concerned over what was viewed as a lack of decisiveness and assertiveness in American security policy. This lack of confidence, Brzezinski explained to President Carter in January 1978, was an inheritance bestowed upon the Carter administration when it assumed power.<sup>598</sup> The national security advisor explained that American allies, particularly in Western Europe,

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<sup>595</sup> Brzezinski, "NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal," 10.

<sup>596</sup> "Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978," *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>597</sup> "Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978," *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>598</sup> Brzezinski, "NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal," 1.

were uneasy about American “constancy, will, and ability to lead.”<sup>599</sup> While several factors contributed to this unease, a key underlying issue centered on the “seeming softness in (U.S.) policy regarding Soviet assertiveness.”<sup>600</sup> More broadly, there existed a “widespread sense abroad that the United States was fearful of global change, indifferent to the newly surfacing aspirations of mankind, and thus unable to exercise creative leadership, designed to propel historical change in the right direction.”<sup>601</sup> While the national security advisor judged the first year of the Carter administration’s foreign policy to be relatively successful, a “softness in our policy regarding Soviet assertiveness” and “inadequate articulation of our broad foreign policy assumptions and priorities” represented significant shortcomings that had impeded Carter administration success over the course of its first year in office.<sup>602</sup> These factors raised concerns that President Carter’s foreign policy was veering leftward toward an extreme liberal position, reminiscent of that held by former Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern wherein accommodation of the Soviets and partnering with Moscow to resolve regional disputed trumped strengthening American relationships with its allies.<sup>603</sup>

Carter administration concerns over perceptions of American weakness and uncertain leadership grew more acute over the course of 1978 and 1979, as events in and around the Persian Gulf seemed to confirm their belief in Soviet assertiveness and American timidity. The lack of a strong American response in support of Somalia in its fight with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region, in Yemen, as well as Washington’s failure to prevent the fall of the Iranian Shah had, in the Carter administration’s estimate, led to a perception among the countries of the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, that the United States was “uncertain of its purposes and failing to be responsive to the needs and concerns

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<sup>599</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 1, 8.

<sup>600</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 27. Other factors identified included: unnecessary friction with some friendly states over nuclear nonproliferation; fears of U.S. unilateralism and unpredictability; uncertainty over how the United States reconciled détente with the Soviets with NATO alliance security, and; the administration’s inadequate articulation of its foreign policy assumptions and priorities.

<sup>601</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 1.

<sup>602</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 26–27.

<sup>603</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 28–30.



of the area.”<sup>604</sup> The Carter administration’s “inadequate” support for the Shah had left the Saudis “bitterly unhappy” and caused the ruling regime to “wonder if the U.S. will rely similarly on vague Soviet promises of good behavior in the Persian Gulf region instead of confronting the Soviet challenge” to the area.<sup>605</sup> Concerns over Saudi perceptions of the American reliability prompted the Carter administration to dispatch Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to Saudi Arabia in February 1979 with the objective of restoring Saudi confidence. When the PRC met on February 1, 1979, to discuss Secretary of Defense Brown’s mission, several voices sympathized with the Saudi opinion of American steadfastness, perhaps none more clearly than the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General David Jones. The CJCS offered that governments in and around the Persian Gulf expected the United States to be timid in responding to threats to its interests and suspected that the Carter administration was unwilling to face Congressional opposition to such measures.<sup>606</sup> Concern over allies’ perception of U.S. weakness grew over the course of the spring and summer of 1979 as the Iran situation deteriorated, with Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger stating in May and again in June that “there is growing perception of U.S. weakness which is compounded by the lack of visible instruments of power in comparison to the overhang of Soviet power in the region.”<sup>607</sup>

Given the Soviets’ aggressive strategy, an important question for the Carter administration centered on how and where the Soviets “would attempt to use their growing military strength for political and diplomatic purposes and how can the U.S. best deter or counter such use.”<sup>608</sup> From Brzezinski’s perspective, as he explained to President Carter

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<sup>604</sup> “White House, Summary of Conclusions of a Presidential Review Committee Meeting, January 23, 1979, 10:30AM - 12:05PM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 180; Kieninger, *The Diplomacy of Détente*, 55.

<sup>605</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, January 26, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 181.

<sup>606</sup> “Minutes of a Policy Review Committee Meeting, February 1, 1979, 3 - 4:30PM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 17.

<sup>607</sup> “Minutes of Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30 PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00 AM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26; Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, May 11, 1979, 3:30 - 4:20,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 23.

<sup>608</sup> White House, *CNA-78*, 2.

in December 1978, an arc of crisis “stretching from Chittagong (Bangladesh) through Islamabad to Aden” represented the “area of our current greatest vulnerability.”<sup>609</sup> Within this arc, and extending further into Africa, Brzezinski continued:

Fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to us are threatened with fragmentation. The resulting political vacuum might well be filled by elements more sympathetic to the Soviet Union. This is especially likely since there is a pervasive feeling in the area that the U.S. is no longer in a position to offer effective political and military protection.

If the above analysis is correct, the West as a whole may be faced with a challenge of historic proportions. A shift in Iranian/Saudi orientation would have a direct impact on trilateral cohesion, and it would induce in time more “neutralist” attitudes on the part of some of our key allies. In a sentence it would mean a fundamental shift in the global structure of power.

Indeed, Soviet strategy, as the national security advisor had written to the president almost eight months earlier, exploited this chaotic environment to advance Moscow’s interests, both within the “Arc” and elsewhere.<sup>610</sup>

Brzezinski’s perspective provides the clearest elucidation of the second major belief that informed the Carter administration’s view of the Persian Gulf: *the Soviet Union aggressively exploited regional instability to enhance its prestige and influence*. This belief shaped how the administration viewed events in the Horn of Africa, in Yemen, and in Afghanistan over the course of 1977 and 1978, and would be amplified by the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Events in Ethiopia seemed to confirm the Carter administration’s fears of Soviet adventurism. In 1974 the long-standing and pro-Western Ethiopian ruler Haile Selassie was deposed following a military-led revolution. Over the next three years, Addis Ababa, now under the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, steadily and with much bloodshed drifted toward “scientific socialism” and, by 1977, was firmly aligned with the Soviet

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<sup>609</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #81,” 2 December 1978; folder Weekly Reports (to the President) (71-81) (9/78-12/78): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 3.

<sup>610</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #53,” 7 April 1978; folder Weekly Reports to the President 53–60 (4/78-5/78): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 2.

Union.<sup>611</sup> Events culminated in on April 23, 1977, when Mengistu ordered the closure of several U.S. government installations. While Moscow welcomed Ethiopia's shift from the American to the Soviet orbit, the Soviet's burgeoning relationship with Addis Ababa complicated its relationship with its other regional ally, and Ethiopia's enemy, Somalia. Even as Mengistu expelled the Americans from his territory, Ethiopia and Somalia were fighting over the disputed Ogaden region, which placed Moscow in a delicate position between its two regional allies. In October 1977, disillusioned with what it viewed as Somali ruler Siad Barre's untrustworthiness and concerned that the much more ideologically pure Mengistu regime would not survive if Somali forces emerged victorious from the Ogaden war, Moscow publicly announced a halt to all arms supplies to Somalia, and the commencement of an arms supply relationship with Addis Ababa "to protect her revolution."<sup>612</sup> The Soviets provided over \$1 billion in military equipment to Ethiopia.<sup>613</sup> Additionally, approximately one thousand uniformed military advisors were deployed to help the Ethiopian army plan a counteroffensive against the Somali forces occupying its territory, joining 11,600 Cuban soldiers that were deployed in September.<sup>614</sup> In November, Barre expelled all Soviet and Cuban military personnel from Somalia, ordered Soviet bases in Berbera closed, and broke off relations with Havana.

Soviet activities in the Horn of Africa were the subject of intense disagreement within the Carter administration, particularly between National Security Advisor Brzezinski and Secretary of State Vance and their respective staffs. Secretary of State Vance and the State Department viewed the Ogaden conflict as a local dispute that was being exploited by Moscow to enhance its political clout in the region, as opposed to being a part of an overall Soviet strategic design. In this respect, it was in Moscow's interest to ensure that the conflict did not spiral out of control and the State department possessed information that the Soviets were restraining the Ethiopians and working to help end

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<sup>611</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 257.

<sup>612</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 276.

<sup>613</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 276.

<sup>614</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 276.

hostilities.<sup>615</sup> Secretary Vance believed that, over the long-term, Addis Ababa would ultimately eject Soviet forces from their territory, as Egypt and Sudan had done earlier in the 1970s.<sup>616</sup> National Security Advisor Brzezinski and his staff took an opposing and much more alarmist view of the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute. The deteriorating situation in the African Horn became the subject of much NSC deliberation and, in his reports to President Carter, Brzezinski played down his significant disagreement with the secretary of state over the nature and origin of the Ogaden crisis. In his correspondence to President Carter, the national security advisor successfully marginalized the comparatively more nuanced views of the conflict presented by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the State Department and swayed the president toward an alarmist and Cold War-centric perspective on the crisis.<sup>617</sup>

On March 3, 1978, as the Ethiopian Army, with Soviet and Cuban support, conducted offensive military operations intended to push Somali forces out of the Ogaden, Brzezinski forwarded to President Carter SCC recommendations developed during a March 2 meeting that focused on the Ogaden conflict. In a cover memo, he explained that the SCC recommendations “did not go far enough and they are not responsive to the real problem.”<sup>618</sup> In his view, Soviet actions in the African Horn provided further proof that Moscow continued to define détente “in a purely selective way, retaining for itself the right to use force in order to promote wider political objectives.”<sup>619</sup> On June 30, 1978, Brzezinski repeated this theme in a memo to the President that provided two views of the Soviet approach to détente and Moscow’s general foreign policy position and outlook:

One view (which Hyland took the lead in expressing), was that the Soviets have “stomped all over the code of détente.” They continue to pursue a selective détente. Their action reflects growing assertiveness in Soviet foreign policy generally. Brezhnev’s diminished control permits the natural,

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<sup>615</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 86.

<sup>616</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 74–75, 84.

<sup>617</sup> Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 84–85.

<sup>618</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations;” 3 March 1978; folder Meetings-SCC 61 3/2/78: Container 28; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

<sup>619</sup> Brzezinski, “The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 1.

historical dominating impulse of the regime to assert itself with less restraint. (Bowie and Horelick tend to this view and it is the one closest to my own).<sup>620</sup>

In Brzezinski's view, Soviet policy in the African Horn was a continuation of a course Moscow had held for 15 years that aimed to maintain stable relations with the United States in convenient areas while aggressively pursuing opportunities to expand its political influence.<sup>621</sup> Soviet/Cuban activities in Angola in the mid-1970s provided one concrete example of the latter. The Ogaden crisis, in the national security advisor's opinion, represented an ominous development: unlike Angola, where the Soviets had relied on proxies to further their policy objectives, Moscow had intervened directly, which represented an increasing boldness in Soviet policy.<sup>622</sup> Disagreeing with Secretary of State Vance's view that the Moscow was exploiting the Ogaden crisis as a convenient means to advance its position in the region, Brzezinski asserted that Soviet policy in the Horn of Africa was the result of a larger strategic design and that the Soviets were able to assume the risks inherent in pursuing bolder policy objectives because they had "concluded that they can run such risks and get away with them."<sup>623</sup>

In Brzezinski's opinion, if the Soviet's support to the Mengistu regime was successful the consequences of Moscow's aggressive strategic design to American interests in key areas of the globe were grave. On the African continent, Ethiopian defeat of Somali forces would "have a significant demonstration effect elsewhere in Africa" while also encouraging "radical African states to act more assertively."<sup>624</sup> Outside of Africa, Brzezinski feared that key American allies, such as Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the

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<sup>620</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; "NSC Weekly Report #65;" 30 June 1978; folder Weekly Reports (to the President) 61-71 (6/78-9/78): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1. Robert Bowie and Arnold Horelick were CIA representatives at the meeting on which Brzezinski is reporting. Other participants included Marshall Shulman (from the Department of State), and Bill Hyland (a former Deputy National Security Advisor to President Ford).

<sup>621</sup> Brzezinski, "The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations," 1.

<sup>622</sup> Brzezinski, "The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations," 2.

<sup>623</sup> Brzezinski, "The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations," 2.

<sup>624</sup> Brzezinski, "The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations," 2.

western Europeans would “notice that the Soviet Union acted assertively, energetically, and had its own way” and was prepared to leverage its military might to “decisively exploit targets of opportunity,” the national security advisor explaining:

I think it is fair to say that the Soviets are now engaged in a process which could undermine our influence in the Middle East, isolate and surround such friends as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and out-flank both the Middle East and perhaps our West European friends through both the radicalization of Africa and through the more direct intrusion of Soviet/Cuban military presence. If successful, this could produce far-reaching consequences for the political orientation of Western Europe (“Finlandization”) and of our friends in the Middle East.<sup>625</sup>

In the national security advisor’s opinion, Soviet success in the Horn of Africa threatened the viability of American Cold War strategy, Brzezinski explaining to President Carter, “in effect, first through a proxy (as in Angola) and now more directly (as in Ethiopia) the Soviet Union will be demonstrating that containment has now been fully breached.”<sup>626</sup>

As Brzezinski was worrying over the deteriorating situation in the African Horn, events across the narrow Bab el-Mandeb strait were adding to the national security advisor’s concerns over Soviet advancement. In the aftermath of a June 1978 coup attempt in neighboring North Yemen, the leader of the PDRY’s (i.e., South Yemen’s) ruling socialist party, Salim Ali Rubayyi, was executed and replaced by a rival, Abd al-Fattah Ismail. Ismail, in an attempt to bolster his domestic position, moved the PDRY closer to the Soviet Union. In August, NSC staffer Samuel Hoskinson recommended to Brzezinski that a PRM be issued that would direct a study on the Yemen crisis. In explaining the situation to the national security advisor, Hoskinson asserted that “there is little question that the Soviets, and especially the Cubans, played a direct and critical role in Abl al-Fattah

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<sup>625</sup> Brzezinski, “The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 2–3; Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #57,” 5 May 1978; folder Weekly Reports to the President (4/78-5/78): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 2–3.

<sup>626</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #46,” 9 February 1978; folder Weekly Reports to the President 42–52 (1/78-3/78): Container 41; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 2; Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, 133.

Ismail's violent ouster of Salim al-Rubayyi Ali from the PDRY presidency in late June."<sup>627</sup> In the NSC staffer's view, Moscow's acted in order to "establish and maintain a secure base of operations in South Yemen which can provide logistics support for their Indian Ocean fleet and give them a presence on the Red Sea and Arabian Peninsula." Hoskinson continued, writing that the United States "has an obvious strong interest in countering this most recent example of Soviet expansionism." Three days later Saudi King Khalid expressed similar views vis-à-vis Soviet intentions in a letter to President Carter. The Saudi monarch identified Saudi Arabia as the Soviet's ultimate objective and argued that the United States should allow the kingdom to provide military equipment to North Yemen.<sup>628</sup> The Carter administration acceded to Saudi pressure and provided North Yemen with limited quantities of American equipment, although the types and amount of equipment fell far short of North Yemeni desires. The situation deteriorated further in February 1979 when war broke out between the two Yemens. Coming just days after the fall of the Shah's government in Iran, the Carter administration viewed the conflict as a Soviet-orchestrated crisis that was intended to extend its influence into the Southern part of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>629</sup> Eager to present a strong response, the Carter administration quickly approved \$390 million in Saudi-funded arms transfers to North Yemen while the CIA provided covert assistance and implemented a program intended to sow dissension within the PDRY.<sup>630</sup>

Concurrent events in Afghanistan were also concerning. Long experienced in leveraging international rivalries to its advantage, Afghanistan had been the recipient of significant Soviet and American aid. The Soviet-Afghan relationship had become stronger in the aftermath of the April 1978 coup that, for the first time, witnessed the emergence of a communist government in Afghanistan. The Soviets were quick to recognize the new

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<sup>627</sup> "Memorandum From Samuel Hoskinson of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), August 16, 1978," *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 252.

<sup>628</sup> "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State, August 22, 1978, 1450Z," *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 253.

<sup>629</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 722–723.

<sup>630</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 329.

regime and the warm relations between the two governments were apparent in a May 10 communiqué, which highlighted the “fraternal bonds” tying the two communist regimes together.<sup>631</sup> Backing up this flowery statement was a new round of agreements that included additional aid, loans, debt relief, and military assistance. The United States’ reaction to the Communist takeover in Afghanistan was somewhat muted.<sup>632</sup> The Afghan regime received formal recognition by the United States on May 6, 1978, but the February 1979, kidnapping and subsequent death of the U.S. ambassador in Kabul resulted in the United States halting aid commitments to Afghanistan and the departure of much of the U.S. embassy staff from the country.

By late 1978, the nascent Afghan government was already disintegrating. Infighting between communist political rivals coupled with insurgent attacks, including the March 1979 massacre of 50 Soviet soldiers and their dependents, led to a second coup in September 1979, which installed the erratic and unpredictable former defense minister Hafizulla Amin as the prime minister.<sup>633</sup> The Soviets despised Amin, and by autumn plans were being drafted to forcibly unseat and replace him with Babrak Karmal, ambassador to Czechoslovakia and a Soviet favorite. Soviet troops would be required to maintain order in Afghanistan and to buy time for the new regime to consolidate power and rebuild the Afghan army.<sup>634</sup>

The specter of direct Soviet involvement in Afghanistan had been a cause for concern within the Carter Administration throughout 1979. In March, National Security Advisor Brzezinski pressured Secretary of State Vance to formally register American concern over the Soviet’s “creeping intervention in Afghanistan.”<sup>635</sup> The State Department duly informed Moscow that Soviet involvement in internal Afghan politics was considered

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<sup>631</sup> Joseph J. Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Lexington and Toronto: Lexington Books, 1986), 53.

<sup>632</sup> Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*, 54, 58.

<sup>633</sup> Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*, 60. American support to Afghan anticommunist insurgents would start in April 1979.

<sup>634</sup> Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*, 71.

<sup>635</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 426.



a “serious matter with potential for heightening tensions and destabilizing the situation in the entire region.”<sup>636</sup> Brzezinski successfully obtained consensus for the provision of support to Afghan rebel forces in April. In May he warned the president that Soviet control over Afghanistan placed the security of Pakistan and Iran at risk while also providing Moscow easier access to the Indian Ocean.<sup>637</sup> The national security advisor reminded the president of Russia’s “traditional” interest in pushing southward, and illustrated this point with an erroneous interpretation of the secret November, 1940 German-Soviet negotiations in which Brzezinski mistakenly attributed a Soviet claim to preeminence in the region.<sup>638</sup> Brzezinski repeated this point in March 1980, explaining in a memorandum to President Carter that the Soviet invasion represented a symptom of assertive Soviet behavior and that a drive toward the Persian Gulf represented a “constant” in Soviet foreign policy.<sup>639</sup> President Carter had directly conveyed his concern to Brezhnev during a June 1979 summit meeting in Vienna, stating that the United States expected the Soviets to refrain from interfering in Afghan internal affairs.<sup>640</sup> Afghanistan remained an issue of great concern within the Carter Administration until the start of the Iran hostage crisis in November 1979.

In the estimation of the Carter administration, events in Ethiopia, Yemen, and in Afghanistan shared two things in common. The first was that in each case the Soviets had demonstrated an aggressive “predisposition to exploit a local conflict for larger purposes.”<sup>641</sup> The NSC’s January 1978 assessment of the first year of the Carter administration noted that the Soviets had “stepped up their efforts to exploit African

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<sup>636</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1050.

<sup>637</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 427.

<sup>638</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 427; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1050. See footnote 202.

<sup>639</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #134;” 28 March 1980; folder Weekly Reports to the President 121–135 (12/79-4/80): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1–2.

<sup>640</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1052.

<sup>641</sup> White House; transcript; “SCC Meeting on Horn of Africa, 2 March 1978, 12:50-2:15 pm, White House Situation Room;” 2 March 1978; folder USSR-U.S. Conference 3.95 Briefing Book (1): Container 115; Vertical File; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 8; Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #109;” 13 September 1979; folder Weekly Reports (to the President) 102–120 (7/79-12/79): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1, 3.

turbulence to their own advantage.”<sup>642</sup> In the fall of 1978 CNA-78 assessed that a general cause of changes in the key trends that shaped the strategic environment could be attributed to Moscow and Havana taking “advantage of key opportunities to expand their presence and influence” in Afghanistan and Africa.<sup>643</sup> The Soviets had leveraged these opportunities to gain “three important bridgeheads” in Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Yemen.<sup>644</sup> This was especially concerning given the 1977 PRM-10 assessment’s identification of Iran as the Soviet’s best spot to have a confrontation with the United States.<sup>645</sup> The Carter administration’s concern over Moscow’s ability to leverage regional instability to achieve Soviet strategic end states grew more acute in the aftermath of the Shah’s January 16, 1979 departure from Iran and the February 11 fall of his government. When Secretary of Defense Brown was dispatched to the Persian Gulf in February 1979 to restore and reinforce confidence in the United States among Washington’s regional allies and partners, he was specifically instructed to “make it clear that we see the region to be under serious threat from Soviet power which is systematically exploiting internal instability as well as regional conflicts,” as evidenced by Moscow’s activities in the Horn of Africa, in the PDRY, and in Afghanistan.<sup>646</sup>

The Carter administration’s assessment of Soviet strategy and American meekness, as well as its belief that the Soviets had achieved a position of strength over the United States in the Persian Gulf, marked a significant departure from the prevailing perspective of the Nixon and Ford years. Similarly, its judgment that Moscow was bent on exploiting regional instability as a source of strategic leverage also marked an important departure from assessments and studies developed in the preceding administrations.

It should be recalled that NSSM-66, NSSM-181/182, and NSSM-238 had consistently downplayed the Soviet threat and elevated social, economic, and political

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<sup>642</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” 32.

<sup>643</sup> White House, *CNA-78*, 7.

<sup>644</sup> White House, *CNA-78*, 7–8.

<sup>645</sup> White House, *CNA-78*, 7–8.

<sup>646</sup> “Letter from President Carter to Secretary of Defense Brown, February 9, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 19.

forces indigenous to the Persian Gulf as the principle shapers of the Persian Gulf strategic environment and of the threats to American interests in the region. These earlier studies were consistent in their assessment that these forces, which placed constraints on American policy options, also worked directly against Soviet strategic interests. They were unanimous in their assertion that Soviet policies in the Gulf placed Moscow in a paradox wherein its support for its only real allies in the region, the radical states of Iraq and the PDRY, undermined its efforts to cultivate closer ties with the Saudis, the emerging Gulf Arab states, and with Iran. Additionally, the Gulf Arabs' anticommunist views and distrust of the Soviet Union as well as their growing oil wealth pushed them toward a closer relationship with the United States. Between 1970, with the development of NSSM-66, and December, 1977, with the completion of NSSM-238 and the related CIA estimate on the Persian Gulf, the Nixon/Ford studies assessed that the Soviet position in the Persian Gulf had steadily deteriorated and that the overall prospects for any improvement to Moscow's position were poor. The Soviet position in the Persian Gulf and throughout the greater Middle East had been further reduced by the signing of the Camp David Accords on September 17, 1978, arguably the capstone foreign policy achievement of the Carter administration.

Soviet "gains" in Ethiopia, the PDRY, and Afghanistan shared a second point in common, which helped shape Carter administration comparatively alarmist view of the U.S. position in the Gulf: the proximity of each Soviet client state to Persian Gulf oil fields and their associated sea lanes to the West and to Japan. The administration's first review of the situation in the Horn of Africa, initiated in March 1977 by PRM-21 and led by the State Department, had taken a somewhat nuanced view of the strategic importance of the region. The report noted that Soviet preeminence in Ethiopia could provide Moscow with "some leverage against countries reliant on that route, particularly oil supplier and consumers," but "would not substantially enhance their ability to interdict the Red Sea maritime route beyond their Somalia-based capability."<sup>647</sup> With this measured view in mind, the State Department study asserted that "militarily, the Horn is not of great strategic

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<sup>647</sup> "Paper Prepared by the Policy Review Committee, undated," *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVII, Horn of Africa, Part I, doc. 10.

importance to the U.S.” The Defense Department disagreed on this point, stating for the record that it “holds that U.S. interests in the Horn are chiefly strategic, reflecting the area’s proximity to Middle East oil fields, the sea oil routes, and the Red Sea passage to the Mediterranean.”<sup>648</sup> The Defense Department further explained that it viewed “with concern the continuing expansion of Soviet facilities and presence in Somalia and inroads elsewhere in the Horn.”

By 1978 the Carter administration’s view of the strategic significance of the Horn of Africa had shifted closer the Defense Department’s. Concerned over the Soviet and Cuban presence in Ethiopia, the Carter administration issued PRM-36 on May 23, 1978, to review U.S. policy objectives and options in the Horn. The PRM-36 report, like PRM-21, was led by the State Department and was completed on August 18. The study provided an alarming assessment of Soviet motivations in the Horn of Africa:

At the moment, the working hypothesis which seems to fit best the known facts is that the Soviet motivations are a geographically differentiated “mix” of geopolitical/strategic and ideological/political elements. Soviet involvement in the Horn appears to be primarily geopolitical/strategic and secondarily ideological/political. If the Soviets can establish a strong, permanent presence in Ethiopia (including development of military support facilities), they anticipate they will be in a position to strengthen their impact on Middle Eastern events and affect the flow of oil, to project their military power east into the Indian Ocean, and extend their influence west and south into Africa.<sup>649</sup>

This assessment aligned with a February 2, 1978 CIA document that asserted “Moscow was attracted to the Horn by its strategic location, particularly its proximity to the Middle East with its vast oil reserves and the Indian Ocean with its major trade routes.”<sup>650</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> “Paper Prepared by the Policy Review Committee, undated,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVII, Horn of Africa, Part 1, doc. 10.

<sup>649</sup> Department of State, *Response: Presidential Review Memorandum 36 Soviet/Cuban Presence in Africa* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1978), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/prm/prm36.pdf>, 13.

<sup>650</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “The Soviet Union and the Horn,” (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1978), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81M00980R002700020054-2.pdf>, 1.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with, and expanded on the PRM-36 assessment. In March 1978, Secretary of Defense Brown directed that the Defense Department complete a review of Soviet and American strategy, plans, force structure, and deployments related to U.S. and allied interests related to the Persian Gulf. “The President and I have stated that the Middle East and Persian Gulf cannot be separated from our security and that of NATO,” Secretary Brown explained to JCS Chairman General David Jones, adding “the United States intends to safeguard the production of oil and its transportation to consumer nations without interference by foreign powers.”<sup>651</sup> General Jones summarized the completed report to Secretary of Defense Brown on September 7, 1978, and asserted that Soviet objectives in the region were to “gain ultimate control over critical raw materials, particularly oil; enhance their southern flank security by neutralizing Iran and Turkey; foster a more friendly government in Afghanistan; and generally strengthen the Soviet position at the expense of the West.”<sup>652</sup>

Thus, from the Carter administration’s perspective, the Soviets were aggressively executing an offensive strategy intended to weaken the position of a tentative United States. Moscow exploited regional instability as a key component of its strategy. Furthermore, the Soviet strategy was being successfully implemented in the area of the third world that PRM-10 had identified as the most important for the United States and the Soviet Union. As the Carter administration considered Soviet “advances” in the Horn of Africa, in the PDRY, and in Afghanistan over the course of 1977 and 1978, its assessment of the consequences of the tremendous changes occurring in the around the Persian Gulf to U.S. interests become more directly focused on threats to the region’s oil resources. This reflected the third belief that shaped the Carter administration’s view of the Persian Gulf: *the security of the Persian Gulf and its petroleum resources was essential to the survival of the West and of Japan, and was vulnerable to Soviet encroachment.*

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<sup>651</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9. See note 2.

<sup>652</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

Oil had always been the cornerstone for American economic interests in the Persian Gulf. Access to petroleum had in turn been part of a broader set of economic interests that also included protecting American investments (primarily oil-related) and recycling of Arab and Iranian petrodollars through the American and Western European economies, both to spur economic growth and help alleviate the U.S. balance of payments crisis. The Nixon and Ford administration's comparatively holistic conception of American economic interests in the Persian Gulf was not held by the Carter administration, which focused more narrowly on ensuring continued access to the region's oil. Indeed, at the outset of the Carter administration NSC staffers William Quandt and Gary Sick assessed that American interests in the region revolved "almost entirely around questions of oil production, price and supply, together with protection and encouragement of the considerable U.S. commercial investments in the region."<sup>653</sup> Coincident with the Carter administration's narrowing of U.S. regional economic interests was a growing belief that access to the Persian Gulf oil was essential to the actual *survival* of the West, an outlook rooted in the transformation of the United States into a major importer of petroleum in the 1960s, and the OPEC-imposed oil price shock that accompanied the Arab-Israel War of 1973. This belief grew more acute over the course of 1978 and 1979 in the face of Soviet involvement in Ethiopia and following the fall of the Shah.

This is not to say that the Nixon and Ford administrations had been unconcerned with issues surrounding the global oil market or that they discounted the importance of Persian Gulf oil. Henry Kissinger had been shaken by the impact of the 1973–1974 oil crisis on the west, stating in August 1974 "I simply don't think we can take another embargo. It would lead to economic collapse in Europe. It would lead to the collapse of NATO."<sup>654</sup> Oil price stability became an issue of great concern throughout the remaining days of the Nixon Presidency and into the Ford administration. In keeping with his view of the limits of American power to impact events in the region, Kissinger relied on

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<sup>653</sup> "Memorandum From William Quandt and Gary Sick of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), February 2, 1977," *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 1.

<sup>654</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, August 13, 1974," *FRUS*, 1979–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980 (Washington, DC, 2012), doc. 1.

diplomacy with the Saudis and the Iranians to limit nonmarket-driven oil price increases. He also negotiated with the major oil consumers in an effort to form a unified block of OPEC “customers” to lessen the cartel’s political and economic influence and avoid future embargos. This latter effort resulted in the development of the International Energy Agency (IEA) to help oil consuming countries respond collectively to major disruptions in oil supply through the release of emergency oil stocks.

Carter administration concern over access to Persian Gulf oil was amplified by its dire estimates of the overall ability of the international oil market to keep pace with growing U.S. and global demand, an April 1977 CIA report estimating that oil production would be unable to fulfill global requirements by the mid-1980s.<sup>655</sup> While this would have obvious impacts on the economies of the United States, Japan, and the NATO countries, concerns over oil supplies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe provided an additional complication. Soviet oil production was expected to peak as early as 1978 and by the mid-1980s at the latest, which would necessitate Moscow importing between 3.5 and 4.5 million barrels of oil per day from the OPEC states.<sup>656</sup> Thus, as the importance of Persian Gulf oil production was growing in importance to the United States and its allies, in the Carter administration’s estimate the Soviet Union was emerging as a competitor for the region’s petroleum resources.

Simultaneously, the Carter administration was growing increasingly concerned over American vulnerability to petroleum supply disruptions, and initiated an assessment of this vulnerability in August 1977. This assessment consisted of two parts: an international energy analysis, led by the State Department, and a military contingency analysis chaired by the Defense Department.<sup>657</sup> The latter included an analysis of the

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<sup>655</sup> Walter J. Levy to Zbigniew Brzezinski; memo; “U.S. Energy Policy—Its Interplay and Coordination with Major International Strategic, Political, and Economic Issues,” 29 June 1977; folder Oil 7/77-7/78; Container 48; Brzezinski Material Subject File; Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 2.

<sup>656</sup> Levy, “U.S. Energy Policy—Its Interplay and Coordination with Major International Strategic, Political, and Economic Issues,” 3.

<sup>657</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), August 19, 1977,” *FRUS*, 1979–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980 (Washington, DC, 2012), doc. 127.

impact that oil supply disruptions would have on U.S. ability to execute military contingency plans and identified any “military and related requirements for securing petroleum resources” in a range of disruption scenarios.<sup>658</sup> On March 24, 1978, the SCC discussed the assessment, and concluded that the United States faced a major vulnerability to petroleum supply disruptions.<sup>659</sup> The SCC assessed that the most likely disruptive scenarios would result from accidents or terrorist/guerilla actions that would cause a relatively minor and short-term disruption. A deliberate Saudi decision to limit its oil production was deemed the second most likely scenario that would constrict global oil supplies.<sup>660</sup> Despite these scenarios, which were driven by forces internal to the Persian Gulf, the SCC directed the Defense Department to develop contingency plans to counter the most likely Soviet and Cuban threats to Persian Gulf oil supplies, with special emphasis on hostile forces operations from the PDRY as well as potential threats posed by other hostile regional governments.

Events in the Persian Gulf over the course of 1978 and early 1979 heightened the Carter administration’s concerns over the vulnerability of the petroleum supply. Domestic unrest in Iran, which included oil industry strikes, had risen steadily throughout 1978 and culminated with the complete cessation of Iranian oil production on December 25, followed by the fall of the Shah in January 1979. The removal of Iranian oil from the global market coupled with growth in demand, contradictory government policies, oil producing countries’ self-interest, and emotion spurred massive increases in the cost of oil, despite sizable increases in Saudi output designed to offset the loss of Iranian production.<sup>661</sup> The fall of the Shah eliminated the United States’ principal regional ally and heightened Carter administration concern’s over the vulnerability of the Persian Gulf and its resources to

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<sup>658</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), August 19, 1977,” *FRUS*, 1979–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980 (Washington, DC, 2012), doc. 127.

<sup>659</sup> Summary of Conclusions of Special Coordination Committee Meeting, March 24, 1978, 10:30 - 11:45AM,” *FRUS*, 1979–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980, doc. 145.

<sup>660</sup> “Summary of Conclusions of Special Coordination Committee Meeting, March 24, 1978, 10:30 - 11:45AM,” *FRUS*, 1979–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980, doc. 145.

<sup>661</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, 666–669. The September 1980 commencement of the Iran-Iraq War further stressed the global oil market.



Soviet domination. These factors dramatically increased the urgency of the administration's efforts to bolster its ability to project military power into the region.

Despite the 1977 petroleum vulnerability study's focus on indigenous security threats, the Carter administration remained focused on the Soviets. Over the course of 1979, Brzezinski and Energy Secretary Schlesinger assessed the consequences to the United States and its allies of the Persian Gulf falling under the domination of the Soviet as extremely dire, and argued for a more robust permanent military presence in the region.<sup>662</sup> In making their case for the larger military footprint, Brzezinski emphasized the importance of the region to American interests, asserting, "it is clear that the Middle East is, in fact, vital to the United States and it is not vital to the Soviet Union."<sup>663</sup> Schlesinger went a step further, explaining that "without Middle Eastern oil the Free World as we know it is through...if we don't make the necessary repairs in the military balance in five to ten years the resources of this area will come under Soviet domination."<sup>664</sup> Schlesinger went on, expressing his support for an even larger permanent military footprint in the region. In light of this disparity of interests, Brzezinski explained to President Carter on June 22, 1979, the United States required "perceptible military predominance" in the region.<sup>665</sup> This sentiment would be repeated following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The belief that Persian Gulf oil was essential to the survival of the West and that the region was vulnerable to Soviet domination marked a significant change from the Nixon and Ford years. From 1970 through the end of 1976 indigenous threats had been

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<sup>662</sup> "Memorandum from Fritz Ermarth and Gary Sick of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), June 19, 1979," *FRUS*, 1977-1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24. The moderate increase in military forces developed by the Defense Department proposed increasing MIDEASTFOR from three surface ships to as many as six, deploying aircraft carrier battlegroups and/or Marine Air/Ground Task Forces to the region, and conducting periodic deployments of tactical fighter and bomber aircraft to the Gulf.

<sup>663</sup> "Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM, *FRUS*, 1977-1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

<sup>664</sup> "Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM, *FRUS*, 1977-1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

<sup>665</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; "NSC Weekly Report 101;" 22 June 1979; folder Weekly Reports to the President 91-101 (3/79-6/79); Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material; Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

viewed as the primary danger to the Persian Gulf region and its petroleum resources, while the Soviet threat to the region had been consistently deemphasized. Furthermore, elevation of the Soviets as the principal threat to American interests in the region ran counter to the administration's own petroleum vulnerability assessment, which was much more aligned with the earlier Nixon and Ford views of the most likely threats.

The Carter administration combined its belief that Persian Gulf oil was essential to the survival of the West with the conviction that the Soviets were executing an offensive strategy against the United States and that in executing this strategy Moscow exploited regional instability to advance their interests. Thus, Moscow's intervention in the Ethiopia-Somalia war over the Ogaden, its support for the PDRY, and the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan appeared to fit within the all administration's Cold War-inspired conception of the Persian Gulf strategic environment. The 1979 fall of the Shah and the subsequent collapse of the U.S. position in Iran amplified the magnitude of what appeared to be a Soviet threat to the Persian Gulf; following Soviet "gains" in Ethiopia and South Yemen the fall of the Shah convinced the Carter administration that American strategy in the region was collapsing.<sup>666</sup> Responding to a question at a 1995 conference of former Carter administration and Soviet government officials discussing the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of détente, NSC staffer Gary Sick attested to the impact that the Cold War context had on the Carter administration's regional outlook, stating "when you add that (the fall of the U.S. position in Iran) to Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and then events in Afghanistan as well, I think you can see how Cold War perceptions were shaped by certain fixed attitudes."<sup>667</sup> These three key beliefs were present from the beginning of the Carter administration and they shaped how key events in and around the Gulf between 1977 and 1980 were interpreted. Their impact on the development of U.S. security policy in the Persian Gulf was significant. The Carter

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<sup>666</sup> David A. Welch and Odd Arne Westad, eds, "The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente," (symposium, Lysebu, Norway, September 17–20, 1995), [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/carterbrezhnev/docs\\_intervention\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_and\\_the\\_fall\\_of\\_detente/fall\\_of\\_detente\\_transcript.pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/carterbrezhnev/docs_intervention_in_afghanistan_and_the_fall_of_detente/fall_of_detente_transcript.pdf), 36–38.

<sup>667</sup> David A. Welch and Odd Arne Westad, eds, "The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente," 39.

administration's internalization of them redirected the range of plausible policy options away from the arm's length security policies of the Nixon and Ford years and toward a hands-on policy of direct American involvement in regional security. This perspective would be carried forward into subsequent administrations.

**B. MORE DIRECT SECURITY COMMITMENTS: CARTER  
ADMINISTRATION SECURITY POLICY IN THE PERSIAN GULF**

The push for more direct American military involvement in the Persian Gulf began with the 1977 PRM-10 study, which had advocated that the United States acquire military forces above and beyond what was required for a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict that could be used for crisis management and intervention in local wars. As part of the PRM-10 Military Strategy and Force Posture review the Defense Department was tasked with examining the extent to which the United States should have military forces (or supplies) available for crisis management or intervention in local wars as well as the extent such forces could be called upon without drawing down those required in a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict. The Defense Department provided three force planning options that scaled upward from what it termed limited action (air and naval forces with logistical support for 90 days but no planned commitment of ground forces), to light intervention (air and naval forces, plus limited ground forces with 180 days logistical support), and, finally, to heavy intervention (robust land, air, naval forces with logistical support for 360 days).<sup>668</sup> The NSC staff advocated for development of a level of capability that fell between limited action and light intervention.<sup>669</sup> On July 8, 1977, the PRC "generally agreed" that the United States should develop forces for crisis management and local wars in addition to those required in a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict, while Brzezinski recommended the

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<sup>668</sup> White House, *PRM/NSC-10 Military Strategy and Force Posture Review Final Report*, undated, <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/memorandums/prm10.pdf>, 24–26.

<sup>669</sup> James Thompson and Victor Utgof to Zbigniew Brzezinski; memo; "PRC Meeting on PRM 10-Friday, July 8, 1977 at 10:00 AM;" 6 July 1977; folder Meetings, PRC-22, 7/8/77: Container 24; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 10.

creation of a “highly responsive global strike force.”<sup>670</sup> Development of these forces, which would eventually be referred to as the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), was codified with the release of PD/NSC-18 on August 26, 1977. Entitled *U.S. National Strategy*, PD/NSC-18 directed the development of military forces “beyond those maintained for European requirements” that were “designed for use against local forces and forces projected by the USSR” into the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, or Korea.<sup>671</sup>

Despite PD/NSC-18’s direction, the Carter administration made little progress on developing the RDJTF as a credible military force over the course of 1977 and 1978. This was due, in part, to the higher prioritization afforded to NATO requirements, institutional resistance within the Department of Defense, as well as the long time-lines associated with any effort to make significant changes to the size and posture of the American military.<sup>672</sup> Secretary of Defense Brown explained to President Carter in an undated 1979 memorandum “the programs we instituted since August 1977 are just now beginning to take effect” and that “major changes in defense posture take five or more years.”<sup>673</sup>

By the summer and fall of 1978, however, events had transpired that lent new urgency to the development of the RDJTF. By the time CNA-78 was updated in the fall of 1978, “the coup in Afghanistan, the Soviet-Cuban presence in Ethiopia, and the improved communist party position in South Yemen” had introduced “new Soviet threats not only to Iran but also to the smaller Persian Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, and North Yemen.”<sup>674</sup> CNA-78 assessed each of these states as “likely subjects for political instability, which would

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<sup>670</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; memo; “Policy Review Committee Meeting on PRM-10 on July 8, 1977;” 25 July 1977; folder Meetings, PRC-22, 7/8/77: Container 24; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 2.

<sup>671</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Weekly Report #21,” 2; White House, *Presidential Directive/NSC-18*, “U.S. National Strategy, 4.

<sup>672</sup> Olav Njølstad, “Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in U.S. Strategic Planning in the Carter Years,” 29.

<sup>673</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “U.S. Capability to Respond to Limited Contingencies;” undated; folder SW Asia/Persian Gulf (2/79-12/79): Container 15; Geographic File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

<sup>674</sup> White House, *CNA-78*, 12–13.

offer the Soviets various opportunities to expand their influence” and prescribed “rapid implementation of the PD-18 provisions concerning a quick reaction force” and “increasing U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf area” as key components of a comprehensive strategy to prevent Moscow from expanding its influence in the region.<sup>675</sup>

A further impetus was provided by President Carter. On March 17, 1978, Secretary of Defense Brown directed the Joint Staff to conduct a study of American military strategy related to the protection of Middle East and Persian Gulf oil, Brown explaining, “the United States intends to safeguard the production of oil and its transportation to consumer nations without interference by hostile powers.”<sup>676</sup> The secretary of defense continued, “I believe it is appropriate for us to review Soviet and U.S. strategy, plans, force structure, and deployments as they relate to these important U.S. and allied interests.” The report was completed that summer and forwarded to the secretary of defense on September 7, 1978. The JCS report echoed the Carter administration’s beliefs regarding Soviet assertiveness and opportunism, and reiterated its concerns over Soviet gains in the Horn of Africa, warning, “these gains, if realized, will impact so profoundly on Key Middle East and Persian Gulf states that, without compensating measures by the West and the United States, in particular, these states may be forced to accommodate the Soviets to the jeopardy of the West and, particularly, the North Atlantic alliance.”<sup>677</sup>

Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended “a comprehensive strategy” be developed around three objectives:

- A full or partial Middle East settlement backed by guarantees, which could include U.S. military presence, coupled with efforts designed to

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<sup>675</sup> White House, *CNA-78*, 12–13.

<sup>676</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9. See note 2.

<sup>677</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

discourage “key countries” from maintaining arms supply relationships with the Warsaw Pact;

- A “revitalized CENTO alliance” that featured more active American leadership, and;
- “Firm and public” security commitments to Iran and Saudi Arabia that included increased military sales, development of base infrastructure, and, potentially, an increase in American military presence in the region.<sup>678</sup>

A regional strategy that embraced these objectives, in the estimation of the Joint Chiefs, would “counter or deter Soviet military presence in the region and enhance regional stability.”<sup>679</sup>

The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed a four-part military strategy to support these objectives.<sup>680</sup> First, American military forces deployed to the area would counter Soviet forces in and around the region. Second, deployed forces would assist regional governments “in the development of local base infrastructures which are adequate to support the introduction of significant U.S. military forces to the region.”<sup>681</sup> Third, the United States’ permanent and limited regional military footprint would act as a tangible signal of American interests, contribute to regional stability, and serve as a facilitator for the introduction follow-on forces in a crisis. Finally, the American regional military posture would seek to “prevent (and be understood as seeking to prevent) any major conquests by

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<sup>678</sup> <sup>678</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>679</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>680</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>681</sup> <sup>681</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

a regional power or powers.”<sup>682</sup> The JCS report was forwarded to Secretary of Defense Brown with the recommendation that it be “used as the basis for a strategy for the next decade, the importance of which conveys to the USSR as well as U.S. friends and allies the importance the United States attaches to the stability and security of the region.”<sup>683</sup> The CJCS, General Jones, reiterated these points to the Secretary of Defense Brown on January 11 and 23, 1979.<sup>684</sup>

In early December, as the Shah’s regime in Tehran was teetering, Brzezinski attempted to place ongoing events in the Gulf into a wider historical context for President Carter. Explaining his concept of an arc of crisis, the national security advisor wrote:

President Truman confronted a similar crisis in the late 40s in Western Europe. At that time, internal weaknesses also interacted with an external challenge. It took a very major and collective effort to respond effectively. That response involved a long-term solution for political initiatives as well as more direct security commitments.<sup>685</sup>

By the end of 1978, Brzezinski recommended that the president press the United Kingdom, France, and West Germany to develop a collective response to the ongoing turmoil in the arc of crisis and respond to the danger posed by the intersection of Soviet military power and regional instability in the Persian Gulf. In making this argument, the national security advisor viewed the deteriorating situation in Iran in stark terms, explaining that Iran “repeating the experience of Afghanistan, would be the most massive American defeat since the beginning of the Cold War, overshadowing in its real consequences the setback

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<sup>682</sup> <sup>682</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>683</sup> <sup>683</sup> “Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, September 7, 1978,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 9.

<sup>684</sup> “Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Jones) to Secretary of Defense Brown, January 11, 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 11.

<sup>685</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Weekly Report #81,” 3.

in Vietnam” (emphasis in the original).<sup>686</sup> Nineteen days later the Shah departed Iran for good.

The fall of the Shah in January 1979 added momentum to the Carter administration’s efforts to assume a more active security role in the Persian Gulf, and was the principle reason behind Secretary of Defense Brown’s February trip to the Gulf that was intended to shore up regional allies’ confidence in the United States. Additionally, it should be recalled that Brown was to emphasize the ongoing tumult in Iran, as well as Soviet activities in the PDRY, in the Horn of Africa, and in Afghanistan that threatened to lead to “general disorder or the imposition of dominant Soviet influence” that the United States and its regional allied would be unable to tolerate.<sup>687</sup> In the Carter administration’s estimate, this situation required the development of an integrated regional security strategy. The secretary of defense, in conveying this message to American allies, was to stress that the United States was prepared to “make a strong political and military contribution” to this strategy. Crucial components of this strategy included bringing peace between Israel and the Arab states, development of “new forms” of bilateral and multilateral security collaboration, increased U.S. military presence in the region (principally in the form of augmented U.S. Navy presence and development of basing arrangements), and “concerted measures to counter radical forces that now provide a bases for the intrusion of Soviet influence” into the region.<sup>688</sup> Finally, Brown was to stress the necessity of “cooperation in oil matters” that would build on the shared interests of the United States, American allies, and the Gulf oil producing states in ensuring security and economic development.<sup>689</sup>

As the secretary of defense was conveying this message to American allies, work was underway in Washington, DC, to develop a cogent security policy for the Middle East.

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<sup>686</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; “NSC Weekly Report #83;” 28 December 1978; folder Weekly Reports to the President 82–90 (12/78-3/79); Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 4.

<sup>687</sup> “Letter from President Carter to Secretary of Defense Brown, February 9, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 19.

<sup>688</sup> Letter from President Carter to Secretary of Defense Brown, February 9, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 19.

<sup>689</sup> Letter from President Carter to Secretary of Defense Brown, February 9, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 19.



Developed within the NSC staff, and entitled “Consultative Security Framework for the Middle East,” four sources of Middle East instability were postulated: the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict; the political radicalism that emerged from this conflict and the problems associated with uneven socio-economic development in the region; Soviet exploitation of regional instability, and; regional disparities in wealth and human resources.<sup>690</sup> Mitigating these sources of instability necessitated the development of a consultative security framework (as opposed to a formalized alliance system) wherein countries that shared common interests with the United States (and, as the document explained “implicitly with each other”) would “consciously enhance their security and intelligence relations” with the United States.<sup>691</sup> Four elements comprised the framework: achievement of peace between Israel and Egypt; a political process to contain or resolve the Palestinian aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict; development of a security framework that “enhances stable military relationships within the region” that also excluded outside destabilizing influences, and; a coordinated program to spur regional socio-economic development of strong political institutions.<sup>692</sup>

The framework asserted that advancing its regional goals necessitated that the United States “assume heavy political, economic, and military burdens.”<sup>693</sup> Four military burdens were identified. First, it was assessed that Washington would have to assume a leadership role in the development of “security concepts and institutions that are suited to the needs of the regional states.”<sup>694</sup> Second, the United States would need to provide more extensive and formalized security guarantees to its allies in the region. Third, the American military presence in the region would need to be enhanced, particularly in and around the Persian Gulf. Over the short term, this would include visits by military forces to key regional allies, combined exercises, and deployment of U.S. Navy strike capabilities to the

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<sup>690</sup> White House; memo; “Consultative Framework for the Middle East,” 28 February 1979; folder Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) (1/80-3/80): Container 20; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1–2.

<sup>691</sup> White House, “Consultative Framework for the Middle East,” 2–3.

<sup>692</sup> White House, “Consultative Framework for the Middle East,” 2–3.

<sup>693</sup> White House, “Consultative Framework for the Middle East,” 3.

<sup>694</sup> White House, “Consultative Framework for the Middle East,” 3.

region.<sup>695</sup> Long-term options included permanent augmentation of the U.S. Navy's Middle East Force, upgrading the base on Diego Garcia and seeking regional base access with prepositioned stocks of U.S. military equipment, development of "an east-of-Suez command entity of some kind, located in the U.S. but equipped to move," and development of the RDJTF with contingency capabilities "fully independent of capabilities for a NATO war."<sup>696</sup> Finally, American foreign military and economic assistance would need to be augmented to \$10 to \$15 billion dollars over the next five years, a significant increase over the planned annual outlay of \$3 billion.<sup>697</sup>

The Consultative Security Framework for the Middle East provided the basis for a meeting of the SCC on May 11, 1979. Among other topics, the discussion centered on the threats to American interests in the region and the American military presence in the area. Regarding the former, two points of view existed. Secretary of State Vance viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict and its associated Palestinian issues, and inter-Arab tensions as being the principle drivers of regional instability.<sup>698</sup> Brzezinski disagreed, arguing that the Saudi's feared external threats over indigenous ones.<sup>699</sup> Secretary of Defense Brown agreed with the national security advisor, with the clarification that the external threat originated with other Arab states as opposed to the Soviet Union. Secretary of Energy Schlesinger also agreed with Brzezinski, and went a step further, explaining:

They're (i.e., the Saudis) afraid of external pressures, and they have lost confidence in the United States. We couldn't do everything that they wanted us to do. The effect has been that the Saudis are turning elsewhere for protection, including the Soviet Union and the radical Arabs. There is the

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<sup>695</sup> White House, "Consultative Framework for the Middle East," 4, 6.

<sup>696</sup> White House, "Consultative Framework for the Middle East," 6.

<sup>697</sup> White House, "Consultative Framework for the Middle East," 4. Other initiatives included working toward "the broadest possible Arab-Israeli accommodation," enhancing commitment to domestic energy policies to reduce U.S. reliance on Middle East oil, and taking "steps in U.S.-Soviet bilateral relations that call into question the cooperative elements of those relations." This measure was necessary given that "the Soviets will see our purposefulness in the area as directly hostile to their interests, and they are likely to escalate their own efforts to oppose ours."

<sup>698</sup> White House; minutes of meeting; "Special Coordination Committee Meeting, Middle East Security Issues," 11 May 1979; folder Meetings, SCC 164, 5/11/79; Container 30; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 5-6.

<sup>699</sup> White House, Special Coordination Committee Meeting, Middle East Security Issues," 5.

increasingly important role of Iraq. The Saudis won't turn around on this until they see a U.S. military presence in the area to deter these threats.<sup>700</sup>

A short discussion of the options available to increase the American military footprint in the area followed that aligned well with the initiatives that had been described in the NSC-developed consultative framework document. Concluding the meeting, Brzezinski asserted “over the longer term, what we are talking about is an increasing American role in the area which recognizes it as vital to our national interests.”<sup>701</sup> It was agreed that the State and Defense Departments would chair two follow-on PRC meetings that would more closely consider the military and diplomatic consequences associated with increasing the overall U.S. military footprint in the region.

These follow-on meetings occurred on June 21 and 22, 1979. The Departments of State and Defense, as well as the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), Admiral Stansfield Turner, developed papers in support of these meetings, which were to focus on a security policy for the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions. In preparing National Security Advisor Brzezinski for the meetings, NSC staffers Fritz Ermarth and Gary Sick dismissed the State Department paper, describing it as “inconclusive and providing little basis for decision,” and explaining that it aimed to discount “the need for increases in U.S. permanent military presence.”<sup>702</sup> While acknowledging that “all parties reflect awareness of great political pressure for increased U.S. deployments, and seems to agree that a modest increase is advisable,” Sick and Ermarth observed that “State and CIA clearly go to great lengths, however, to stress the penalties of adverse local reaction and the case for great moderation.” The Defense Department paper provided several options for increasing the

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<sup>700</sup> White House, “Special Coordination Committee Meeting, Middle East Security Issues,” 6.

<sup>701</sup> White House, “Special Coordination Committee Meeting, Middle East Security Issues,” 10.

<sup>702</sup> “Memorandum from Gary Sick and Fritz Ermarth of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), June 19, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

overall U.S. military footprint in the region, and Secretary of Defense Brown was reported to be “readying a recommendation for increased U.S. presence.”<sup>703</sup>

The NSC staffers recommended that the national security advisor push for agreement that the U.S. military presence in the region be augmented by two to three surface ships (in addition to the current MIDEASTFOR strength of three ships), and that the Defense Department alternate aircraft carrier strike groups and Marine Air-Ground Task Force deployments to the area.<sup>704</sup> These forces would be further enhanced, Ermarth and Sick explained, with periodic deployments of land-based tactical and support aircraft. This course of action marked the second of four short-term options proposed by the Defense Department that would augment American military capabilities in the area. A second priority was that PRC participants recognized that the Persian Gulf as a strategically significant region, “ranking barely behind Northeast Asia and Europe,” and that American defense planning, budgeting, and arms transfer policies reflect these realities.<sup>705</sup> The two staffers concluded by recommending that an appropriate PD be drafted that would encompass these points.

The June 21 and 22 PRC meetings, Brzezinski explained to President Carter, reached general agreement on two significant points. The first was that “the military aspect” of Middle East and Persian Gulf security represented “only half the equation and that the second half in the need to strengthen and accelerate the peace process.”<sup>706</sup> Second, and more significantly, in light of the great disparity of interests in the Middle East between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States required “perceptible military

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<sup>703</sup> “Memorandum from Gary Sick and Fritz Ermarth of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), June 19, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

<sup>704</sup> “Memorandum from Gary Sick and Fritz Ermarth of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), June 19, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

<sup>705</sup> “Memorandum from Gary Sick and Fritz Ermarth of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), June 19, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 24.

<sup>706</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Weekly Report #101,” 1.

predominance” in the region.<sup>707</sup> Concretely, for the short-term, this presence would be along the lines of the footprint Sick and Ermarth advocated for in their memo to Brzezinski. The State Department had argued against this expansion, instead favoring an ability to surge forces into the region on an as-needed basis. In making the case against augmenting the regional U.S. military footprint, the State Department argued that “an increased U.S. presence would be seen by Moscow not as recouping a loss but as creating a new and different imbalance which may in turn require redress.”<sup>708</sup> Energy Secretary Schlesinger disagreed, and expressed his concern over the growing perception of U.S. weakness in the region. Given the impact of the Shah’s downfall on the American position in the Gulf, Schlesinger argued, “we should have no illusion about the importance of visible instruments of U.S. power to counterbalance the presence of Soviet power.”<sup>709</sup>

In Brzezinski’s estimate, the fact that the Persian Gulf region was vital to the United States and not vital to the USSR argued against the State Department’s position in favor of developing the ability to surge forces into the region in times of crisis. The United States needed to demonstrate its willingness to defend its interests, Brzezinski argued, which would require more than the capability to surge forces into the region.<sup>710</sup> The United States required “increased real capability on the scene.”<sup>711</sup> Schlesinger agreed with the Brzezinski’s arguments against the surge option, and argued for a robust U.S. military presence:

We must consider the long-term thrust of our policy. We must recognize that the balance of power in the area is unfavorable and perceived to be so. Our interests require new and visible means to respond to major aggression. Our actions will have to be unilateral at first. We cannot expect people in the area to stand up and applaud our presence until we have demonstrated

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<sup>707</sup> Brzezinski, “NSC Weekly Report #101,” 1.

<sup>708</sup> “Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

<sup>709</sup> “Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

<sup>710</sup> “Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

<sup>711</sup> “Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

our resolve and capability to be there in strength. If we don't make the necessary repairs in the military balance in 5–10 years, the resources of this area will come under Soviet domination. We must create a situation in which we are expected normally to be present. Occasional appearances and surge capability will not do the job.<sup>712</sup>

Schlesinger favored the near continuous deployment of aircraft carrier battlegroups or a Marine Air-Ground Task Force and land-based tactical aviation squadrons to the region. These had comprised the more robust third and fourth options the Defense Department had recommended. Ultimately, the PRC opted to proceed with the more restrained course of action introduced by the Defense Department and recommended by Sick and Ermarth.

Over the course of the summer, the Carter administration moved forward on several initiatives geared toward securing access to regional bases. In September, it was decided that U.S. Navy ships would commence visits to the Somali port of Berbera. On October 3, 1979, Brzezinski, Vance, and Secretary of Defense Brown recommended that President Carter “explore the sale of some defensive equipment to Somalia,” perhaps as a precursor to securing increased access and use of Somali ports and airfields.<sup>713</sup> Additionally, the three advisors urged the president to approve upgrades to American facilities on Diego Garcia. The president approved these actions on October 12, 1979. The November 4, 1979 seizure of the American embassy by Iranian nationals and the resulting 444-day hostage crisis increased the urgency surrounding base access. Accordingly, the Defense Department dispatched a study team to Saudi Arabia, Oman, Somalia, and Kenya to assess suitable basing facilities.

In late November, Brzezinski's military assistant, Lieutenant General William Odom, submitted an information memo with the subject “Strategy for the Persian Gulf in 1980” to the national security advisor that provided his views on the next steps in American security policy in the Persian Gulf.<sup>714</sup> In Odom's view, with the loss of the U.S. position

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<sup>712</sup> “Minutes Policy Review Committee Meetings, June 21, 1979, 1:30 - 2:30PM and June 22, 1979, 9:15 - 10:00AM,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 26.

<sup>713</sup> Njølstad, “Shifting Priorities,” 36.

<sup>714</sup> “Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

in Iran the Persian Gulf had become the “forward edge of the battle area” with the Soviet Union.<sup>715</sup> The loss of Iran necessitated that the United States center its military posture on the Arabian Peninsula. Odom identified Iraq and Pakistan as areas wherein the United States could engage in an effort to turn the Soviet’s flank and influence ongoing events in Afghanistan. He characterized Saudi Arabia and Oman, two key U.S. allies in the region, as lacking effective domestic institutions that could support an effective military establishment. More broadly, the countries lacked “effective institutions for coordinating a peninsula-wide interstate security system.”<sup>716</sup> In Odom’s estimate, Moscow was “attacking both these weaknesses—infiltrating and developing internal opposition movements—and coordinating the interstate actions of Soviet client states-Yemen and Ethiopia.”<sup>717</sup>

To mitigate these threats, Odom laid out a five-part strategy. First, he recommended that a unified regional military command for the Persian Gulf and Middle East be developed.<sup>718</sup> The General feared that the lack of a unified combatant command would cause U.S. security and intelligence activities in the region to continue to “stumble along” as they had in the past.<sup>719</sup> Second, Odom advocated that Oman, Saudi Arabia, and, potentially, Sudan and Pakistan be asked what the United States could do to help each country achieve their security objectives. The point, as Odom explained, was that the United States “must open a dialogue, regional in scope, but not at all public, which lets the

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<sup>715</sup> Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

<sup>716</sup> Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

<sup>717</sup> Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

<sup>718</sup> “Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

<sup>719</sup> Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

Saudis, Omanis, and maybe others lead us into closer security relations.”<sup>720</sup> “The outcome after a year or two,” he continued, “will be a regional security system, *de facto* but not *de jure*.”<sup>721</sup> Third, the United States needed to acquire both permanent and temporary bases in the region, the latter for exercise use. Odom flagged Masirah Island off Oman, Berbera in Somalia, and, possibly, Aswan in Egypt. The fourth step would comprise operational deployments of U.S. forces to the region, starting with lower profile, small footprint force elements, such as maritime patrol or airborne surveillance aircraft. The final element of Odom’s strategy would direct that U.S. intelligence and covert activities be stepped up. The General identified the provision of support for Afghan insurgents and to tribes located along the PDRY-Oman border, as well pursuing similar opportunities in Eritrea and Somalia to counter Moscow’s client state, Ethiopia. Given President Carter’s direction for the Defense Department to investigate basing options in the region, Odom believed that his strategy could be formally proposed to the president. Brzezinski agreed to provide President Carter with Odom’s concept and to solicit Secretary of Defense Brown’s reaction and support.<sup>722</sup>

As the end of the year approached, the strategic significance of the Persian Gulf continued to be a hot topic within the Carter administration. On Christmas Eve, 1979, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Robert Komer drafted a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Brown.<sup>723</sup> Komer viewed with alarm the impact the energy crisis was having on the security of the west and expressed concern that OPEC could continue to raise prices, to the detriment of U.S. defense spending. He offered that retention of acceptable access to

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<sup>720</sup> Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

<sup>721</sup> Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34.

<sup>722</sup> “Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), November 28, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 34. See notes 10 and 11.

<sup>723</sup> “Memorandum From the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (Komer) to Secretary of Defense Brown and the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Claytor), December 24, 1979,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980, doc. 253.



Persian Gulf oil represented the United States' "overall security objective" in the region and recommended that "an overt declaratory policy that (Middle East) oil is vital to (American) security and (the United States) will do whatever is necessary to retain access to it."<sup>724</sup> Komer's timing was exquisite, for as he drafted this memorandum Soviet forces were crossing the border into Afghanistan.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan joined a large list of topics discussed at a series of National Security Council meetings that occurred between December 28, 1979, and January 2, 1980. The previous summer, the Carter administration had started providing support to mujahideen guerillas in Afghanistan, and in September an interagency group developed contingency plans delineating potential diplomatic, political, and informational options that could be taken in the event that Moscow became more directly involved in the country.<sup>725</sup> On December 19 the National Security Agency had warned that Moscow was poised to directly intervene in Afghanistan.<sup>726</sup> President Carter was shaken by the Soviet invasion, viewing it as a danger to détente and to the impending ratification of the SALT II treaty.<sup>727</sup> He judged that the Soviet action constituted a "far-reaching challenge" that required a firm and credible response.<sup>728</sup> Accordingly, the NSC developed a comprehensive menu of punitive sanctions that were announced by the president in a nationally televised address to the American people on January 4, 1980.<sup>729</sup> Additionally, President Carter pledged to provide military and humanitarian aid to maintain Pakistani

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<sup>724</sup> "Memorandum From the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (Komer) to Secretary of Defense Brown and the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Claytor), December 24, 1979," *FRUS*, 1969–1976, vol. XXXVII, Energy Crisis, 1974–1980, doc. 253.

<sup>725</sup> Glad, *An Outsider in the Whitehouse*, 198.

<sup>726</sup> Glad, *An Outsider in the Whitehouse*, 199.

<sup>727</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1055.

<sup>728</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 432.

<sup>729</sup> These initial sanctions were: 1. Recall of the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union and the delaying of opening new consular activities; 2. Senate deferral of further consideration of the SALT II treaty; 3. Suspension of exports to the Soviet Union, to include high technology items, Soviet fishing rights in American waters, and 17 million tons of grain that had been previously ordered, and; 4. Consideration of American non-participation in the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. Additional punitive sanctions followed. On January 8, the United States limited the Soviet airline Aeroflot to two weekly flights; on January 11, previously validated export licenses totaling \$150 million were suspended; and on January 23, a previously approved export of computer parts contracted in 1973 was revoked.

sovereignty in the face of the Soviet threat and warned the American people of the danger of unopposed aggression becoming a “contagious disease.”<sup>730</sup>

Longer-term security measures were also pushed forward in the days after the invasion. On December 28, 1979, the NSC decided that Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher would be dispatched to Pakistan to offer a security guarantee to Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq, who had seized power in a bloodless coup in 1977. Security guarantees were also extended to Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt. These guarantees were combined with increases in U.S. defense expenditures, improvement of NATO warfighting capabilities, and the long-awaited commissioning of the RDF into what Brzezinski coined the Carter Doctrine. President Carter approved of these measures on January 9.<sup>731</sup> These, and other, measures were formally announced during President Carter’s January 23, 1980 State of the Union address. Classifying the Soviet invasion as “the most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War” that presented the United States with a “fundamental challenge in the region,” President Carter asserted “let our position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”<sup>732</sup>

To support this new declaratory policy, President Carter announced several concrete measures that would give it teeth. He urged Congress to approve his proposed defense budget for 1981 that included 5% real growth, development of the RDJTF, an initiative first raised during the 1977 PRM-10 effort, and signaled his intention to submit legislation aimed at revitalizing the Selective Service Program. He reaffirmed the American commitment to assist Pakistan in resisting any outside aggression and informed Congress that additional appropriations for Pakistani aid would be forthcoming. Finally, the president publicly announced his intent to move forward with the development of the

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<sup>730</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,” January 4, 1980, The American Presidency Project, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-4-1980-speech-afghanistan>.

<sup>731</sup> Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 201.

<sup>732</sup> Jimmy Carter, “State of the Union Address,” January 23, 1980, The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, [https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/selected\\_speeches/](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/selected_speeches/).

Persian Gulf cooperative security framework that had been the subject of much discussion over the course of 1979.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent promulgation of the Carter Doctrine marked the culmination of the evolution of American Persian Gulf security policy away from the arm's-length policies that had marked the Nixon and Ford eras and toward a more direct American involvement in the regions security matters. The new policy was fundamentally shaped by the Cold War beliefs through which the Administration in general, and National Security Advisor Brzezinski in particular, viewed events in and around the Persian Gulf. These beliefs were present in January 1977, and were reflected in the PRM-10 and CNA-79 assessments, as well as how events in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan were interpreted. The specific longer-term policy initiatives announced by President Carter during the State of the Union speech predated the Soviet invasion and, in the case of the RDJTF, the fall of the Shah's government. In the run up to the State of the Union, the national security advisor had repeatedly in his correspondence with the president attempted to place the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as the latest step in a multidecade continuum that had started in the late 1940s. "We have, in effect, entered the fifth decade in the U.S.-Soviet competition," Brzezinski wrote President Carter on January 9, and, following the "continued buildup of Soviet strength" during the 1970s, the 1980s carried "the danger of conflict within the context of wider global turbulence."<sup>733</sup> He viewed the invasion of being "symptomatic of Soviet a long-term historical drive, with military power supplanting Marxist ideology as its basic dynamic source."<sup>734</sup> For Brzezinski, the task ahead of the United States was clear, in that it needed "to replicate the in this new third central strategic zone (southwest Asia) what we have done earlier in Western Europe and the Far East: create a sense of security and halt Soviet expansionism." Accordingly, and in-line with his Cold War lens through which he viewed the region,

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<sup>733</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President; memo; "A Long-Term Strategy for Coping with the Consequences of the Soviet Action in Afghanistan;" 9 January 1980; folder Afghanistan 1/9-31/80: Container 1; Brzezinski Material Country File; Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

<sup>734</sup> Brzezinski, "NSC Weekly Report #134," 1-2.

Brzezinski developed the Carter Doctrine along the lines of the Truman Doctrine for inclusion in the president's State of the Union Address.<sup>735</sup>

Over the course of the Spring and Summer the Carter administration moved forward with efforts to secure base access in and around the region and to formally stand up the RDJTF. With regard to the former, the Soviet invasion had provided urgency to the Administration's ongoing efforts dating from 1978 and 1979 that enabled the Carter administration to negotiate base access and overflight agreements with ten states as well as an "integrated set of naval and air bases in Oman, Somalia, Kenya, and Egypt to support increased U.S. presence in the region" in exchange for unilateral security guarantees.<sup>736</sup> With regard to the RDJTF, the Soviet invasion provided the Administration the momentum it needed to overcome institutional resistance in the Department of Defense toward the new task force. On March 1, 1980, the RDJTF was formally established at MacDill Air Force Base. The administration's larger effort to establish a unified combatant command, what would become the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), would ultimately be completed by the Reagan administration on January 1, 1983.<sup>737</sup>

Work also continued to develop the Persian Gulf security framework. By May, the SCC had conducted 11 meetings discussing the framework, and despite bureaucratic resistance, as Brzezinski explained to President Carter, progress had been made.<sup>738</sup> Militarily, in addition to improved base access and increased Navy and Marine presence in the region and the stand-up of the RDJTF, the Administration had acquired additional sealift assets, developed initiatives intended to induce NATO countries to assume a larger burden in the defense of Western Europe, and improved ties with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar through the use of FMS credits, combined

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<sup>735</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 444.

<sup>736</sup> Njølstad, "Shifting Priorities," 38.

<sup>737</sup> Njølstad, "Shifting Priorities," 41.

<sup>738</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter; memo; "NSC Weekly Report #141;" 16 May 1980; folder Weekly Reports to the President 136–150 (4/80–8/80); Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1.

military exercises, and contingency planning.<sup>739</sup> Diplomatically, the Administration was working with Turkey to secure base access, establishment of close ties with Oman and of a relationship with Somalia, and continuing the United States' close relationship with Saudi Arabia.<sup>740</sup> Economically, the Carter administration continued its efforts to reduce American oil consumption while working toward debt relief for Pakistan.<sup>741</sup> Efforts along these, and other, lines continued over the course of the summer and into the fall.

President Carter's November 4, 1980, electoral defeat to Ronald Reagan did not halt efforts to establish the Persian Gulf security framework. On January 15, 1981, five days before President-Elect Reagan's inauguration, the Carter administration issued two final presidential directives that were intended to ensure that development of the Persian Gulf security framework would continue. The first directive was PD/NSC-62. Entitled *Modifications to U.S. National Strategy*, PD/NSC-62 was intended to provide a course correction to the strategy that had been promulgated in 1977 by PD/NSC-18.<sup>742</sup> This course correction was necessitated by the increases in Soviet power projection, which threatened "U.S. vital interests in the Persian Gulf region" and necessitated that the outgoing administration "elaborate and codify (its) progress in building a security framework for the Persian Gulf."<sup>743</sup> While PD/NSC-18 had placed an emphasis on general purpose military forces for NATO contingencies, while also calling for the development of the RDJTF, Soviet advances in the Horn of Africa and in Afghanistan had "increased substantially the threat to our vital interests in the Persian Gulf region."<sup>744</sup> Regional

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<sup>739</sup> White House; paper; "Security Framework for Southwest Asia;" undated; folder Weekly Reports to the President 136–150 (4/80-8/80): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1–2. This document was forwarded to the President as an attachment to Brzezinski's May 16, 1980, weekly report.

<sup>740</sup> White House; paper; "Security Framework for Southwest Asia;" undated; folder Weekly Reports to the President 136–150 (4/80-8/80): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1–2.

<sup>741</sup> White House; paper; "Security Framework for Southwest Asia;" undated; folder Weekly Reports to the President 136–150 (4/80-8/80): Container 42; Subject File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1–2.

<sup>742</sup> White House, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*, Presidential Directive/NSC 62 (Washington, DC: White House, 1981), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pd/pd62.pdf>.

<sup>743</sup> White House, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*.

<sup>744</sup> White House, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*.

instability, stoked by the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iranian revolution, intra-Arab tensions, and the September 22, 1980, eruption of the Iran-Iraq war, amplified the Soviet threat by providing Moscow with “added opportunities for interference” in the region.<sup>745</sup>

PD/NSC-62 continued:

Given the danger that Soviet success in asserting influence over the oil-producing status (SIC) of the Persian Gulf region could undermine the viability of NATO and Japan, cause enormous economic disruptions in Europe, Japan, and the United States, higher priority must be given to developing adequate strategic lift, general purpose forces, and facilities access for Persian Gulf contingencies. While NATO will retain first call on force deployments in peacetime for wartime operations, the Persian Gulf shall have the highest priority for improvement of strategic lift and general purpose forces in the Five Year Defense Program.<sup>746</sup>

The danger posed by the Soviet threat increased the strategic burden shouldered by the United States and would necessitate that Washington’s European allies “undertake the programs and make available the resources needed to make up for the reduction in U.S. force commitments caused by our effort oriented toward the Persian Gulf.”<sup>747</sup> Additionally, PD/NSC-62 called for the British, French, and Australians to contribute forces to the Persian Gulf security framework.

The second of these directives, PD/NSC-63, focused more narrowly on the Persian Gulf security framework, and highlighted the Carter administration’s commitment to improving American ability to project military power into the region and developing military options to counter the “current Soviet regional advantage in conventional forces.”<sup>748</sup> In terms of structure and content, PD/NSC-63 reflected the priorities and initiatives that had been developed in 1979 and 1980. The document noted that the Carter administration had made significant progress on improving the United States’ regional security posture, and, in an effort to ensure momentum on the Persian Gulf security

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<sup>745</sup> White House, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*.

<sup>746</sup> White House, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*.

<sup>747</sup> White House, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*.

<sup>748</sup> White House, *Persian Gulf Security Framework*, Presidential Directive/NSC 63 (Washington, DC: White House, 1981), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pd/pd63.pdf>, 1. Henceforth referred to as *Presidential Directive/NSC 63*.

framework would continue, directed that efforts continue along four lines of effort. First, the Defense Department was directed to maintain its efforts directed at improving its regional presence, its ability to flow forces into the region, and its access to regional base facilities, to include overbuilding excess capacity at regional bases and prepositioning military equipment. Simultaneously, the Defense Department would continue its efforts to improve the capability and capacity of indigenous security forces. Finally, the Department was directed to help convince U.S. allies to assume larger defense burdens in Europe to “offset greater allocation of U.S. resources to the security of the Persian Gulf.”<sup>749</sup>

This responsibility would be shared with the State Department, which would also push for greater access to base facilities and overflight rights for aircraft transiting to the Gulf.<sup>750</sup> In addition, continuing the Middle East peace process, improving security ties with Turkey and Pakistan, and assisting the Gulf Arab states as they worked to enhance their own security forces. The State Department was also directed to improve ties with Somalia, Djibouti, and, when conditions made it possible, Ethiopia. The Persian Gulf also included an economic component, overseen by the State, Treasury, and Energy departments, that prioritized securing adequate supplies of Persian Gulf oil at a reasonable cost, reducing American dependence on imported oil, securing Western economic assistance for the region, working with the Saudis and other Gulf Arabs to ensure their participation in ensuring their own security, and continuing efforts to ensure regional economic and political stability. Finally, an intelligence program would support the military, foreign policy, and economic components of the Persian Gulf security framework. The SCC would ensure the requisite level of interagency coordination required to execute the framework.<sup>751</sup>

## **C. CONCLUSION**

With the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as president on January 20, 1981, the job of implementing the Persian Gulf security framework fell to a new administration. The

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<sup>749</sup> White House, *Presidential Directive/NSC 63*, 2–3.

<sup>750</sup> White House, *Presidential Directive/NSC 63*, 3–4.

<sup>751</sup> White House, *Presidential Directive/NSC 63*, 3–4.

Reagan administration would sustain the Cold War perspective of the Carter years and, following its own NSC-level study of the Persian Gulf, develop a security policy that, in effect, operationalized the security framework and supporting initiatives that had been developed between January 1977 and January 1981. In 1987, in the midst of the Iran-Iraq War, the Reagan administration would launch the first direct U.S. military intervention into the region, establishing a military presence that continues to this day.



## VII. NO OTHER REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE: 1981–1989

The Persian Gulf strategic environment that confronted the Reagan administration in January 1981 had been altered by two important events from the Carter years: the March 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the ongoing Iran-Iraq War. While the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was a signature accomplishment of the Carter administration, reaction in the region was largely negative. Across the Middle East, Muslim governments and public opinion viewed the treaty as a victory for Israel, as the Egyptian threat to Tel Aviv had been eliminated with little apparent gain to the Palestinian people. This damaged American credibility in the Muslim world, particularly as the Israelis started to back away from some of the agreements they had made. Sadat was vilified for having brokered a separate peace with Israel, which dashed American hopes that the agreement could form the cornerstone of a broader Middle East peace agreement.<sup>752</sup>

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein leveraged the weakening of Cairo as the critical center of gravity in Arab politics to elevate himself (and Iraq) as the new leader of the Arab people. Saddam arranged a meeting of the Arab League in Baghdad in November 1978, which was followed up by a second conference in March 1979 wherein Egypt was ejected from the League. Concurrent with Iraq's Arab League efforts was a brief rapprochement and tentative plan, never realized, to form a political union with Syria and Hafiz Assad. This marriage of convenience would have served Syrian interests by providing a military ally to replace Egypt in the fight against Israel. From the Iraqi perspective, a unification agreement would have solidified Iraq's new position as the Arab leader in the conflict against Israel while simultaneously underlining Syria's and Assad's relative weakness and dependence on Iraqi political and military support.<sup>753</sup>

Saddam Hussein assumed the presidency of Iraq on July 16, 1979, six months after the Iranian Shah had been overthrown and eventually replaced by a theocratic Shia regime

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<sup>752</sup> William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 241.

<sup>753</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 219.

under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. On February 8, 1980, partially in response to the threat posed by the new Iranian regime to his hold on Iraqi power, Saddam articulated an eight-point charter intended to guide the overall direction of Arab policy and reaffirm the Arab League's prohibition on the use of force to solve inter-Arab disputes.<sup>754</sup> This guarantee was extended to nations "neighboring the Arab homeland," in an attempt to assure the nascent Iranian regime that Iraq harbored no aggressive intentions.<sup>755</sup> At the same time, by way of deterring possible Iranian aggression, the charter went on to pledge a collective Arab response to any outside aggression against an Arab nation. The eight-point charter marked the apogee of Iraq's attempts to position itself as the undisputed leader of the Arab cause, prior to Saddam's September 1980 decision to invade Iran, and it was largely supported by the other Gulf Arab states.<sup>756</sup>

While the Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty altered the Persian Gulf security environment, and propelled Saddam Hussein to the forefront of Arab politics, their impact was not as significant as the repercussions of the fall of the Shah and the Iranian Revolution. For the purposes of this study, the significance of Camp David and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty derives primarily from the timing of these two events and for what it enabled Saddam Hussein to do. The period between Camp David (September 1978) and the concluding of the peace treaty (March 1979) coincided with the fall of the Iranian Shah and the establishment of a theocratic and volatile Shia government that was openly hostile to the conservative Sunni monarchies of the Persian Gulf. This had the effect of bolstering the legitimacy of Saddam's claim to Arab leadership as the remaining Persian Gulf monarchies' dependence upon Iraqi protection from the dangers posed by the Iranian revolution grew in magnitude. For the United States, the rise of Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a further blow to the declining American strategic position in the Persian Gulf, as Iraq, a country on friendly terms with the Soviet Union (and still considered radical as late as

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<sup>754</sup> Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein A Political Biography* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 133–134.

<sup>755</sup> Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein A Political Biography* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 133.

<sup>756</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 230.

the mid-1970s), became the de facto guarantor of regional security in the face of the Iranian threat.

The Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty also served to push the Saudis closer to the Iraqi orbit, to the consternation of the Carter administration. In the aftermath of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Saudis had attempted to balance the conflicting regional objectives of the Americans, the Egyptians, and of the more hardline Arab countries (e.g., Iraq and Syria) while simultaneously executing a foreign policy that supported Saudi interests. Anwar Sadat had informed Riyadh that he would undertake his famous trip to Jerusalem on November 18, 1977. Publicly, the Saudis expressed their surprise at Sadat's gambit and stated their support for a unified Arab effort to forge peace with Israel in an effort to appease the more hardline voices that were shaping Arab opinion.<sup>757</sup> Saudi balancing of the conflicting goals of the United States and its Arab neighbors continued through the Camp David agreements. On the one hand, they publicly told American Secretary of State Cyrus Vance that the agreements marked "an initial step for peace," while, on the other, hosting separate visits by Hafiz Assad, Yassir Arafat, and Saddam Hussein, all of whom thought otherwise.<sup>758</sup> The Saudis committed themselves to participate in the November 1978 Baghdad conference while quietly maneuvering to limit possible sanctions on Egypt.

This first Baghdad summit occurred at a difficult time for the Saudis. Saddam Hussein was clearly positioning himself as the leader of the Arab world and was seemingly close to forging a union with Syria. Simultaneously, the Shah's hold on Iranian power appeared to be slipping, which carried grave consequences for Persian Gulf and Saudi security. To the south, the two Yemens stood poised to go to war against each other. In this uncertain environment, it was strategically advantageous for the Saudis to bend with the wind and get behind the hardline Iraqi-led Arab consensus and reject the Camp David agreements. Sanctions were proposed to punish Sadat, but the Saudis managed to postpone punitive action until an actual peace agreement between Egypt and Israel was concluded.

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<sup>757</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 259.

<sup>758</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 262.

The Saudis did sign on to a joint call for the establishment of a Palestinian State as the cornerstone of a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As the calendar turned from 1978 to 1979, the Saudis continued to move closer to Iraq, at the expense of their relationship with the United States. In early February, Baghdad and Riyadh concluded an internal security agreement as a hedge against the Iranian Revolution spilling across the border and destabilizing Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Shortly thereafter, at a meeting with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, the Saudis rejected an American proposal to establish an airbase on Saudi soil.<sup>759</sup> In March 1979, Zbigniew Brzezinski arrived in Saudi Arabia on an official visit and promised American military protection in an unsuccessful attempt to garner Saudi support for the soon-to-be concluded peace treaty. Saudi participation in the second Baghdad conference, which expelled Egypt from the Arab League, cut diplomatic ties with the Sadat regime, and imposed a range of punitive sanctions against Cairo, further weakened the American position in the Gulf. The Saudi decision to support these actions occurred after much internal debate, and was undertaken as a means to resolve short-term security concerns related to the Iranian revolution.<sup>760</sup> The smaller Gulf monarchies, with the exception of Oman, largely followed the Saudi example and aligned themselves with the Iraqi position.

As in the case of Iraq, it is important to avoid overstating the importance of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in driving the Saudis away from the American orbit and toward that of Iraq and Saddam Hussein. From the Saudi perspective, the danger posed by the Iranian Revolution to the Saudi monarchy was of greater significance. The primary impact of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty was that it worked to constrain the menu of policy options available to the Saudis: the peace treaty's failure to account for the aspirations of the Palestinian people and the sense that the treaty represented a one-sided victory for Tel Aviv made it politically difficult for the Saudis to openly support the treaty and be seen as overly dependent on American security. Unfortunately, the timing of the treaty dictated that these phenomena would occur at a time of maximum peril for the Saudi monarchy and

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<sup>759</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 277.

<sup>760</sup> Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 281.

would help solidify the regional political and military supremacy of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The second event that had significantly changed the Persian Gulf strategic environment was the Iran-Iraq War. Saddam Hussein hoped to exploit the war as a means of realizing a range of objectives.<sup>761</sup> He believed that the Iranian military had been significantly weakened as a result of the fall of the Shah and the ongoing political turmoil in Iran. This meant that a limited war, aimed at seizing disputed territory along the border and regaining complete control over the long-disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway, would further weaken the Khomeini regime, perhaps fatally, while simultaneously buttressing Saddam's domestic political standing and confirming the Iraqi dictator as the leader of the Arab world. Accordingly, in July 1980 Saddam Hussein ordered preparations for war to commence, and on August 16 he informed his military chiefs of staff that he had decided to attack. On September 17, following several weeks of border skirmishes, Saddam publicly denounced the 1975 Algiers Agreement that had delineated the middle of the Shatt al-Arab, as opposed to the eastern (Iranian) bank of the waterway, as the border between Iran and Iraq. On September 22, Iraqi aircraft started attacking targets in Iran while Saddam's ground forces began crossing the border.

The Carter administration declared the United States neutral toward the warring parties. On September 23, one day after Iraqi forces crossed the border into Iran, the Carter administration's Special Coordination Committee convened to discuss the crisis and, over the course of an hour, reached agreement on several important points. American objectives vis-à-vis the war were two fold. First, Washington hoped to "terminate the conflict as quickly as possible" using diplomatic and political pressure "in order to reduce the opportunity for the Soviet Union to enhance its position in the region and to ensure the territorial integrity of Iran."<sup>762</sup> Second, the United States would use the conflict to exploit

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<sup>761</sup> Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 6–14. The remainder of this paragraph is derived entirely from this source.

<sup>762</sup> White House; memo; "Special Coordination Committee Meeting, September 23, 1980, Summary of Conclusions;" undated; folder Southwest Asia-Persian Gulf (9/80): Container 16; Geographic File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA, 1–4.

any emerging opportunities to conclude the ongoing hostage crisis and to develop diplomatic ties with both belligerents. A series of what the SCC described as tactical actions would support these objectives. These included mobilizing the UN and the Islamic Conference, as well as conducting consultations with the Saudis, the Omanis, the other Gulf Arabs, and Jordan. The Carter administration would use these consultations to describe its Iran-Iraq War policy, and underline the importance of preventing Moscow from using the conflict to achieve Soviet objectives, while simultaneously seeking regional viewpoints on the crisis. Egypt and Israel would also be consulted, with the latter being urged to exercise restraint and avoid taking any sort of military action against Iraq. Simultaneously, Secretary of State Muskie, who had replaced Cyrus Vance following his resignation after the failed April 1980 hostage rescue, would communicate to the Iranian prime minister the United States' noninvolvement in the conflict and would solicit his views on how it could be resolved. Additionally, in light of reports that the Iranians were boarding ships in the Strait of Hormuz, the SCC agreed to continue to examine this issue and discuss potential U.S. responses. The administration would continue to discuss Persian Gulf military contingencies with key allies to develop a multilateral military presence in the region. Finally, Secretary of State Muskie would raise the crisis with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to stress the United States' noninvolvement in the conflict and underline the importance of the Soviets not becoming overly involved, despite Iraq's status as a long-standing Soviet client.

While proclaiming its neutrality, the Carter administration did take steps to reassure the Saudis of the American commitment to the kingdom's security. On September 25, 1980, President Carter announced that the USS *Leahy* (CG-16), on-station in the region, would enter the Persian Gulf to provide antiaircraft defense to Saudi Arabia. Additionally, in October 1980, four E-3 Sentry Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft (AWACS) were deployed to protect Saudi Arabia from air and missile threats from both Iran and Iraq.<sup>763</sup> The AWACS deployment came at the request of the Saudis, with support from Zbigniew Brzezinski. "We are more likely to prevent escalation of the conflict if we

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<sup>763</sup> Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 81.

reassure our friends through a military presence,” he explained to President Carter on September 27, 1980, “which at the same time is coupled with a request for their restraint in not increasing the scope of the conflict.”<sup>764</sup> “Since the Iranians are irrational in any case,” Brzezinski continued, “it is wrong to conclude that our military presence in Saudi Arabia will provoke them (emphasis in the original).”<sup>765</sup> Given that Tehran could choose to strike Saudi Arabia regardless of a U.S. presence in the kingdom, it was in the United States’ interests to be in a position to protect Saudi oil facilities. The national security advisor concluded by warning the president:

In effect we should not make a fetish out of ‘neutrality’ when our vital assets are at risk; an interposition itself is not a ‘hostile act.’ Moreover, the whole world knows that we have a vital stake in Saudi oil and our passivity in the face of a Saudi request would become known, and be extraordinarily destructive both in terms of our international standing abroad and our political position at home.<sup>766</sup>

Thus, from the conflict’s outset, the Carter administration was turning toward the direct application of American military power to support what it viewed as the United States’ vital interests in the Persian Gulf. The Reagan administration would build upon these initial moves and, in 1987, would oversee the direct involvement of American military forces in the Iran-Iraq War.

#### **A. NSSD-4/82: NEW COMMITMENTS**

While the Reagan administration promulgated several presidential decisions that implemented national-level policy over the course of 1981, it did not conduct its first national security-related study until 1982. Over the course of 1982, 14 National Security Study Directives (NSSD) were issued. One of these studies specifically examined U.S. objectives in the region, assessed the threats to these objectives, and provided an overall strategy to guide the new administration’s Persian Gulf security policy. Two additional

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<sup>764</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter; memo; “SCC Meeting on Saudi Request for Assistance and Protection;” 27 September 1980; folder Southwest Asia-Persian Gulf (9/80): Container 16; Geographic File; Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>765</sup> Brzezinski, SCC Meeting on Saudi Request for Assistance and Protection.”

<sup>766</sup> Brzezinski, SCC Meeting on Saudi Request for Assistance and Protection.”

studies were focused predominantly upon the Soviet Union, and they aligned with the three interrelated beliefs that shaped the Carter administration's Persian Gulf security policy. All three of these studies painted the Soviet Union as exploiting regional instability to enhance its regional influence as a key component of an aggressive and successful strategy. Each also portrayed the security of the Persian Gulf and its petroleum resources as essential to the *survival* of the West and of Japan, and vulnerable to Soviet encroachment.

The first of these studies was NSSD 1–82. Issued on February 5, 1982, and entitled *U.S. National Security Strategy*, NSSD 1–82 directed a review of the Carter administration's PD/NSC-18, *U.S. National Strategy*, and PD/NSC-62, *Modifications in U.S. National Strategy*.<sup>767</sup> An interagency review group was tasked to develop the study, that considered, among other things, “fundamental U.S. national security objectives,” regional security objectives, the impact of Soviet behavior on U.S. strategy, as well as policies to govern the employment of conventional (i.e., non-nuclear) military forces in support of strategic objectives.<sup>768</sup> The study also considered the role of allies in executing the strategy, and examined security assistance to allies and partner nations. This effort would provide the basis for an NSDD that would articulate the Reagan administration's national security strategy that would “provide the foundation for companion studies on interrelated matters of national strategy, such as international economic, diplomatic, arms control, and information strategies.”<sup>769</sup> This included the Reagan administration's Persian Gulf-focused study.

The study was completed in two months and discussed by the NSC on April 16 and 27. President Reagan signed the study's output, NSDD-32, *U.S. National Security Strategy*,

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<sup>767</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, National Security Study Directive 1–82 (Washington, DC: White House, 1982), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssd/nssd-1-82.pdf>, 1–2.

<sup>768</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 1.

<sup>769</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 2.



on May 20, 1982. NSDD-32 highlighted 11 global objectives that would guide American security policy.<sup>770</sup> Four of these were germane to Persian Gulf security policy:

- To deter military attack by the USSR and its allies against the U.S., its allies, and other important countries across the spectrum of conflict; and to defeat such an attack should deterrence fail;
- To contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world and to increase the costs of Soviet support and use of proxy, terrorist, and subversive forces;
- To neutralize the efforts of the USSR to increase its influence through its use of diplomacy, arms transfers, economic pressure, political action, propaganda, and disinformation, and;
- To ensure the U.S. access to foreign markets and to ensure the U.S. and its allies and friends access to foreign energy and mineral resources.<sup>771</sup>

These objectives would be reflected in follow-on strategy documents related to the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf. The remaining seven global objectives were a mixture of Soviet-focused interests and broader ones, such as discouraging the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The safety and security of Southwest Asia were assessed as being vital to the defense of the United States, Europe, and Japan.<sup>772</sup> “A critical stake in this region is the oil in the Persian Gulf,” the NSSD 1–82 study asserted, “the western economic system needs ready access to it while control of this energy source by the Soviet Union would give

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<sup>770</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, National Security Decision Directive Number 32 (Washington, DC: White House, 1982), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-32.pdf>, 1–2. The seven global objectives were: “to strengthen the influence of the U.S. throughout the world by strengthening existing alliances, by improving relations with other nations, by forming and supporting coalitions of states friendly to U.S. interests, and by a full range of diplomatic, political, economic, and information efforts; to foster, if possible in concert with our allies, restraint in Soviet military spending, discourage Soviet adventurism, and weaken the Soviet alliance system by forcing the USSR to bear the brunt of its economic shortcomings and to encourage long-term liberalizing and nationalist tendencies within the Soviet Union and allied countries; to limit Soviet military capabilities by strengthening the U.S. military, by pursuing equitable and verifiable arms control agreements, and by preventing the flow of militarily significant technologies and resources to the Soviet Union; to ensure U.S. access to space and the oceans; to discourage further proliferation of nuclear weapons; to encourage and strongly support aid, trade, and investment programs that promote economic development and the growth of humane social and political orders in the Third World, and; to promote a well-functioning international economic system with minimal distortions to trade and investment and broadly agreed and respected rules for managing and resolving differences.”

<sup>771</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 1–2.

<sup>772</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 4.

it a strangle hold over the West and enormously ease the Soviet economic difficulties.”<sup>773</sup> Accordingly, ensuring access to Persian Gulf oil was elevated to the third highest priority for wartime planning, behind only the protection of North America and NATO.<sup>774</sup>

Having established the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf, NSSD 1–82 promulgated a series of regional objectives for the Near East and Southwest Asia.<sup>775</sup> These included ensuring Western access to Persian Gulf oil, gaining and maintaining sufficient regional influence and presence to support U.S. objectives, securing cooperation of allies and partner nations in support of U.S. interests, and acquiring a “network of military facilities in the region for the rapid introduction of sizable U.S. forces.”<sup>776</sup> Two additional objectives focused on the Soviet Union: securing Moscow’s withdrawal from Afghanistan or, if unable to do so, increasing the costs of their involvement and deterring or frustrating “further military intervention or subversion by the Soviet Union, Soviet proxies, or regional states or movements hostile to Western interests.”<sup>777</sup>

A series of peacetime military objectives that built upon similar ones developed during the Carter administration supported these broader, national-level objectives.<sup>778</sup> These included demonstrating the ability to deploy the RDJTF and follow-on forces to the region to deter an outright Soviet attack or prevent a *fait accompli*. Carter administration initiatives to ensure access to regional military, transportation, and other important infrastructure would continue, as would efforts to acquire overflight, landing, refueling, and en-route facilities support for deploying U.S. military forces. Combined military

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<sup>773</sup> White House; *U.S. National Security Strategy*; April 1982; folder NSDD 32 (1 of 4): Container 2; National Security Decision Documents; Executive Secretariat NSC; Ronald Reagan Library (RRL), Simi Valley, CA, 3. Henceforth referred to as *NSSD 1–82 Report*.

<sup>774</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 4.

<sup>775</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 7.

<sup>776</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 7.

<sup>777</sup> Other regional objective identified by the NSSD 1–82 report were: to preserve the independence of Israel and other key states in the region and to strengthen their ability to resist aggression or subversion by a regional or extra-regional power or movement; to enhance the possibility of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in a manner that respects the security interests of all parties; to encourage India to seek greater independence from the Soviet Union, and to establish stable relations with other states in the region, and; to support the further development of a secure and independent Pakistan.

<sup>778</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 39–41.

planning with Persian Gulf states would be increased, as would the prepositioning of military equipment in the region and the solicitation of military contributions from extra regional allies and partner nations. Finally, the United States would continue to maintain a strong naval presence in the region, supplemented by “as substantial a presence on land as can be managed given regional sensitivities and political constraints.”<sup>779</sup>

The Soviet Union, along with Moscow’s allies and clients, was considered the “most formidable threat to the United States and to American interests globally.”<sup>780</sup> The Soviets were believed to be cognizant of the drastic consequences inherent in any war with the United States and its allies and were assessed as being “unlikely to initiate military hostilities in an area of central importance to the U.S. such as the Persian Gulf.”<sup>781</sup> The more likely threat was Soviet exploitation of the opportunities presented by regional instability to enhance its position in the region.<sup>782</sup> “Unstable governments, weak political institutions, inefficient economies, and the persistence of traditional conflicts provided Moscow with ample opportunities to expand its influence.”<sup>783</sup> Within the Gulf, Iranian-sponsored subversion and direct military attacks on the Gulf Arab states provided the most immediate threat to U.S. interests.<sup>784</sup> The “most severe danger” to U.S. interests was considered to be Iran succumbing “to increased Soviet influence or a large-scale military intervention with the Soviets.”<sup>785</sup> Within the wider Persian Gulf region, governments friendly toward the United States were vulnerable to other regional states as well as to indigenous or Soviet-supported coups. The consequences of the Soviets achieving political and military dominance over the region and its oil resources were severe: the damage to

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<sup>779</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 41. Three other military objectives were listed, all of which were in-line with the national-level objectives discussed above. These additional objectives were: to prevent Soviet hegemony and extension of influence; to maintain Israel’s qualitative military advantage over any realistic combination of Arab foes, and; to support moderate states against internal and external aggression.

<sup>780</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 1; White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 2.

<sup>781</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 11.

<sup>782</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 3; White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 11.

<sup>783</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 3.

<sup>784</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 18.

<sup>785</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 17.

Western European and Japanese economies “could threaten the dissolution of (the U.S.) alliance system by subjecting our allies to Soviet pressure.”<sup>786</sup>

Achieving the objectives described in the NSSD 1–82 report would require the Reagan administration to cooperate closely with allies and partner nations. The United States would be responsible for resisting direct attacks on the region by the Soviet Union.<sup>787</sup> Harkening back to the Nixon-era NSDM-92 policy, the Reagan administration would rely on friendly indigenous governments to respond to regional conflicts (i.e., those not involving the Soviets). The United States would support friendly governments with a robust security assistance and foreign military sales program and, if needed, supporting capabilities, such as airlift or quick reaction forces. If additional assistance was necessary, the United States would first look toward other allies, such as the British and the French. This would help to mitigate local political sensitivities regarding an overt U.S. military presence in the region while also reducing the potential for direct conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. If these steps were insufficient to mitigate a regional conflict, both the NSSD 1–82 report and NSDD-32 asserted that “if no other reasonable alternative exists, the United States should be prepared to intervene militarily in regional or local conflicts.”<sup>788</sup> While the NSSD 1–82 report and NSDD-32 continued the logic promulgated in PD/NSC-62 and -63, their direction to be prepared to intervene in indigenous conflicts that were not directly related to the Soviet Union marked a significant milestone in the evolution of American security policy in the Persian Gulf.

The second study was NSSD 11–82, *U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Union*. Issued on August 21, 1982, NSSD 11–82 directed an interagency group, chaired by a State Department representative, to “assess the nature of the Soviet threat to U.S. national security interests across the short- and long-terms, with particular emphasis on the non-military aspects of this threat.”<sup>789</sup> The study would also provide recommended policy

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<sup>786</sup> White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 17.

<sup>787</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 4.

<sup>788</sup> White House, *U.S. National Security Strategy*, 3; White House, *NSSD 1–82 Report*, 29.

<sup>789</sup> “National Security Study Directive 11–82, August 21, 1982,” *FRUS*, 1981–1988, vol. III, Soviet Union, January 1981–January 1983 (Washington, DC, 2016), doc. 204.

options for the NSC to consider. The study was completed on December 6, 1982, and discussed by the NSC ten days later. On January 17, 1983, the study's findings and policy recommendations were promulgated with the release of NSDD-75.

NSDD-75 promulgated a three-track policy to govern U.S. relations with the Soviet Union as well as a series of functional and geopolitical imperatives that aligned well with the objectives articulated in NSSD 1–82 and NSDD-32.<sup>790</sup> Like the earlier study and decision document, NSSD 11–82 and NSDM-32 incorporated Carter administration beliefs and portrayed the Soviet Union as an aggressive and confident power that exploited regional instability to advance its interests:

Although the Soviets will not wish to provoke a major confrontation with the United States, their belief that they now enjoy strategic equality and some advantages enhances the prospects for an even more assertive foreign policy. Soviet leaders probably also can be expected to seize new opportunities offered by instability in the Third World to enhance Soviet geopolitical influence and divert U.S. attention from areas of direct U.S.-Soviet interaction, even in situations where the USSR has little prospect of making significant gains for itself.<sup>791</sup>

Soviet confidence was amplified by Moscow's perceptions of American vulnerabilities and weaknesses, which "serve to enhance their confidence in their ability to compete with" the United States.<sup>792</sup> American efforts to "heighten the economic and military costs to Moscow," in the Soviet view, were "subject to competing U.S. domestic priorities, the ability to rally popular support, and reluctance on the part of U.S. allies to incur the costs of increased defense expenditures or increased tensions with Moscow."<sup>793</sup>

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<sup>790</sup> "National Security Decision Directive 75, January 17, 1983," *FRUS*, 1981–1988, vol. III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983, doc. 260. The three policy tracks were external resistance to Soviet imperialism, internal pressure on the USSR to weaken sources of Soviet imperialism, and negotiations to eliminate, on the basis of strict reciprocity, outstanding disagreements.

<sup>791</sup> White House, *Response to NSSD 11–82, U.S. Relations with the USSR* (Washington, DC: White House, 1982), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84B00049R001202870018-8.pdf>, 19–20. Henceforth referred to as *NSSD 11–82 Report*.

<sup>792</sup> White House, *NSSD 11–82 Report*. 22.

<sup>793</sup> White House, *NSSD 11–82 Report*. 22.

In the view of the NSSD 11–82 report’s authors, the three-tracked approach directed in NSSD-75 provided a departure from the “reactive and defensive strategy of containment which concedes initiative to the Soviet Union and its allies and surrogates.”<sup>794</sup> Opposing the Soviet Union’s consolidation of its hold on Afghanistan was a priority, as was blocking the expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. This would require the Reagan administration to work toward obtaining a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, while also demonstrating a “sustained defense commitment to deter Soviet military encroachments” into the region.<sup>795</sup> Echoing again a key area of concern articulated in NSDM-32, improvements in Moscow’s force projection capabilities and its extensive use of military aid posed significant challenges to U.S. interests in the Third World. In response, and as a means of “rebuilding the credibility of its commitment to resist Soviet encroachment on U.S. interests and those of its allies and friends, and to support effectively those Third World states that are willing to resist Soviet pressures,” the Reagan administration would continue to employ a robust security assistance and military sales program.<sup>796</sup> It would also demonstrate its “readiness to use U.S. military forces where necessary to protect vital interests and support endangered allies and friends.”<sup>797</sup>

## **1. Development of the Study**

An important first step toward preventing Moscow from extending its military reach in the Gulf was taken on March 19, 1982, with the release of NSSD 4–82, *U.S. Strategy for the Near East and Southwest Asia*. “Revised policy guidelines are necessary which take into account recent regional diplomatic and world oil market developments,” the document explained, “as well as the negotiations U.S. officials have conducted with

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<sup>794</sup> White House, *NSSD 11–82 Report*, 33.

<sup>795</sup> “National Security Decision Directive 75, January 17, 1983,” *FRUS*, 1981–1988, vol. III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983, doc. 260.

<sup>796</sup> National Security Decision Directive 75, January 17, 1983,” *FRUS*, 1981–1988, vol. III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983, doc. 260.

<sup>797</sup> “National Security Decision Directive 75, January 17, 1983,” *FRUS*, 1981–1988, vol. III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983, doc. 260.

regional governments since January 1981.”<sup>798</sup> NSSD 4–82 directed the NSC staff to conduct a review of U.S. strategy in the region that could provide the basis for political decisions, procurement policies, arms transfers, and intelligence plans for the region. It directed an interdepartmental group, drawn from the Departments of State, Defense, Energy, and the Treasury, together with representatives of the CIA and JCS, to conduct the study.

The study would consider a range of interrelated topics. American regional interests and economic, political, and security objectives would be identified and prioritized, with the caveat that these objectives had to align with those identified during the NSSD 1–82 study and codified in NSDD-32.<sup>799</sup> The study would also include an assessment of extra- and intra-regional threats to these interests and objectives. Finally, the interdepartmental group would develop a comprehensive strategy that incorporated economic, political, diplomatic, intelligence, and military instruments of national power to address the threats it had identified. The interdepartmental group was also tasked with developing a supporting declaratory policy that would be shared publicly.

## **2. U.S. Strategic Interests**

As directed, the NSSD 4–82 study asserted that “a meaningful U.S. strategy for the Near East and Southwest Asia must, in the first instance, be clearly derived from clearly articulated global U.S. objectives” that had been articulated in NSDD-32 in May 1982.<sup>800</sup> American objectives in the strategically vital Near East and Southwest Asia regions “cannot stand by themselves” and “must support our overall national objectives.”<sup>801</sup> Within the Near East and Southwest Asia, two primary national security interests predominated. The first was to “prevent the Soviets from acquiring political-military

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<sup>798</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy for the Near East and Southwest Asia*, National Security Study Directive 4–82 (Washington, DC: White House, 1982), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssd/nssd-4-82.pdf>, 1.

<sup>799</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy for the Near East and Southwest Asia*, 1.

<sup>800</sup> White House; *NSSD-4 Security Strategy for Southwest Asia*; undated; folder NSDD 99 (2 of 3): Container 9; National Security Decision Documents (NSDDs); Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 1. Henceforth referred to as *NSSD-4 Report*.

<sup>801</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 1.

hegemony in the region.”<sup>802</sup> This required that the United States support the sovereignty of regional allies and friendly states. The second primary interest was to ensure continued access to Persian Gulf oil.<sup>803</sup> This would, in the estimate of the study’s authors, require the United States, along with its regional and extra-regional allies and partners, to be ready to “meet threats of any magnitude, from internal subversion to large-scale Soviet aggression.”<sup>804</sup> A series of nine regional objectives supported these two primary interests.

Two of the regional objectives were directly related to the Soviets. First, the United States would deter and combat direct Soviet aggression and intervention in the region. Such aggression was considered the most dangerous, if least likely, threat to American interests and would carry significant repercussions for NATO.<sup>805</sup> “The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan demonstrated Moscow’s willingness to use direct force in pursuit of its own interests,” the NSSD 4–82 report warned, and “an important U.S. objective must be to demonstrate that such action on the part of the Soviets does not pay.”<sup>806</sup> The United States would lead the resistance to any direct Soviet aggression with the support of regional and extra-regional allies. The Reagan administration would also help friendly states in the region defend their soil from both the Soviet threat and that posed by Moscow’s surrogates. For hostilities that did not directly involve Moscow, the United States would rely on regional countries, albeit with the United States providing any required support. The more likely, but equally dangerous, threat would be a “significant extension of Soviet hegemony or influence in the region by other means.”<sup>807</sup> Thus, a second important objective for the United States was to counter and reverse Moscow’s attempts to use arms sales, economic assistance, political support, and subversive activities to extend its regional influence.<sup>808</sup> “The United States must be alert to Moscow’s efforts to expand its regional influence,” the

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<sup>802</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 3.

<sup>803</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 3.

<sup>804</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 3.

<sup>805</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 4–5.

<sup>806</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 4–5.

<sup>807</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 5.

<sup>808</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 5.



report advised, “and must be in a position not only to take steps to deter and defeat outright aggression, but also to counter other means of Soviet political and economic advancement in the region.”<sup>809</sup>

Strengthening regional stability and expanding American influence were priorities, given the Soviet threat to U.S. interests. The report asserted that sustaining economic growth and improving the ability of regional allies and partners (Lebanon, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states were mentioned explicitly) to defend themselves against threats internal and external to the Persian Gulf provided the most efficacious means of maintaining stability.<sup>810</sup> Continued robust security assistance to these states would constitute an “essential dimension” of American policy.<sup>811</sup> Echoing the Persian Gulf security framework that Zbigniew Brzezinski had championed, the report explained that, when practical, “a key U.S. objective is to foster broad strategic consensus and regional defense cooperation” against common threats.<sup>812</sup> Simultaneously, Washington would pursue opportunities to expand its influence with Iran, Iraq, Syria, and India, should opportunities to engage these governments arise.

The importance of the region’s oil, the implications of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the accession to power of the Islamic regime in Iran had, according to the NSSD 4–82 study, made the Persian Gulf the center of the U.S.-Soviet competition for political and military influence in Southwest Asia.<sup>813</sup> Moscow recognized, the NSSD-4 report explained, the strategic significance of the Persian Gulf, given its proximity to Soviet borders, its vast energy resources, and its several weak and vulnerable ruling regimes. Moscow’s primary regional objective was to enhance Soviet political and military influence while reducing that of the United States and the West, and, ultimately, to become

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<sup>809</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 5.

<sup>810</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 6.

<sup>811</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 6.

<sup>812</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 6.

<sup>813</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 8.

the “predominant outside power in the region’s affairs.”<sup>814</sup> Achievement of this goal would extend Moscow’s “strategic reach,” counter Western military activity in the region, and also mitigate any Western military threat to the Soviet Union from the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia.<sup>815</sup> It would also provide the Soviets with an additional outlet for weapons sales, which would increase Moscow’s hard currency holdings and solidify its military and political relationships with regional governments. Achievement of these objectives would put the Soviets in a good position to acquire “leverage over the oil supply from the Persian Gulf oil fields to Europe, Japan, and the United States.”<sup>816</sup>

The report assessed the political trends for the Soviets in the Near East and South Asia as “mixed.”<sup>817</sup> The Soviets’ only allies in the region, the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, Syria, Libya, Ethiopia, and the “besieged government in Afghanistan,” maintained military ties with Moscow but were “not automatically responsive to Soviet policy direction.”<sup>818</sup> Soviet-Iraqi ties, which were assessed to have deteriorated after the start of the Iran-Iraq War, were improving as Moscow continued to supply Baghdad with weapons. The United States had lost influence in Iran and Ethiopia, while the Soviets had experienced setbacks in Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia.<sup>819</sup> Soviet policy was constrained by Moscow’s desire to avoid a directly military confrontation with the United States and by concern over the “world opprobrium” that would accompany an aggressive move toward the region.<sup>820</sup> Moscow also feared that Israel could strike advancing Soviet forces if Tel Aviv considered that its interests were threatened. Echoing an NSSM-66 conclusion, the NSSD 4-82 report explained that “local nationalisms and Islam’s traditional abhorrence of

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<sup>814</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 12.

<sup>815</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 12.

<sup>816</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 12.

<sup>817</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 15.

<sup>818</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 15.

<sup>819</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 15.

<sup>820</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 15.

Communism” provided the most significant barriers to the extension of Soviet influence.<sup>821</sup>

Iran was the region’s most vulnerable “strategic prize,” and the fall of the Shah and the ongoing Iran-Iraq War had improved the prospects for increased Soviet political and military penetration into the Gulf.<sup>822</sup> Despite the Iranian regime’s staunch anticommunism, Tehran sought “pragmatic ties” with Moscow that provided the Soviets “an avenue for penetration directly and in support of leftist parties.”<sup>823</sup> The NSSD 4–82 report described several scenarios that could result in an unlikely outcome, a direct Soviet invasion of the country:

Several developments could lead them to consider invading Iran, including the seizure of power by a leftist coalition seeking Soviet assistance or the collapse of the government in Tehran with no clear successor regime. Moscow might invade out of opportunism, recognition of Iran’s great strategic importance, fear that prolonged chaos or civil war could create security problems in the Soviet Muslim population near the Iranian border, or desire to forestall a possible U.S. military move into Iran.<sup>824</sup>

The Reagan administration believed that the Soviets had developed conceptual plans to govern military operations in the Persian Gulf that included “plans for the seizure of the entire Persian Gulf littoral.”<sup>825</sup> Several important factors militated against a direct Soviet invasion, however. In addition to the likelihood of Iranian resistance, an aggressive Soviet move would “represent a radical shift in Soviet foreign policy towards the West” and thereby risk an “escalating military conflict with the U.S. in Iran and elsewhere.”<sup>826</sup>

Moscow was more likely to exploit regional conflicts and domestic instability in the Persian Gulf littoral as its “principal avenue” for expanding its influence in the Near

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<sup>821</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 8

<sup>822</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 8, 17.

<sup>823</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 13, 17.

<sup>824</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 13–14.

<sup>825</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 14.

<sup>826</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 14.

East and Southwest Asia.<sup>827</sup> Several ongoing regional conflicts directly impacted Persian Gulf stability and U.S. security objectives in the region.<sup>828</sup> Two were external to the Persian Gulf, and both constrained the level of Gulf Arab security cooperation with the United States: the Cold War competition for regional influence between the United States and the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states remained dependent upon the United States to protect them from the Soviet threat, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict and the subversive threat posed by Islamic fundamentalist groups placed constraints on the ability of Washington's regional allies to develop overt security ties with the United States.<sup>829</sup> The Gulf Arabs feared Soviet-sponsored subversion if they were seen to cooperate closely with the United States, and they also harbored doubts over Washington's willingness to protect them. Thus, the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict presented Washington's Gulf allies with a paradox: "the more they turn to the United States for protection, the more they increase their vulnerability to subversion."<sup>830</sup> The danger to American interests was that the Arab states could mimic Kuwait, which had maintained, relative to the other Gulf Arab states, good relations with the Soviet Union.

The third conflict was the nearly three year old Iran-Iraq War. The NSSD 4-82 report categorized the conflict as a "special danger" to U.S. interests, given its potential to spill over into neighboring states friendly toward the United States and the threat it posed to Persian Gulf oil flows.<sup>831</sup> By 1982 the war had turned against Saddam Hussein, who, in the face of Iranian victories, was trying to end the conflict any way he could. The U.S.-aligned Gulf Arab regimes feared that a decisive Iranian victory would eliminate Iraq as a counterweight to Tehran, and had therefore provided Saddam Hussein with varying levels

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<sup>827</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 12.

<sup>828</sup> This section discusses only those conflicts that had a direct impact on the Persian Gulf strategic environment. Other conflicts highlighted in the NSSD 4-82 study were Libya-Egypt; Pakistan-India; Morocco-Algeria, and; Ethiopia-Somalia. Regarding the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, the report had little to say that was directly relevant to the Persian Gulf, despite the Carter administration's explicit linking of the security of the Horn of Africa to the safety of Persian Gulf oil flows.

<sup>829</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 19-20.

<sup>830</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 19-20.

<sup>831</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 34.

of financial support.<sup>832</sup> If Iran successfully pushed the Iraqi army out of its territory and instigated the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, it would be able to present itself as a “winner” to Arab Shia populations while also freeing up resources that Tehran could use to destabilize the Gulf Arab states and weaken their close ties with the United States.<sup>833</sup> Several key U.S. allies were at risk. Bahrain, home to a large (65%) Shia population that was resentful of the ruling Sunni regime, was most vulnerable. While the Shia population in Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia was small, its presence in the oil-rich eastern province, coupled with its vulnerability to Iranian propaganda, was a cause for U.S. concern. Qatari Shias were assessed as being supportive of the Iranian Revolution and, like their Saudi counterparts, resented living under a Sunni regime. Fortunately for Washington, they were also assessed as being thoroughly intimidated by Qatari security forces and unlikely to pose a serious threat to the government. Shia populations in Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE were not considered likely to foment unrest within their borders. Conversely, Iranian failure to achieve success against Iraq actually presented an additional threat to the Gulf Arabs, as Tehran could be tempted to lash out against them.<sup>834</sup> Even if Iranian-inspired subversion was unsuccessful, the threat of it could lead the Gulf Arabs to distance themselves from the United States. The resulting loss of American influence would benefit Iran and “enhance the Soviet position without any commensurate increase in numbers of Soviet allies.”<sup>835</sup>

In addition to the Iran-Iraq War, ongoing conflict between North and South Yemen continued to provide the Soviet Union with opportunities to expand its influence and maintain a limited military footprint in the region. Moscow maintained 700 military advisors in South Yemen and was training 1,500 Yemeni military officers in the Soviet Union.<sup>836</sup> With continued political instability in North Yemen, the United States and Saudi Arabia were concerned that the Soviets would eventually, through the PDRY, gain control

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<sup>832</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 10.

<sup>833</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 10–11, 17–18.

<sup>834</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 10.

<sup>835</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 15.

<sup>836</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 18.

over both the Yemens.<sup>837</sup> In Afghanistan, the Soviets were seeking to “establish conditions for political domination and a continued military presence in the country” while avoiding the commitment of additional major combat forces.<sup>838</sup> If the Soviets were successful in realizing these objectives, the NSSD 4–82 report warned, they would “attempt to exploit their more forward-leaning posture vigorously” to support “patient, calculated but assertive Soviet policies in Southwest Asia.”<sup>839</sup> The prospects for Soviet success in Afghanistan were not good, the NSSD-4 report explaining that “the Soviets have too few men in the country to gain control.”<sup>840</sup> Despite insurgent disorganization and weaknesses, Moscow had “little reason to consider a compromise settlement.”<sup>841</sup> Soviet success in defeating the insurgency would require the commitment of as many as 500,000 additional soldiers.<sup>842</sup>

Several sources of domestic instability also threatened American interests in the Persian Gulf and provided Moscow with opportunities to expand its influence in the region. On a macro level, rapid, oil-fueled economic development “set in motion forces likely to challenge the ability of Saudi Arabia and the more traditional Gulf States to maintain internal stability.” The continued influx of foreign laborers and advisors, the concomitant “penetration of Western secularism and materialism,” corruption, and unequal wealth distribution stoked popular discontent and necessitated that Gulf Arab governments walk a fine line between conservative forces and modernist factions that sought to liberalize their political systems.<sup>843</sup> For the Saudis, this meant that the government would need to move very deliberately on any social and political reforms intended to placate a “growing Western-educated political elite” to avoid any backlash by conservative and fundamentalist Islamic forces. Simultaneously, Saudi internal security services would have to maintain a close watch over the kingdom’s Shia population, which “could become more assertive in

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<sup>837</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 19.

<sup>838</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 14, 20–21.

<sup>839</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 14.

<sup>840</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 20.

<sup>841</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 21.

<sup>842</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 21.

<sup>843</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 13.

the wake of an Iranian victory over Iraq.” Despite these concerns, the NSSD 4–82 report assessed the prospects for near-term political stability in Saudi Arabia as good.<sup>844</sup> Similarly, prospects for Omani stability appeared quite good, given the country’s homogenous population, lack of opposition, and popular support for the ruling Sultan. The only concerns in Oman were corruption, which could grow if oil revenues decreased, and the lack of an identified successor to Sultan Qaboos.<sup>845</sup>

The fourth and fifth regional objectives focused on economic concerns. One centered on the region’s oil resources, and echoed the Carter administration belief in the critical role that Persian Gulf oil served in ensuring the survival of the West and of Japan. “The continued viability of the economies of many of the Western industrialized countries,” the report explained, “is dependent upon continued access to adequate supplies of Persian Gulf oil at reasonable prices.”<sup>846</sup> While the United States was less dependent on Persian Gulf oil than most of its allies and partners, “the interrelated nature of Western economies (including Japan’s) makes it impossible for the United States to insulate itself from the shock which would be felt by the West were access to Gulf oil be arbitrarily curtailed for whatever reason.”<sup>847</sup> “Clearly,” the report continued, “factors which threaten Western access to Gulf oil also threaten U.S. vital interests.”<sup>848</sup> The same forces of globalization that made the security of the Persian Gulf oil fields a vital interest to the United States also produced “a growth of mutual economic interests between Western banks and business enterprises and their private and governmental counterparts in the region.”<sup>849</sup> The oil wealth that accrued to the region’s oil producers had provided “a source of economic growth and stability” while simultaneously creating an economic vulnerability

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<sup>844</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 26.

<sup>845</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 25. For the sake of brevity, this study concentrates on two countries that directly impact the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia and Oman were the only two countries that were discussed in the NSSD 4–82 report’s assessment of threats to internal stability. The NSSD 4–82 report also discussed threats to stability in Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Pakistan, Sudan, and Tunisia.

<sup>846</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 4.

<sup>847</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 4.

<sup>848</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 4.

<sup>849</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 5.

in the West “should conditions result in the disruption of existing banking and trading relationships.”<sup>850</sup> Thus, a key U.S. objective was to provide staunch support to American economic interests in the region.

As the NSSD 4–82 study was being developed, the Reagan administration was also completing a concurrent study that would serve as the basis for an energy security policy.<sup>851</sup> Directed by NSSD 9–82, the resultant policy was promulgated in NSDD-87 on March 30, 1983, shortly before the completion of NSSD 4–82. This policy provided the basis for NSSD 4–82’s depiction of the global oil supply and demand situation. Both reports (NSSD 4–82 and NSSD 9–82) asserted that OPEC producers remained the primary suppliers to the free world and would provide approximately half of its oil requirements throughout the 1980s. For NATO countries, this figure ranged from 25 to 60 percent.<sup>852</sup> The global oil market was, at the time, experiencing a supply glut, and prices had declined (along with demand) for two years. The market was expected to remain soft for several more years with consumption growing slowly and excess production capacity remaining sufficient for all but a major oil supply disruption (i.e., one resulting in a net global oil supply shortfall).<sup>853</sup> Two scenarios were representative of a major disruption: (a) closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which would eliminate 17 million barrels per day (BPD) of export capacity, and (b) a cutoff of Saudi oil exports, which would create an 11 million BPD loss.<sup>854</sup> While this supply glut was beneficial to the economies of non-producing countries, it posed a threat to the economic and political stability of the Gulf oil-producing states.

Despite the glut and the presence of approximately eight billion BPD in excess production capacity, the ongoing Iran-Iraq War did provide a cause for concern, as

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<sup>850</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 5.

<sup>851</sup> White House, *Comprehensive U.S. Energy Security Policy*, National Security Study Directive Number 9–82 (Washington, DC: The White House, 1982), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssd/nssd-9-82.pdf>; White House, *NSSD 4–82 Report*, 27–31.

<sup>852</sup> White House, *Comprehensive U.S. Energy Security Policy*, National Security Decision Directive 87 (Washington, DC: 1983), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-87.pdf>, 3. Henceforth referred to as *National Security Decision Directive 87*.

<sup>853</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 28.

<sup>854</sup> White House, *National Security Decision Directive 87*, 4–6.



approximately five to six million BPD of this excess capacity could be threatened by an escalation of the conflict.<sup>855</sup> For example, Iran could choose to attack the Gulf Arabs' oil production infrastructure to retaliate against them for the support they had provided to Iraq. While the resulting loss of oil from the global market would not rise to the level of the more dangerous contingencies discussed above, Iranian horizontal escalation would cause global oil prices to rise.<sup>856</sup> Arab use of the oil weapon was considered unlikely because, under the current oil market conditions, the Arab oil producers would bear a considerable economic burden from which non-Arab producers would be able to benefit. Voluntary production reductions would also weaken the global economy and hasten research and development of alternative fuel sources, neither of which served the interests of the Persian Gulf oil producers.<sup>857</sup> Ultimately, the Reagan administration's energy security policy was intended to improve the oil marketplace and better prepare for emergencies, mitigate the impacts that a supply disruption would have on U.S. and allied military forces, and deter future disruptions. NSDD-87 goals included deterring "Soviet, Soviet proxy, or other radical intervention in the Persian Gulf and other major oil producing regions," advancing the Arab-Israeli peace process, and maintaining strong political, economic, and security relationships with select oil producing states.<sup>858</sup>

Maintaining the United States' commitment to the security of Israel and pursuing a comprehensive and enduring Middle East peace agreement comprised the seventh and eighth regional objectives set forth in NSSD 4-82. The relationship between these two objectives was complex, the report explaining that "a more secure Israel might be more willing to accept certain risks inherent in political initiatives" that were undertaken to secure Arab-Israeli peace.<sup>859</sup> A peace agreement would reduce the danger of future Arab-Israeli conflicts and strengthen Israeli security, while also eliminating opportunities for Moscow to further embed itself into the region. This latter point was significant, because

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<sup>855</sup> White House, *National Security Decision Directive 87*, 5-6.

<sup>856</sup> White House, *National Security Decision Directive 87*, 6.

<sup>857</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 30.

<sup>858</sup> White House, *National Security Decision Directive 87*, 8-18.

<sup>859</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 5-6.

the Soviets exploited the Arab-Israeli conflict to “isolate the United States with Israel while aligning the USSR with the Arabs” while also using their arms supply relationships with several Arab states to increase their influence.<sup>860</sup> While American credibility in the greater Middle East was assessed as being improved by the Reagan administration’s efforts to resolve ongoing hostilities in Lebanon, Washington would remain under pressure to demonstrate continued movement on Middle East peace or else “Moscow and its radical regional allies will continue to exploit the perception among many regional states that Washington’s unwillingness to press its ally, Israel, inhibits resolution of these major issues.”<sup>861</sup> Movement toward a resolution of the “Palestinian problem” would close off the Soviets’ primary avenue of encroachment into the region.<sup>862</sup> The ninth regional objective was to discourage nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

### **3. U.S. Policy Options in the Persian Gulf**

Unlike the Persian Gulf studies completed during the Nixon and Ford years, which had provided several policy options for decisionmakers to choose from, the NSSD 4–82 report provided a single “comprehensive political strategy” that was comprised of “mutually reinforcing diplomatic, economic and security initiatives.”<sup>863</sup> This holistic strategy was a collection of interrelated initiatives, elements, objectives, principles, and components, all of which were intended to develop opportunities that would enable the United States to improve its regional strategic posture, weaken Soviet influence, and enhance “the perception of key regional states that cooperation with us serves their national interests.”<sup>864</sup> Three tools underpinned the strategy: American ability to deter Soviet aggression in southwest Asia, the United States’ “unique capability” to lead efforts at achieving Arab-Israeli peace, and its ability to employ economic, technical, military, and

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<sup>860</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 12–13.

<sup>861</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 12–13.

<sup>862</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 6.

<sup>863</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 31.

<sup>864</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 31.

industrial strength to aid allies and partner nations.<sup>865</sup> Close coordination with regional and extra-regional allies and partner nations was deemed critical to the success or failure of the Reagan administration's policy. Building a relationship with regional states would require that Washington "be attuned to the complex interrelationship of the security, political, and economic concerns of these states and their perception of what we have to offer in meeting those concerns."<sup>866</sup> Success (or, at least, the perception thereof) in helping regional states build their defense capability and assisting in their economic development, while simultaneously making headway toward Arab-Israeli peace, provided Washington "a vehicle for increasing our influence while diminishing that of the Soviets."<sup>867</sup> Failure to meet the expectations of regional governments, however, could prove disastrous to U.S. objectives in the region "if it is perceived locally that we are unwilling to devote adequate attention and resources."<sup>868</sup> Overall, the strategy articulated in the NSSD 4-82 report was comprised of diplomatic and military tracks.

The diplomatic strategy was comprised of eight elements, all of which had a direct impact on American security policy. The first was the Arab-Israeli peace process. The report contended that credible efforts aimed at securing a lasting and comprehensive peace enhanced "the willingness of certain regional states to engage in security cooperation" with the United States.<sup>869</sup> Lebanon, invaded by Israel in 1982, loomed large. While continuing the American commitment to Israeli security and working to convince Arab states to "accept the reality of Israel," the United States would also have to work toward obtaining an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.<sup>870</sup> Unwillingness to press the Israelis on this issue, the NSSD 4-82 report warned, would erode American influence with Arab governments to the detriment of U.S. interests. The report also pressed for the withdrawal of all foreign

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<sup>865</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 32.

<sup>866</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 32.

<sup>867</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 32.

<sup>868</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 32.

<sup>869</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 33. The remainder of this paragraph is derived entirely from this source.

<sup>870</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 32.

forces from Lebanon and advocated for the strengthening of the Lebanese army as a means of restoring the stability and sovereignty of that shattered country. Taken together, these steps would contribute to the resolution of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. “Continued, significant American involvement” in the Lebanese crisis, the report asserted, was necessary to restore Lebanese sovereignty and ensure that U.S. diplomatic efforts were successful.<sup>871</sup> A critical outcome from all these efforts would be to isolate the Arab-Israeli conflict from other regional conflicts that threatened American interests in the Gulf.

Resolving or mitigating other regional conflicts provided the second element of the diplomatic strategy. “We must deal with other regional conflicts and forge a strategic understanding of the Soviet threat,” the NSSD 4–82 report explained, “in order to position ourselves more favorably in the area.”<sup>872</sup> The Reagan administration would, in effect, steal a page from the Soviet playbook and leverage regional instability to solidify American influence and presence. The administration would “capitalize on such opportunities to improve (Washington’s) regional position” while also working to “contain and resolve” these same conflicts.<sup>873</sup> The ongoing Iran-Iraq War posed two significant dangers to American strategic interests in the region. The first was the conflict’s threat to the flow of oil to the West, either through the war spilling over into other countries or by a deliberate Iranian or Iraqi decision. “Acts of desperation could be aimed at oil facilities,” the report explained, “triggered by the hope that outside powers would be forced to intervene and stop the war.”<sup>874</sup> This assessment would prove remarkably prescient, as the targeting of oil tanker traffic in the Persian Gulf by both belligerents would be the catalyst for the first

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<sup>871</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 33. The report provided six initiatives that were intended to contribute to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict: (1) “pursue vigorously the President’s September 1 initiative to strengthen the confidence of moderate Arabs in the U.S. and encourage them to take risks for peace;” (2) maintain the American commitment to long-term Israeli security; (3) “foreshadow enough hope for the future for Palestinians” to slow radicalization of the Palestinian movement, reduce Palestinian threats in Lebanon and in the Persian Gulf, and to induce other countries (Jordan being specifically identified) to associate themselves with Arab-Israeli peace; (4) support the reintegration of Egypt into the “Arab mainstream” in a manner that contributed to American interests; (5) “exclude the Soviets from the Arab-Israeli peace process,” and; (6) “demonstrate sufficient progress toward agreement to prevent serious support from the alternative” peace initiatives developed by moderate Arabs and European nations.

<sup>872</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 33.

<sup>873</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 33–34.

<sup>874</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 34.

direct American military intervention in the Gulf in 1987, Operation Earnest Will. The second danger centered on the Gulf Arab's concern over the Iranian threat. While this threat was a source of concern, it also provided the Reagan administration with strategic opportunities.

Washington could exploit Gulf Arab fears of Iranian military success to forge tighter security ties and enhanced military cooperation. The Reagan administration would need to walk a fine line, however. The report warned that the Iranian threat also stoked Arab fears of being seen to be cooperating too closely with the United States. Another complicating factor was the importance of Iran as a "strategic barrier to Soviet expansion into the Gulf."<sup>875</sup> Thus, the Reagan administration would need to carefully balance its efforts to deter Iranian aggression and defend against Tehran's threat to the Gulf with its "long-term aim of rebuilding a working relationship with Iran."<sup>876</sup> This would require that Washington resist Arab pressure for the United States to provide support to Iraq. It would also necessitate a messaging campaign designed to convince Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the other moderate Arab states that their interests were best served by the United States remaining neutral in the conflict. None of this would prevent the Reagan administration from helping these states provide for their own self-defense, however. Simultaneously, the United States would continue its "discreet, behind-the-scenes" efforts to mediate an end to the war.<sup>877</sup>

The NSSM 4-82 report also discussed three other regional conflicts that directly impacted the Persian Gulf strategic environment.<sup>878</sup> Each had been of grave concern to the Carter administration. The first was Afghanistan, where Reagan administration objectives focused on securing a complete Soviet withdrawal, restoring Afghan sovereignty and independence, and ensuring a post-Soviet occupation Afghan government. While waiting on a Soviet withdrawal, Reagan administration policy would maximize the war's political

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<sup>875</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 34.

<sup>876</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 34.

<sup>877</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 34.

<sup>878</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 35. In addition to the conflicts discussed below, the report also discussed the Indo-Pakistani conflict.

and economic costs for Moscow, while also using the Soviet occupation as a tool to achieve enhanced cooperation with regional states. The report recommended a two-track policy, wherein the United States would support Afghan resistance while also pursuing a negotiated political settlement that would end the conflict.<sup>879</sup> A major enabler supporting both tracks was close diplomatic and military cooperation with Pakistan. The second conflict was the ongoing war between North and South Yemen, where the continuing PDRY threat to North Yemen provided the United States with an opportunity for closer “security cooperation with the Saudis and Jordanians aimed at protecting our interests in the Peninsula and the strategic Bab-al-Mandab straits” that separated Yemen from the Horn of Africa.<sup>880</sup> Accordingly, the report recommended that the Reagan administration continue to conduct consultations with Riyadh and Amman aimed at assisting North Yemen President Salih. The third conflict centered on the Horn of Africa, the NSSD 4–82 report recommending that American ties to Somalia be bolstered and that opportunities for closer cooperation with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other moderate states be pursued.<sup>881</sup>

The third element of the NSSD 4–82 diplomatic strategy revolved around the provision of security assistance to key states in the region. “We must bolster the defense capability of friendly states against Soviet and radical regional threats,” the report argued, an objective which required that the United States pursue robust foreign military sales and security force assistance relationships in and around the Persian Gulf.<sup>882</sup> This would also necessitate that the Reagan administration carefully weigh a range of factors and objectives when deciding upon the types and quantities of military equipment it should provide its allies and partners: Congressional opposition, satisfying valid partner nation military requirements “rather than a desire for gadgetry,” ensuring that the economic and technical capacity of receiving nations was not overwhelmed, ensuring a “regional arms balance” was maintained and that Israeli security was not compromised, and ensuring that Persian Gulf military sales supported American security objectives, all while bolstering regional

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<sup>879</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 35.

<sup>880</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 35.

<sup>881</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 36.

<sup>882</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 36.

confidence in American support.<sup>883</sup> Security assistance also provided an opportunity for the Reagan administration to pursue greater strategic cooperation with “key regional states.”<sup>884</sup> As overt, close cooperation with the United States exposed regional states to risk, robust and sustained diplomatic, intelligence, and economic coordination comprised the diplomatic strategy’s fourth element.<sup>885</sup>

Strengthening what NSSD 4–82 referred to as the Northern Tier, comprised of Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, against direct Soviet military pressure comprised the fifth element of the NSSD 4–82 diplomatic strategy.<sup>886</sup> While U.S. policy options in Iran were “limited by the government’s hostility and the need to take the interest of friendly Arab states into account,” the United States maintained a long-term interest in ensuring that Iran remained an independent barrier between the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf.<sup>887</sup> This would not, however, prevent the Reagan administration from confronting Iranian challenges to U.S. interests, especially efforts by Tehran to “subvert or otherwise threaten the stability and security of its neighbors.”<sup>888</sup> On the diplomatic front, the report recommended that the United States “encourage Western states as well as friendly regional states to develop closer ties with Iran in hope of strengthening more pragmatic forces within the Khomeini regime.”<sup>889</sup>

Simultaneously, the United States also maintained an enduring interest in an independent Iraq. The United States had announced a declaratory policy in support of Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity, while also maintaining its neutral stance in the ongoing war with Iran. While the Soviets had expanded their military supply relationship with Baghdad, the report recommended that the Reagan administration “capitalize on Iraqi unhappiness with initially inadequate Soviet support in its war with Iran and quarrels with

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<sup>883</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 36.

<sup>884</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 36.

<sup>885</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 36–37.

<sup>886</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 37.

<sup>887</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 38.

<sup>888</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 38.

<sup>889</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 38.

Syria.”<sup>890</sup> The report also recommended that Washington encourage Western, particularly French, ties with Iraq, while also responding to any Iraqi commercial or political overtures toward the United States in light of a decrease in Iraqi “hostility to many regional U.S. interests.”<sup>891</sup>

Continuing a Carter administration priority, the NSSD 4–82 report identified enhancing American ability to project forces into the region as its diplomatic strategy’s sixth element. Within the Persian Gulf, and like several other elements of the NSSD 4–82 diplomatic strategy, Washington would have to carefully enhance its military posture in the region and avoid contravening Arab sensitivities to an overt American presence or the appearances of close cooperation with the United States. “We must take advantage of opportunities that arise,” the report counselled, “tailoring our initiatives to make them as palatable as possible by emphasizing the ‘temporary’ as opposed to ‘permanent,’ ‘facilities’ as opposed to ‘bases,’ and ‘exercises’ or ‘deployments’ as opposed to ‘presence.’”<sup>892</sup> The report recommended that joint U.S.-Gulf Arab naval and military exercises be encouraged, and that Washington be ready to exploit opportunities to increase the size of the MIDEASTFOR naval presence in and around the Persian Gulf. It also recommended that the administration discourage “the interest of Kuwait and others in an arms supply relationship with the Soviets.”<sup>893</sup> Turning toward Saudi Arabia, the report advised that the United States continue its efforts to “quietly improve” Saudi military-related infrastructure and pursue closer overall defense cooperation, to include “planning for operational use of Saudi facilities in an emergency” and ascertaining Saudi willingness to host a forward CENTCOM headquarters.<sup>894</sup> As in other areas of the Gulf, all of this would have to be accomplished without imperiling Saudi stability.

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<sup>890</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 38.

<sup>891</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 38.

<sup>892</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 39.

<sup>893</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 40.

<sup>894</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 40.



Cooperation with regional and extra-regional allies and partners comprised the diplomatic strategy's seventh and eighth elements, respectively. Within the Persian Gulf, the NSSD 4-82 report recommended that the Reagan administration use its bilateral relationships to "encourage the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in drawing together the states of the Gulf, especially those which achieved sovereignty in the early 1970s."<sup>895</sup> Established in 1981 by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman, and Qatar in response to the Iran-Iraq War, the GCC could serve "a useful parallel purpose in promoting regional cooperation."<sup>896</sup> Washington would need to tread carefully, however, to avoid being viewed by the GCC countries as interfering with the GCC. Simultaneously, the United States would need to "capitalize on opportunities to put pressure on Soviet friends" in order to "force reassessment of their policies," given the disunity that existed between the major Soviet arms recipients in the region.<sup>897</sup> Turning toward Western Europe, the report urged the Reagan administration to press its allies for enhanced military presence, increased resource allocation, and combined planning for security contingencies in Southwest Asia.<sup>898</sup> The report also recommended that the United States support European efforts to moderate the policies of "those radical countries to which they have ties (e.g., Iraq, Iran, and Syria)."<sup>899</sup> Finally, the given its significant interests in ensuring the unabated flow of oil out of the Persian Gulf, Japan would be pressed to provide "greater economic support to key countries in the region."<sup>900</sup>

The military component of the strategy was intended to deter, and, if necessary, defeat Soviet or Soviet-sponsored aggression against American interests in Southwest Asia and was designed to achieve four objectives. The first was "to prevent the spread and reduce the extent of Soviet presence and influence" in Southwest Asia.<sup>901</sup> The second

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<sup>895</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 41.

<sup>896</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 41.

<sup>897</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 41.

<sup>898</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 41.

<sup>899</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 41.

<sup>900</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 41.

<sup>901</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 42.

objective was to defend Western access to the region's oil resources. Underlying these two objectives was a third: improving the United States' ability to execute military options in the region via Washington's sound relations with friendly countries, including Israel. A fourth objective was "to support friendly states against subversion directed by inimical powers."<sup>902</sup>

Three principles helped guide the military strategy. The first was "preventing the spread of Soviet influence and deterring Soviet or Soviet-sponsored aggression."<sup>903</sup> Demonstrations of American *credibility* would be vital if the United States was to achieve this principle, which was the crucial factor that dictated how regional states aligned themselves:

The orientation and military alignment of nations in the region will be formed, in part, by perceptions of the military balance between the U.S. and its allies on the one hand and the Soviets and theirs on the others. The balance of capabilities, which can be credibly (and rapidly) brought to bear in the event of a crisis or conflict, will have a significant effect on the policies of friendly countries as well as inimical powers.<sup>904</sup>

Routine deployments and frequent bilateral and multilateral military exercises would be used to reinforce regional perceptions of the United States as a credible security partner. In parallel, the strategy prioritized improving the ability of the United State to flow military forces into the region via securing access to key ports and airfields, prepositioning military equipment in the region, and improving the Defense Department's strategic air and sea lift. Beyond these steps, the Defense Department needed to be prepared for the possibility that deterrence could fail and that Moscow could make an aggressive move toward the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, the military strategy prioritized development of operational plans and the required force structure that would enable the United States to "defend the critical oil production and transshipment facilities on the Arabian Peninsula proper."<sup>905</sup>

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<sup>902</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 42.

<sup>903</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 42.

<sup>904</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 42.

<sup>905</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 43.

To support the Reagan administration's strategy, the NSSD 4-82 report recommended that a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier battle group be maintained in the Indian Ocean, predominantly in the Arabian Gulf, in addition to the long-standing MEF presence.<sup>906</sup> The Navy would also plan on future multi-carrier deployments to the area. This would be supplemented by periodic deployments of U.S. Marines as well as air and ground forces, additional military trainers, and by continued efforts to establish a CENTCOM forward headquarters into the region. Smaller-scale regional exercises would be complemented annually by one large-scale military exercise that would vary in participants, scope, purpose, and location and that would include indigenous military forces to the maximum extent possible. To enable military forces to flow into the area in the event of an emergency, the military strategy called for expanded access to regional port and airfield infrastructure, improvements to the facilities in Diego Garcia, development of staging areas that could support forces flowing into the theater, increased prepositioning of equipment and supplies, and the development of closer military relationships with Pakistan, Turkey, Israel, and Sudan, as well as with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states.<sup>907</sup>

The second principle was to support friendly states against overt attack by radical states. Echoing a Carter administration belief that "inter-state rivalries and conflicts are major threats which the Soviets can exploit," the NSSD 4-82 report declared that the United States sought to protect its interests, defend its friends, and contain conflicts to prevent "other regional states from being drawn into the conflict and reducing the likelihood of Soviet involvement."<sup>908</sup> The military strategy would prioritize the provision of military assistance to enable key allies and partners to defend themselves against regional threats. Additionally, another focus area would be to work with regional partners to develop "appropriate contingency forces" that could aid other Southwest Asian

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<sup>906</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 45-49. In addition to the four objectives and three principles promulgated in the NSSD 4-82 military strategy, the study also included five components that would enable the United States to secure its objectives in Southwest Asia. These components were: U.S. military presence in Southwest Asia; access rights and development of regional facilities; burden-sharing with allies and extra-regional support requirements; security assistance, and; security role of bilateral military commission.

<sup>907</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 45-46.

<sup>908</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 44.

states.<sup>909</sup> American military forces would play a supporting role in these contingencies, mainly through the provision of lift and other enabling capabilities. This made combined military exercises and improvements in multilateral defense cooperation involving the United States and regional states a necessity. The United States would also be prepared to assume a more direct role in regional conflicts if its vital interests were threatened. The military strategy identified the provision of air defense and naval mine countermeasures capabilities, air and naval support, intelligence, and, “in extreme cases, the commitment of U.S. ground forces.”<sup>910</sup> Iran was defined as a “special case” and, despite its importance as a “bulwark against a Soviet invasion” of the Gulf, the military strategy warned that the United States should “not lose sight of the stated aims of the Iranian government and the impact this is having” on weaker states in the region.<sup>911</sup>

The third principle, closely related to the second, called for supporting friendly states “against insurgency and subversion aided or directed by outside powers.”<sup>912</sup> The United States would likewise rely on local military forces to combat these irregular threats, with UN or multinational peacekeeping forces providing a second alternative. If these threats were beyond the capabilities of local, UN, or multinational forces to mitigate, the strategy recommended that U.S. allies, such as France and the UK, provide military forces to “avoid escalation to the possibility of a superpower confrontation” and to sidestep local political sensitivities to an overt U.S. presence.<sup>913</sup> This would not, however, preclude the direct intervention of American military forces in the event that U.S. interests were threatened or if a partner nation requested it.

The NSSD 4–82 military strategy prioritized provision of security assistance to regional states and ensuring that the United States’ European allies shouldered their share of the security burden as key enablers that would help secure U.S. and NATO interests in

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<sup>909</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 44.

<sup>910</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 44.

<sup>911</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 45.

<sup>912</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 45.

<sup>913</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 45.

the region. Provision of security assistance would improve the capability and capacity of U.S. regional allies to look after their own security while also providing openings for “strategic dialogue which could lead to increased access for U.S. forces and should help assure overflight and transit rights during crisis periods.”<sup>914</sup> The United States’ European allies maintained their own security assistance programs in the region, although the NSSD 4–82 report asserted that “more is clearly needed.”<sup>915</sup> European allies that could deploy and maintain military capabilities in Southwest Asia should continue to do so, as these deployments provided a tangible demonstration of Western resolve, helped deter the Soviets, and provided additional capabilities to limit the impact of regional conflicts. Additionally, the strategy made a plea for increased allied defense expenditures in Western Europe to “compensate for the diversion of U.S. military resources to Southwest Asia.”<sup>916</sup>

#### **4. Deliberations and Decision**

While NSSD 4–82 was issued in March 1982, “events in Lebanon, the announcement of the September 1, 1982, initiative, and the unsettled course of the Iran-Iraq War” had interrupted development of the study.<sup>917</sup> Furthermore, since the report provided a single, holistic security strategy as opposed to a range of policy options from which to choose, debate centered on the language that would be incorporated into the NSDD that would codify the Reagan administration’s Southwest Asia security policy. This NSDD was drafted in late May 1983 and on June 9, 1983, was released to the State, Treasury, Defense, and Energy Departments, the JCS and the CIA for review and comment.

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<sup>914</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 48.

<sup>915</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 47.

<sup>916</sup> White House, *NSSD-4 Report*, 47.

<sup>917</sup> William P. Clark to the President; memo; “NSC Meeting: NSSD-4/82 U.S. Strategy for the Near East and South Asia;” 11 July 1983; folder NSDD 99 (2 of 3): Container 9; National Security Decision Documents; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 1.

This interagency review was completed before the end of June and the NSC staff fine-tuned the draft NSDD's language in preparation for an early July NSC meeting.<sup>918</sup>

This meeting occurred on July 12, 1983. National Security Advisor William P. Clark, while preparing President Reagan for this meeting, identified two areas of potential contention, both of which were Soviet-focused. The first involved strategic military cooperation with the Israelis. "While noting that there are limits on the contributions Israel could make in the event of conflict in the region," Clark explained, "Israel could provide significant assistance to us in the event of major Soviet aggression in the region" (emphasis in the original).<sup>919</sup> Close cooperation and detailed military planning for "certain scenarios" would signal U.S. resolve in its commitment to defend "the core security interests of Israel" and also defuse Israeli questioning of American reliability as the United States worked to "cooperate and equip moderate Arab states with similar stakes in a strategic relationship with the United States."<sup>920</sup>

The second point of contention was over the risks associated with interdicting Soviet forces that were believed to be headed toward Southwest Asia in preparation for a full-on invasion. In making the case for interdicting Soviet forces on Soviet territory, President Reagan's talking points asserted that "we would be remiss if we didn't use every advantage we have to raise the costs of aggression," given Moscow's proximity to the region and "its interior lines of communication."<sup>921</sup> The output of this meeting was NSDD-99, which codified the administration's regional security policy. Later that day, President

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<sup>918</sup> The White House to the Honorable Donald P. Gregg, the Honorable Lawrence S. Eagleburger, the Honorable Beryl Sprinkel, the Honorable Fred C. Ikle, the Honorable George Bradley, the Honorable John McMahon, and Vice Admiral Arthur Moreau; memo, "Draft NSDD-United States Security Strategy for the Near East and Southwest Asia," 9 June 1983; folder NSDD 99 (2 of 3): Container 9; National Security Decision Documents; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 1.

<sup>919</sup> Clark, "NSC Meeting: NSSD-4/82 U.S. Strategy for the Near East and South Asia," 2.

<sup>920</sup> Clark, "NSC Meeting: NSSD-4/82 U.S. Strategy for the Near East and South Asia," 2.

<sup>921</sup> White House; talking points; "Talking Points for the President;" undated; folder NSDD 99 (2 of 3): Container 9; National Security Decision Documents; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 1-3. These talking points were forwarded to President Reagan as Tab (C) to William Clarke's July 11, 1983 memorandum to the President.

Reagan cryptically recorded in his diary “NSC meeting to OK plan for pre-positioning mil. equipment in Israeli as well as Arab countries as hedge against Soviet push.”<sup>922</sup>

Entitled *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, NSDD-99 asserted that the NSSD 4–82 study had “reaffirmed the basic soundness of the purposes and objectives” of the Reagan administration’s Near East/Southwest Asia security policy.<sup>923</sup> The six page document reiterated the regional interests and security objectives that had been articulated in the NSSD 4–82 report and approved its “derivative and complementary regional security interests, objectives, and strategy.”<sup>924</sup> NSDD-99’s characterization of the threat to U.S. regional interests focused on the Soviet Union and on regional conflict, the latter providing Moscow with opportunities to expand its interests. While NSSD 4–82 included a comprehensive diplomatic component to its regional strategy, NSDD-99’s “strategic concept for near-term planning” was more narrowly focused on security.<sup>925</sup> The document directed that American strategy and military planning focus on “defending the oil fields, the transshipment points, and the sea and air lines of communication to this theater” in order to “prevent control of these vital resources by the Soviet Union.”<sup>926</sup> American military forces, together with those of key allies, would be prepared to deploy to the theater in order to deter Soviet aggression and, if deterrence failed, “interdict the movement of Soviet combat forces to the Gulf region.”<sup>927</sup> NSDD-99 also codified the Reagan administration’s push for combined military planning with the Israelis, the second of the two contentious issues that had been identified in National Security Advisor Clark’s July 11, 1983, memorandum to the president. Drawing a clear point of demarcation, NSDD-99 declared the Reagan administration’s “determination to

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<sup>922</sup> Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries*, 165.

<sup>923</sup> White House, *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, National Security Decision Directive Number 99 (Washington, DC: White House, 1983), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-99.pdf>, 1.

<sup>924</sup> White House, *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, 1.

<sup>925</sup> White House, *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, 3.

<sup>926</sup> White House, *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, 3–4.

<sup>927</sup> White House, *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, 3.

block any military moves by the Soviets, their surrogates, or any other powers which threaten U.S. and allied access to the critical resources of the region.”<sup>928</sup>

The NSSD 4–82/NSDD-99 project, along with the earlier NSSD 1–82/NSDD-32 and NSSD 11–82/NSDD-75 efforts, are important milestones in the evolution of American Persian Gulf security policy. Like its predecessor, the Reagan administration viewed the Persian Gulf through a Cold War lens and the security policy promulgated in NSDD-99 was shaped by the same three beliefs that had shaped Carter administration policy development:

- The Soviet Union is confidently and successfully executing an offensive strategy designed to improve its geostrategic position vis-à-vis the United States. In contrast, the United States is becoming tentative and indecisive in the face of Soviet “victories” and “gains.”
- The Soviet Union aggressively exploits regional instability to enhance its prestige and influence.
- The security of the Persian Gulf and its petroleum resources is essential to the survival of the West and of Japan, and vulnerable to Soviet encroachment.

In its national security studies and decision directives, the Reagan administration continued the Carter administration’s depiction of the Soviet Union as aggressively exploiting regional instability as part of a deliberate strategy to expand its influence in the Persian Gulf at the expense of the United States. Likewise, the Reagan administration retained the Carter administration’s view that the region’s oil was vital to the survival of the West. Indeed, with globalization and increasing economic interdependence, threats to the Persian Gulf oil-dependent Japanese and Western European economies could now be considered a direct threat to the United States, which was much less dependent on the region’s fossil fuels.

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<sup>928</sup> White House, *United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia*, 3.



Given the congruence of its views with the Carter administration on the strategic significance of the Gulf, U.S. interests in the region, and the Soviet threat to these interests, it is unsurprising that the policy options presented in NSSD 4-82 and codified by NSDD-99 were continuations of earlier Carter administration priorities: directly confronting Soviet direct and indirect threats in support of the Carter Doctrine, enhancing U.S. credibility, improving U.S. ability to project power into the region, mitigating regional conflicts, developing closer security relationships with the Gulf Arabs, and urging extra-regional allies to support American security interests. Moving beyond continuity with Carter administration priorities, the Reagan administration took a significant step toward a hands-on Persian Gulf security policy with NSSD 4-82 and NSDD-99's assertion that the United States would intervene in regional state-on-state conflicts and in intrastate conflicts if it felt its vital interests were threatened. Previously, the threshold for direct U.S. military involvement in the region was a direct Soviet invasion of the Gulf. The deep-seated belief that the Soviets leveraged regional conflict as their principal tool to increase their influence, coupled with the perceived pressure to be viewed by the Gulf Arab states as a credible security partner, in effect, lowered the threshold for American intervention in the Persian Gulf security environment. American military involvement in the Gulf would now hinge on whichever of the Gulf Arab states was most vulnerable to internal instability or regional conflict, such as the Iran-Iraq War. This war would provide the impetus for the first direct involvement of American military power in the Persian Gulf in 1987 and 1988 when the Reagan administration agreed to reflag and protect several Kuwaiti-owned oil tankers against Iranian attack during the last years of the Iran-Iraq War.

## **B. GETTING TO WAR: OPERATION EARNEST WILL**

Events in the Iran-Iraq War ensured that the conflict remained front and center on the Reagan administration's list of Persian Gulf concerns in the aftermath of NSDD-99's release. Over the course of 1983 the Iranians launched a series of five ground offensives against Iraq that were either repulsed or achieved marginal gains. Facing defeat, Iraq proposed a ceasefire on June 7, 1983, that was rejected by Tehran. On July 27, 1983, Baghdad announced that Iraq would escalate its attacks on Iranian oil-related

infrastructure.<sup>929</sup> “The seemingly endless war with Iran and Iraq’s worsening financial problems are forcing Baghdad to consider drastic military measures,” an October 1983 CIA special intelligence estimate warned, as Iraq was completing the purchase of five French-built Dassault Super Étendard attack aircraft.<sup>930</sup> Equipped with French-produced Exocet anti-ship missiles, these aircraft posed a significant threat to tanker vessels calling on Iranian ports. In the CIA’s view, Iraq’s targeting of Iranian oil flows was intended to achieve three objectives: to deny Tehran a critical source of revenue, to convince Iran to seriously consider a negotiated settlement to the conflict, and, if the latter was not achieved, “to force the West to intervene in the Gulf.”<sup>931</sup> The Reagan administration viewed Baghdad’s purchase of the Super Étendards with alarm, warning that Iraq’s efforts at impeding the production and distribution of Iranian oil, if successful, could push Tehran to “lash out against not only Iraq but other Gulf states as well.”<sup>932</sup> This posed a risk to Gulf Arab confidence in American reliability, as persistent Iranian attacks would demonstrate that “we are manifestly unable to protect them against the threat they worry most about, namely attacks on their internal security and on the oil resources that help to supply, not only wealth, but also legitimacy to many of the current regimes.”<sup>933</sup>

Accordingly, on November 7, 1983, an NSC meeting was convened to discuss the situation in the Gulf, propose consultations with the Gulf Arab states and key extra-regional allies, and reach decisions on policy guidance for potential military contingencies.<sup>934</sup> The latter had been studied by a Senior Interagency Group (SIG) over the fall, and had culminated in a late October 1983 meeting where agreement had been reached that “the

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<sup>929</sup> Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War 1980–1988* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 10.

<sup>930</sup> Central Intelligence Agency; *Iran-Iraq War: Increased Threat to Persian Gulf Oil Exports*; 13 October 1983; folder Iran (10.6.83-03.14.84): Container 38; Country File Near East and South Asia; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 1.

<sup>931</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Iran-Iraq War: Increased Threat to Persian Gulf Oil Exports*, 1.

<sup>932</sup> Donald R. Fortier and Philip A. Dur to Robert C. McFarlane; memo; “NSPG on U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War,” 3 November 1983; folder NSPG Iran-Iraq (11.07.83-12.22.83) (2 of 3): Container 9; Near East and South Asia Affairs Directorate, NSC Records; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 2.

<sup>933</sup> Fortier and Dur, “NSPG on U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War,” 2.

<sup>934</sup> Robert C. McFarlane to unknown; memo; “National Security Planning Group Meeting,” 5 November 1983; folder NSPG 0076 07NOV1983: Container 2; National Security Planning Group (NSPG) Records 1981–1987; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 3.

U.S. should respond militarily to belligerent attempts to mine international or non-belligerent territorial waters, belligerent attacks on shipping, and belligerent attacks on the oil facilities or territory of a non-belligerent asking for U.S. support.”<sup>935</sup> The SIG also recommended that the United States, in concert with its allies, be prepared to conduct mine clearance operations and protect commercial shipping in the region. On November 26, 1983, President Reagan accepted these recommendations and codified them in NSDD-114, *U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War*. NSDD-114 asserted that “it is the present United States policy to undertake whatever measures may be necessary to keep the Strait of Hormuz open to international shipping.”<sup>936</sup> It directed that political and military consultations with both regional and extra-regional allies be undertaken to discuss “planning measures necessary to deter or defend against attacks on or interference with non-belligerent shipping or on critical oil productions and transshipment facilities in the Persian Gulf.”<sup>937</sup> Establishing access agreements to enable the rapid projection of U.S. military forces into the region was the number one consultation priority. Simultaneously, the secretary of defense and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff were directed to monitor tensions in the region and ensure the readiness of U.S. forces to deter and defeat “any hostile efforts to close the Strait to international shipping.”<sup>938</sup>

The Reagan administration promptly dispatched diplomatic and military consultation teams to the Gulf, to Europe, and to the Pacific. These teams made requests for combined military planning for Gulf contingencies with the UK, France, Italy, Australia, and New Zealand. With the accepting the Reagan administration’s request,

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<sup>935</sup> Charles Hill to Robert C. McFarlane; memo; “Iran-Iraq War;” 27 October 1983; folder NSPG 0076 07NOV1983; Container 2; National Security Planning Group (NSPG) Records 1981–1987; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA. This quotation is taken from pages 7–10 of an undated paper prepared by an NSC Senior Interagency Group entitled “Discussion Paper” that was provided to Robert C. McFarlane as an attachment to Hill’s memorandum; White House, *National Security Council Structure*, National Security Decision Directive Number 2 (Washington, DC: White House, 1982), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-2.pdf>. The purpose of Interagency Groups was to support the NSC by establishing policy objectives, developing policy options, providing policy recommendations, and to “undertake such other activities as assigned by the NSC.”

<sup>936</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War*, National Security Decision Directive Number 114 (Washington, DC: White House, 1983), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-114.pdf>.

<sup>937</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War*.

<sup>938</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War*.

initial consultations with the GCC countries were completed in early December 1983, with Bahrain and Oman agreeing to “detailed bilateral contingency planning for combined operations.”<sup>939</sup> These efforts were discussed by the NSC on December 22, 1983, President Reagan noting that the meeting discussed “plans to keep the Persian Gulf open if Iran should try to close it. All agreed it must be kept open to shipping.”<sup>940</sup> As these steps were being undertaken, the Iran-Iraq War droned on. In February 1984, a renewed Iranian offensive captured the Fao peninsula in southern Iraq. Iraq commenced a series of air and missile attacks on Iranian population centers, which sparked a series of Iranian reprisal attacks, in what became known as the War of the Cities. Of greater concern for U.S. security policy was the expanding war against shipping in the Persian Gulf. As an offset to Iranian gains in the ground war, Iraqi attacks against merchant shipping servicing Iran’s oil industry increased 440% over the previous year (58 attacks in 1984 versus 13 in 1983).<sup>941</sup> Six ships were sunk outright while 28 were considered to be constructive total losses (CTL). In May 1984, Tehran, which had heretofore abstained from attacks on Gulf shipping, commenced its first of 19 attacks against shipping calling on Kuwaiti and Saudi ports. One vessel was sunk and two more were deemed to be CTLs.<sup>942</sup> Additionally, 18 vessels transiting the Red Sea struck naval mines. The Iranian-supported terrorist group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the Red Sea minefields.<sup>943</sup> These developments prompted the Reagan administration to release NSDD-139, *Measures to Improve U.S. Posture and Readiness to Respond to Developments in the Iran-Iraq War* on April 5, 1984, and NSDD-141, *Responding to Escalation in the Iran-Iraq War* on May 25, 1984. Among other things, NSDD-141 directed the Air Force to deploy tanker aircraft to support the

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<sup>939</sup> Department of State to Mr. Robert C. McFarlane; memo; “U.S. Policy Towards the Iran-Iraq War: Status Report on NSDD-114;” 19 December 1983; folder NSPG 0082 22DEC1983: Container 2; National Security Planning Group (NSPG) Records 1981–1987; Executive Secretariat NSC; RRL, Simi Valley, CA. 3.

<sup>940</sup> Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries*, 206.

<sup>941</sup> Navias and Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, 74–75.

<sup>942</sup> Navias and Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, 83.

<sup>943</sup> Navias and Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, 91.

Saudi Air Force and tasked the Department of Defense to study likely escalation scenarios, including attacks on U.S.-flagged merchant vessels.<sup>944</sup>

The war against Persian Gulf shipping continued into 1985 and 1986. During this period Iraq attacked 95 vessels, resulting in six being sunk and 29 being declared CTLs.<sup>945</sup> Iran conducted 58 attacks resulting in seven ships being declared CTLs.<sup>946</sup> More significant than the numbers of Iranian attacks were its targets: as 1986 ground on, Kuwaiti vessels were being increasingly targeted, with eight being attacked during the second half of 1986.<sup>947</sup> Alarmed, the Kuwaiti government raised this issue with the GCC on November 1, 1986, and, on December 10, 1986, the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company reached out to the United States Coast Guard to ascertain the requirements associated with reflagging its vessels under the American flag.<sup>948</sup> Two weeks later, on December 23, 1986, the KOTC informed the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait City of its interest in reflagging and on January 13, 1987, asked if the reflagged vessels would be protected by the U.S. Navy. On this same day the Reagan administration learned that the Kuwaitis had also approached Moscow over the protection of shipping. The Reagan administration considered the reflagging request over the first two months of 1987 only to learn in late February of a Soviet agreement to reflag five Kuwaiti-owned tankers. On March 2, 1987, the Kuwait government asked Washington to place six tankers under the American flag. On March 7 the Reagan administration offered to reflag all 11 of the Kuwaiti tankers, and the Emirati government accepted this offer on March 10.

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<sup>944</sup> White House, *Measures to Improve U.S. Posture and Readiness to Respond to Developments in the Iran-Iraq War*, National Security Decision Directive Number 139 (Washington, DC: White House, 1984), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-139.pdf>; White House, *Responding to Escalation in the Iran-Iraq War*, National Security Decision Directive Number 141 (Washington, DC: White House, 1984), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-141.pdf>.

<sup>945</sup> Navias and Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, 107.

<sup>946</sup> Navias and Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, 110, 116–119. Iraq conducted 33 attacks in 1985 (two vessels sunk and 11 declared CTLs) and 62 attacks in 1986 (four vessels sunk and 18 declared CTLs). Iran executed 17 attacks in 1985 (resulting in one CTL) and 41 in 1986 (six vessels declared CTLs).

<sup>947</sup> Navias and Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, 131.

<sup>948</sup> White House; memo; “Chronology of Kuwaiti Shipping Protection Issue;” undated; folder Persian Gulf 1987 (6.15.1987): Container 11; Near East and South Asia Affairs Directorate, NSC Records; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 1–3. The remainder of this paragraph is derived entirely from this source.

The Reagan administration's decision to reflag and provide naval protection for 11 Kuwaiti-owned oil tankers nested neatly beneath the strategic objectives identified in the NSSD 4-82 study and the policy options promulgated in NSDD-99 in July 1983. Similarly, the decision reflected concerns expressed in NSSD-113, -139, and -141 over freedom of navigation in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and the protection of nonbelligerent shipping. The Reagan administration reflagging decision was taken to counter three threats: the danger posed by an Iranian victory in the Iran-Iraq War, the impact of Iranian intimidation and destabilization of the Gulf Arab states, and the "skillful exploitation of Gulf Arab anxieties," exacerbated by the Iran-Contra scandal, which could lead to "an expansion of Soviet influence in the area."<sup>949</sup> The administration's purpose in agreeing to the Kuwait request was multifaceted:

To help demonstrate to Iran that it can't win the war by pressuring the Gulf Arabs and will, therefore, eventually have to negotiate a settlement with Iraq; to bolster the ability of Kuwait and other GCC states to withstand Iranian intimidation, and to make clear our continuing commitment to defending freedom of navigation for non-belligerent shipping and the flow of oil to the west; and to foreclose, or at least sharply limit, opportunities for the Soviets to expand their influence. It is essential that the Soviets not be able to assume the posture of being the "defender" of the Gulf.<sup>950</sup>

Secretary of Defense Weinberger elaborated on these points in a June 1987 report to Congress entitled *Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf*. The Iran-Iraq War provided Moscow with "opportunities to expand their influence at our expense."<sup>951</sup> Moscow was "watching the development of U.S. policy very closely," Weinberger warned, and "the way the Soviets define their options and the extent to which they see it in their interests to act responsibly will depend in large part on western and U.S. steadfastness, our willingness to

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<sup>949</sup> Robert B. Oakley to Frank C. Carlucci; memo; "Building Allied Support for Gulf Policy: Background and Talking Points for President's Use at Venice Summit;" 2 June 1987; folder Persian Gulf (1.01.87-6.04.87); Container 11; Near East and South Asia Affairs Directorate, NSC Records; RRL, Simi Valley, CA, 2.

<sup>950</sup> Oakley, "Building Allied Support for Gulf Policy: Background and Talking Points for President's Use at Venice Summit," 2.

<sup>951</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *A Report to Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1987), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a193900.pdf>, i.

protect our own and free world interests, and the security and independence of our many friends in the Gulf.”<sup>952</sup>

With the Reagan administration having made its decision, and despite intense Congressional interest in the reflagging scheme after the American frigate USS *Stark* (FFG-31) was attacked by an Iraqi aircraft, claiming the lives of 37 sailors, planning for the operation, ultimately named Earnest Will, proceeded at CENTCOM headquarters and onboard the MEF flagship USS *La Salle* (AGF-3). The plan was straightforward. Two to three U.S. Navy warships would escort small convoys of one to three tankers between Kuwait and Oman, supported by additional warships stationed on either end of the Strait of Hormuz, the northern portion of the Gulf, and in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>953</sup> Tehran was not expected to cause problems. American military planners, intelligence analysts, and General and Flag officers assumed that the Iranian government had no stomach for a confrontation with the U.S. Navy and would, therefore, not overtly challenge the American convoys.<sup>954</sup> American analysts also discounted the threat posed by Iran’s naval mines, estimating that Tehran lacked “the capability to lay and maintain systemic minefields,” the threat being “primarily psychological.”<sup>955</sup> Operation Earnest Will commenced on July 22, 1987, when the 440,000 deadweight tonnage (DWT) tanker *Bridgeton* and the 46,000 DWT Liquid Propane Gas carrier *Gas Prince*, accompanied by an American cruiser and destroyer, set course from the Gulf of Oman to Kuwait. The United States, for the first time, was committing military power and directly intervening in a regional conflict in support of its Persian Gulf security policy.

## C. CONCLUSION

American assumptions about supposed Iranian timidity were quickly disproved on July 24, 1987, when the *Bridgeton* struck an Iranian mine in the Persian Gulf. Despite this

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<sup>952</sup> Weinberger, *A Report to Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf*, 9.

<sup>953</sup> David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America’s Thirty-Year Conflict With Iran* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 230–231.

<sup>954</sup> Crist, *The Twilight War*, 233; William J. Crowe and David Chanoff, *The Line of Fire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 111.

<sup>955</sup> Crist, *The Twilight War*, 233.

setback, the Reagan administration persisted with its reflagging policy, thereby demonstrating steadfast commitment to its regional allies and upholding NSDD-99's assertion that the United States would intervene militarily in regional state-on-state conflicts that threatened American interests. Operation Earnest Will marked the United States' inaugural use of direct American military force in the Persian Gulf, which enabled Washington to derive strategic benefits while simultaneously exposing the United States to a new set of risks. The administration stood by its policy even as attacks by both belligerents on merchant shipping increased dramatically in 1987, with Iraq executing 97 attacks and Iran 89. Over the first eight months of 1988, Iran and Iraq conducted 47 and 40 attacks, respectively.<sup>956</sup> Between July 1987 and the end of the Iran-Iraq War in August 1988, the United States escorted 181 ships in 83 convoys.<sup>957</sup> During this period American and Iranian naval and air forces clashed at least six times. This included the mining of the USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG-58) on April 14, 1988, and, in response, American destruction of several Iranian naval vessels and oil platforms in a planned operation called Praying Mantis. On April 29, 1988, the Reagan administration expanded its protection scheme to include all "friendly, innocent neutral vessels flying a nonbelligerent flag outside declared exclusion zones, that are not carrying contraband or resisting legitimate visit and search by a Persian Gulf belligerent."<sup>958</sup> On July 3, 1988, the USS *Vincennes* (CG-49), while responding to reports of Iranian small craft harassing a Pakistani-flagged merchant vessel, instigated a running surface battle that culminated with the American warship mistakenly shooting down an Iranian airliner, killing 290 people. With its fortunes in the ground war declining in the face of Iraqi advances, Tehran accepted a ceasefire, which went into effect on August 20, 1988.

Despite the end of the Iran-Iraq War and a reduction in the U.S. Navy presence in the region, Operation Earnest Will convoys continued, in the opinion of one historian,

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<sup>956</sup> Navias and Hooton, , *Tanker Wars*, 133–138, 166–167, 172–173.

<sup>957</sup> Ronald O'Rourke, "Gulf Ops," United States Naval Institute Proceedings 115 (May 1989), 49.

<sup>958</sup> Andrea DeGuttry and Natalino Ronzitti, eds., *The Iran-Iraq War (1980 - 1988) and the Law of Naval Warfare* (Cambridge: Grotius Publications Limited, 1993), 196.



“more out of inertia than necessity” throughout 1989 and into 1990.<sup>959</sup> The final Earnest Will convoy reached Kuwait in the early morning hours of August 2, 1990. Shortly thereafter, just before 0400, U.S. Army Major John F. Feeley, in Kuwait City to brief the American ambassador on the Iraqi threat to the kingdom, awoke to the sound of explosions. Minutes later he received a phone call from the U.S. embassy confirming that Iraq had commenced an invasion of Kuwait, an event that would mark the culmination of the evolution of American Persian Gulf security policy from an arm’s-length approach that leveraged regional allies to a hands-on one wherein the United States was the unequivocal guarantor of regional security and stability.<sup>960</sup>

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<sup>959</sup> Crist, *The Twilight War*, 385.

<sup>960</sup> U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 9–10.

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## VIII. THE ELUSIVE PATH TO PEACE: 1989–1991

The Bush administration took office on January 20, 1989, determined to make a clean break with the Reagan administration and “establish its own brand” in the foreign policy arena.<sup>961</sup> It was also confronted with a rapidly changing Cold War environment. The Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev since 1985, was in the midst of an extensive series of domestic political and economic reforms that would ultimately lead to the country’s dissolution in 1991. Economic and political reforms would also sweep over Eastern Europe, as Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia abandoned the Soviet bloc and instituted democratic reforms. The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. To chart its own foreign policy course, the Bush administration commenced an extensive series of National Security Reviews (NSR) that would provide the basis for its foreign policy. The first was NSR-3, *Comprehensive Review of U.S.-Soviet Relations*. NSR-3 noted the “remarkable changes taking place in the Soviet Union and in Soviet foreign policy” and asserted that “the trends in U.S.-Soviet relations are, in large part, favorable to us.”<sup>962</sup> “We may be standing at the door of a new era in our relationship with the USSR,” NSR-3 continued, “with potential for significantly reducing military forces and resolving longstanding international disputes.”<sup>963</sup> Nevertheless, NSR-3 cautioned that “it would be unwise thoughtlessly to abandon policies that have brought us this far” and warned that the USSR remained “an adversary with awesome military power” that maintained interests inimical to the United States.<sup>964</sup> NSR-3 directed the NSC to conduct a comprehensive review of U.S.-Soviet relations and develop a strategy to achieve American strategic objectives.

The NSR-3 report was quickly completed, and reached President Bush’s desk by March 14, 1989. Neither the president, his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, or

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<sup>961</sup> Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 266.

<sup>962</sup> White House, *Comprehensive Review of U.S.-Soviet Relations*, National Security Review 3 (Washington, DC: White House, 1989), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsr/nsr3.pdf>, 1.

<sup>963</sup> White House, *Comprehensive Review of U.S.-Soviet Relations*, 1.

<sup>964</sup> White House, *Comprehensive Review of U.S.-Soviet Relations*, 1.

the secretary of state, James Baker, was satisfied with its level of detail or its substance.<sup>965</sup> Baker assessed that the weaknesses of the NSR-3 report could be traced back to its authors: all Reagan administration veterans with a “personal and psychological investment in the status quo.”<sup>966</sup> No outside perspectives had been included in the report. The result, in Baker’s view, was that the study was “mush.”<sup>967</sup> An NSC team, led by Condoleezza Rice, developed the Bush administration’s Soviet policy and provided the basis for National Security Directive 23 (NSD-23), which was released on September 22, 1989. Entitled *United States Relations with the Soviet Union*, NSD-23 promulgated a cautious policy toward Moscow that sought to influence the evolving political environment within the Soviet Union, push it toward democracy, and encourage bilateral cooperation in resolving regional and transnational issues. The United States would continue to field a powerful military as a “hedge against uncertain long-term developments in the Soviet Union” and to ensure that Moscow remained on a “responsible course” and refrained from defaulting to a militaristic policy.<sup>968</sup>

Overall, this policy reflected the cautious nature of Bush administration thinking on the Soviet Union. In Scowcroft’s view, Mikhail Gorbachev’s political and economic reforms were intended to achieve a specific goal: “to restore dynamism to a socialist political and economic system and revitalize the Soviet Union domestically and internationally to compete with the West.”<sup>969</sup> Breaking from the pattern of past Soviet leaders that had, in Scowcroft’s estimate, “saved the West from the dangers of its own wishful thinking,” Gorbachev was “saying the sorts of things we wanted to hear, [and] making numerous seductive proposals to seize and maintain the propaganda high ground in the battle for public opinion.”<sup>970</sup> This made Gorbachev a more dangerous adversary

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<sup>965</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 40.

<sup>966</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy, 1989–1992*, 68.

<sup>967</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy, 1989–1992*, 68.

<sup>968</sup> White House, *United States Relations with the Soviet Union*, National Security Directive 23 (Washington, DC: White House, 1989), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsd/nsd23.pdf>, 3–4.

<sup>969</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 13.

<sup>970</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 13–14.

than his immediate predecessors. According to Secretary of State Baker, the Bush administration had to adopt an activist policy that would enable the United States to influence Gorbachev's initiatives and push them in a direction that would serve American interests. In Baker's view, Soviet strategy was "premised on splitting the alliance and undercutting us in Western Europe."<sup>971</sup> An activist policy on the USSR and Gorbachev would enable the United States to "attack his strategy head-on" and allow the Bush administration to seize the initiative from Moscow.<sup>972</sup> President Bush personally maintained a cautious view toward the new Cold War environment, only privately acknowledging the Cold War's end in early 1990.<sup>973</sup>

Concurrent with NSR-3, the Bush administration completed several additional studies that provided the basis for American relations with Eastern and Western Europe, with India and Pakistan, and with Libya.<sup>974</sup> An additional review charted the course for the Bush administration's approach to the Arab-Israeli peace process. On February 22, 1989, the Bush administration promulgated NSR-10, which directed a review of Persian Gulf policy.

#### **A. NSR-10: CONTINUING INTERESTS IN THE REGION**

Entitled *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, NSR-10 was developed in response to the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Afghanistan, as well as the United States' "continuing interests in the region."<sup>975</sup> NSR-10 directed a series of seven assessments, each built around a series of interrelated topics.<sup>976</sup> The first identified American political, economic, and strategic interests in the region and

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<sup>971</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 69.

<sup>972</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 70.

<sup>973</sup> Jeffrey A. Engel, "The Gulf War at the End of the Cold War and Beyond," in Engel, ed., *Into the Desert: Reflections on the Gulf War*, 16.

<sup>974</sup> These studies were: NSR-4 (*Comprehensive Review of U.S.-East European Relations*); NSR-5 (*Comprehensive Review of U.S.-West European Relations*); NSR-8 (*U.S. Policy Toward South Asia*); NSR-9 (*U.S. Policy Toward Libya*), and; NSR-7 (*Middle East Peace Process*).

<sup>975</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, National Security Review 10 (Washington, DC: White House, 1989), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsr/nsr10.pdf>, 1. Henceforth referred to as *NSR-10*.

<sup>976</sup> White House, *NSR-10*, 1–2.

assessed how they were impacted by the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Focusing directly on a critical American interest in the region, the second assessment projected the degree of American and allied dependence on the region's fossil fuels. The third assessment examined Soviet interests in the region and forecast the future course of Soviet policy toward the Persian Gulf. The fourth and fifth assessments centered on the recently concluded Iran-Iraq War and considered the prospects for a negotiated and comprehensive peace agreement between Iran and Iraq. It also provided an overall analysis of the nature of the bilateral relationship between the two belligerents that included the probability of renewed fighting between them as well as the impact that any renewed hostilities would have on U.S. interests. More narrowly, the report analyzed the impact of the war on Iraq's "internal situation" and ascertained how these impacts would shape Baghdad's behavior in the region.<sup>977</sup> The sixth assessment, still available only in heavily redacted form, focused on the prospects for Iranian internal stability. Finally, NSR-10 examined regional conventional, nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons proliferation and analyzed its potential impact on U.S. and allied interests and on the ability of the United States military to project military force into the region.<sup>978</sup>

The NSR-10 study also provided policy options focused on seven questions.<sup>979</sup> The first centered on the American posture toward Baghdad and the identification of tools that the Bush administration could use to shape Iraqi behavior toward the Persian Gulf and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The second question, closely related to the first, concerned U.S. involvement in ongoing negotiations between Iran and Iraq that were being conducted under the auspices of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 598 and the investigation of circumstances in which the United States would participate in the

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<sup>977</sup> White House, *NSR-10*, 2.

<sup>978</sup> White House, *NSR-10*, 1–2.

<sup>979</sup> White House, *NSR-10*, 2–3.

reconstruction of both countries.<sup>980</sup> The third question focused on the regional American military footprint, whether U.S. forces should be maintained within the region or outside of it, and the overall level of military cooperation that could be expected from both local and extra-regional allies and partners. The fourth question examined the regional demand for and efficacy of arms sales and security force assistance to the Gulf Arabs. The fifth question examined the ability of the United States to affect “Soviet thinking and behavior toward the Gulf” with a specific focus on how the Bush administration could “persuade the USSR to play a constructive role in the region.”<sup>981</sup> The sixth question was intended to identify options that would enable the United States to become less dependent on Persian Gulf oil resources. The seventh question remains redacted.<sup>982</sup> The NSR-10 report was completed by April 10, 1989, and, in late June, the NSC convened to discuss its findings.<sup>983</sup> On October 2, 1989, President Bush signed National Security Directive (NSD) 26, which laid out the administration’s policy toward the Persian Gulf.

Entitled *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, NSD-26 identified access to Persian Gulf oil and the “security of key friendly states in the area” as “vital” to American national security.<sup>984</sup> Because the NSR-10 report is classified and therefore unavailable for public discussion in this study, it is impossible to examine its portrayal of the Persian Gulf strategic environment and the threats that it posed to American interests. On March 3, 1989, the CIA provided the NSR-10 working group with answers to a series of intelligence-

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<sup>980</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 598, The Situation Between Iran and Iraq, S/RES/598 (July 20, 1987), <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/598>. Among other things, UNSCR 598 directed Iran and Iraq to cooperate in the pursuit of a comprehensive and just settlement to the Iran-Iraq War and directed the UN Secretary General to “assign a team of experts to study the question of reconstruction,” given the significant damage both belligerents sustained in the conflict.

<sup>981</sup> White House, *NSR-10*, 2.

<sup>982</sup> White House, *NSR-10*, 2–3.

<sup>983</sup> Sandra Charles to G. Philip Hughes; memo; “Summary and Minutes of NSC/DC Meeting, Wednesday, April 12, 1989;” 13 April 1989; folder NSC/DC 020-April 13, 1989-NSC/DC Meeting on Persian Gulf, Keywords Persian Gulf; NSC/DC Meetings Files; National Security Council H-Files; George Bush Presidential Library (GBPL), College Station, TX; Sandra Charles to G. Philip Hughes; memo; 23 June 1989; “Minutes of the National Security Council Meeting on the Persian Gulf, Wednesday, June 21, 1989; 1:30-2:45 PM, the Cabinet Room;” folder NSC0023-June 23, 1989-Persian Gulf (1); NSC Meetings Files; National Security Council H-Files; GBPL, College Station, TX.

<sup>984</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, National Security Directive 26 (Washington, DC: White House, 1989), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsd/nsd26.pdf>. Henceforth referred to as *NSD-26*.

related questions that provide some insight.<sup>985</sup> The CIA assessed that Soviet behavior in the Gulf was driven by a series of interests, with preventing the reestablishment of U.S. influence in Iran being most important. Hoping to fill this void, the Soviets were “moving to improve ties and revive economic links” with Iran.<sup>986</sup> This placed Moscow in a difficult spot, as the Soviets had to balance their overtures to Iran with maintaining their influence in Iraq, a constraint on Soviet policy in the Gulf that had been identified during the NSSM-66 effort in 1969/1970. The CIA asserted that Moscow would prop up its position in Iraq through the use of arms sales and, potentially, the restructuring of Baghdad’s debts from the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>987</sup> Indeed, Moscow hoped that the end of the war, together with its withdrawal from Afghanistan, would enable the Soviet Union to improve its relationships throughout the Persian Gulf region. The conclusion of the war also provided the Soviets with a basis to argue that the United States should reduce its military presence in the region.<sup>988</sup>

In the CIA’s estimate, the end of the Iran-Iraq War had ushered in “a new regional order” that lessened the likelihood of local hostilities breaking out through at least 1991.<sup>989</sup> Several factors contributed to this order: the inability of any one state to dominate the region; economic and political issues that would cause most regional states to focus inward rather than outward; and the low likelihood of conflict and lack of immediate threat that would retard U.S. efforts to enhance military cooperation with the Gulf Arab states.

Several regional issues remained concerning, however. In Iraq, the conclusion of the war with Iran had, in the CIA’s assessment, left Saddam Hussein with “the best-equipped and largest armed forces in the Arab world” that, when coupled with Baghdad’s

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<sup>985</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10: U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1989), [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000631118.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000631118.pdf), 3.

<sup>986</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10: U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, 5.

<sup>987</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10: U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, 5.

<sup>988</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10: U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf*, 5.

<sup>989</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10*, 1.



petroleum-fueled economic potential, had reignited the Iraqi dictator's "aspirations to leadership in the Arab world."<sup>990</sup> A second concern was that the end of the war could also cause "contentious regional issues," such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, to rise in prominence and erode American influence in the Gulf.<sup>991</sup> The end of the war could also spur local territorial disputes. The CIA explicitly highlighted Iraq and Kuwait as a potential flash point, given Baghdad's coveting of two Kuwait-held islands that controlled Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf. Iranian internal turmoil and tensions within OPEC spurred by Iraqi efforts to increase its national oil revenues also posed significant indigenous threats to Gulf stability. Overall, however, the CIA estimated that the Persian Gulf strategic environment served U.S. interests well, principally by lessening the risks to Persian Gulf oil flows and reducing the requirement for the United States to become military involved in a Persian Gulf conflict and by providing American companies a safer environment within which they could assist in reconstruction efforts.<sup>992</sup>

NSD-26 largely continued the policy direction that had been taken by the Reagan administration in July 1983 with the release of NSDD-99, in particular its pledge to directly intervene in regional conflicts that threatened American allies or the continued flow of oil from the Gulf. Echoing the Reagan administration policy that was developed in a far different Cold War context, NSD-26 asserted that the United States "remained committed to defend its vital interests in the region, if necessary and appropriate through the use of U.S. military force, against the Soviet Union or any other regional power" that threatened U.S. interests.<sup>993</sup> Continuing another long-standing pillar of American security policy in the Persian Gulf, the Bush administration policy prioritized enhancing the ability of regional allies to provide for their own defense, both individually and collectively. Finally, the Bush administration would enlist its Japanese and European allies to take a more active stance in support of shared interests in the region.<sup>994</sup>

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<sup>990</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10*, 7.

<sup>991</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10*, 2.

<sup>992</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Response to National Security Review 10*, 2.

<sup>993</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 1.

<sup>994</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 1.

NSD-26 promulgated five decisions that guided the Bush administration's regional security policy. The first focused on the Soviet Union. The Bush administration would maintain a dialogue with Moscow on regional issues that would include discouraging arms sales in the region and ensuring that the Soviet Union, like Iran and Iraq, abstained from interfering in the internal affairs of Gulf states.<sup>995</sup> The second decision directed that the overall U.S. Navy presence in the Indian Ocean be reduced and declared that the administration would "continue to nurture the mutually beneficial and enduring cooperative security relationships with the GCC states" that had been developed over the course of the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>996</sup> To enable the United States to project military power into the region, the Defense Department, again continuing Carter and Reagan administration policies, was directed to secure access to ports, airfields, and other critical infrastructure. The Defense Department was also directed to "expand the scope" of its security cooperation efforts with regional allies, through combined contingency planning and military exercises as well as through expanded prepositioning of military equipment.<sup>997</sup> The third decision directed the State and Defense Departments to produce a long-term strategy to guide arms sales to Saudi Arabia that focused closely on sales of controversial equipment (e.g., tanks and fighter aircraft) that could foster strong Congressional and public opposition. This strategy would also need to ensure that arms sold to Saudi Arabia did not pose a threat to Israel.<sup>998</sup>

Expanding American influence with Iran and Iraq constituted the focus of the fourth and fifth policy decisions promulgated by NSD-26. Under the Bush administration policy, the United States would "continue to be prepared for a normal relationship with Iran on the basis of strict reciprocity."<sup>999</sup> Normalization would be conditions-based, however, and would be contingent on Iran stopping subversive behavior, improving relations with the Gulf Arab states, making serious efforts to secure a peace treaty with Iraq, halting its

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<sup>995</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 3.

<sup>996</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 2.

<sup>997</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 2.

<sup>998</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 2.

<sup>999</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 3.

support to international terrorist organizations, and helping to secure the release of American hostages. To avoid a repeat of the Iran-Contra fiasco, NSD-26 designated the State Department as the lead organization for all contacts with Iran.<sup>1000</sup> Turning toward Iraq, NSD-26 explained that establishing normal relations with Baghdad would support U.S. “longer-term interests and promote stability in both the Gulf and the Middle East.”<sup>1001</sup> The Bush administration policy identified economic and political tools as efficacious means of increasing American influence in Iraq while simultaneously moderating Iraqi behavior in the Gulf and across the broader Middle East. As with Iran, improved relations with Iraq were conditions-based. Baghdad would need to abstain from the use of chemical and biological weapons and comply with International Atomic Energy Agency constraints on its nuclear program. Iraq would also need to avoid interference in the internal politics of Persian Gulf and Middle Eastern countries and pursue an overall peace agreement with Iran.<sup>1002</sup>

The Bush administration moved out promptly on NSD-26’s directive to normalize U.S.-Iraqi relations. On October 6, 1989, four days after President Bush signed NSD-26, Secretary of State Baker conducted his first ever meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to “seek his help in moving along the peace process in the Middle East.”<sup>1003</sup> Following mutual expressions of their desire for better U.S.-Iraqi relations, the discussion eventually turned toward U.S. Credit Commodity Corporation (CCC) credits for Iraq that, Aziz complained, were being cut from \$1 billion to \$400 million. The Bush administration, believing that CCC credits comprised the “principal economic incentive” the United States could offer Iraq, ultimately went ahead with the \$1 billion allocated for Iraq, with the caveat that \$500 million would be made immediately available while the remainder would be contingent on Iraqi compliance with specific CCC obligations.<sup>1004</sup> Unfortunately, Bush

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<sup>1000</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 3.

<sup>1001</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 2.

<sup>1002</sup> White House, *NSD-26*, 2.

<sup>1003</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 264.

<sup>1004</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 266–267; Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 306.

administration faith in economic incentives did not moderate Iraqi behavior in the first half of 1990. Saddam Hussein ratcheted up his anti-Israel rhetoric, threatening on April 2, 1990, to “make fire eat up half of Israel.”<sup>1005</sup> Additionally, the Bush administration and the Saddam Hussein regime clashed over issues related to nuclear proliferation and human rights. Finally, Iraq started to quarrel with its neighbors over oil pricing, Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of “economic warfare” on May 30, 1990, and charged both Kuwait and the UAE with “economic aggression” against Iraq on July 16.<sup>1006</sup> On July 19, 1990, American reconnaissance satellites detected large Iraqi military formations moving toward the Kuwaiti border.

A series of economic factors drove Saddam Hussein’s hostility toward Kuwait in 1989 and 1990. Baghdad had emerged from the Iran-Iraq War with its economy in shambles, its credit drying up owing to the enormous foreign debts accrued during the war with Iran, and its foreign exchange reserves falling from a \$35 billion surplus in 1980 to a deficit of \$80 billion at war’s end.<sup>1007</sup> War reconstruction costs, estimated at upwards of \$230 billion, further stressed the Iraqi economy.<sup>1008</sup> Oil production offered a potential way out of Iraq’s economic predicament, but oil prices remained low, and Kuwait was consistently exceeding its production quotas, further contributing to downward pressures of the price of petroleum. Iraqi attempts to convince Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to forgive \$40 billion in war debt were rebuffed, as were Baghdad’s efforts to restrict oil production and drive prices from \$14 toward \$25 per barrel.<sup>1009</sup> Iraq also accused Kuwait of illegally extracting \$2.4 billion of oil from an oil field along the Iraq-Kuwait border. Finally, the end of the Iran-Iraq War had left Saddam Hussein with a massive 50 division army that could not be demobilized, given the inability of the economy to absorb returning Iraqi

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<sup>1005</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 268.

<sup>1006</sup> Baker III and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 270–271.

<sup>1007</sup> Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990–1991*, 39.

<sup>1008</sup> Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990–1991*, 39.

<sup>1009</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 242; Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 46; U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory*, 22.

soldiers. Nor could new military equipment be purchased to make up for war losses and to modernize.<sup>1010</sup>

Saddam Hussein's decision was also shaped by two other interrelated factors: Arab popular opinion and his ambitions to be viewed as the leader of the Arab world and also his fundamental distrust of the United States. The declining position of the Soviet Union on the global stage had, from the Arab world's perspective, "ushered in an era of American hegemony that also entailed Israeli regional hegemony."<sup>1011</sup> By 1990, Arab concerns over unconstrained American (and, by association, Israeli) power was contributing to a growing anti-Americanism in the Middle East that Saddam Hussein hoped would limit or eliminate Arab government cooperation with the United States and enable him to assume the mantle of Arab leadership.<sup>1012</sup> Additionally, Saddam Hussein harbored an intense belief that the United States posed a direct threat to his regime. By the summer of 1990, this distrust had led him to fear a U.S.-Israeli-Kuwaiti conspiracy to "strangle Iraq and topple his regime."<sup>1013</sup> The support the Reagan administration had provided him during the Iran-Iraq War had done little to assuage Saddam Hussein's distrust of the United States; the Americans, he asserted in 1985, "are still conspiring bastards."<sup>1014</sup>

As the Iraq-Kuwait crisis started to boil over during the summer of 1990, the Bush administration, on the advice of its Arab allies, let them take the lead in defusing the situation.<sup>1015</sup> On July 22, 1990, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Saudi Arabian King Fahd, and Jordanian King Hussein informed the Bush administration that there would be no Iraqi attack on Kuwait, Mubarak reporting to Washington that Saddam Hussein was

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<sup>1010</sup> Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 477–478.

<sup>1011</sup> Shibley Telhami, "The Arab Dimension of Saddam Hussein's Calculations: What We Have Learned From Iraqi Records," in Engel, ed. *Into the Desert*, 157.

<sup>1012</sup> Telhami, "The Arab Dimension of Saddam Hussein's Calculations," 156–162.

<sup>1013</sup> Hal Brands and David Palkki, "Conspiring Bastards: Saddam Hussein's Strategic View of the United States," *Diplomatic History* 36, vol. 3, June 2012, 626.

<sup>1014</sup> Brands and Palkki, "Conspiring Bastards: Saddam Hussein's Strategic View of the United States," 626–627.

<sup>1015</sup> Richard N. Haas, "The Gulf War: Its Place in History," in Engel, ed., *Into the Desert*, 59.

receptive to a negotiated settlement to the crisis.<sup>1016</sup> On July 24, at the invitation of the Emirati government, the air forces of the United States and the UAE conducted small-scale exercises. On July 25, the American ambassador to Iraq, April C. Glaspie, was called to meet with Saddam Hussein on short notice. Over the course of a two hour meeting, the first ever between the Ambassador and the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein reviewed the history of U.S.-Iraqi relations, highlighted American support for Israel, underlined the importance of the unimpeded flow of Persian Gulf oil to the world market, emphasized Iraqi willingness to fight over questions of honor, and questioned American willingness to fight for its objectives in the face of significant casualties.<sup>1017</sup>

Nevertheless, Glaspie emerged from the discussion with the belief that Saddam Hussein was worried, reporting in a cable “he does not want to further antagonize us.”<sup>1018</sup> The USAF exercise with the UAE, in Glaspie’s view, had caught the Iraqi president’s attention. Significantly, Saddam Hussein had informed the American ambassador that he agreed to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Kuwaitis.<sup>1019</sup> In light of pending Arab-sponsored negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait, Glaspie cautioned, it would be best if the United States avoided “public criticism of Iraq until we see how the negotiations develop.”<sup>1020</sup> While the American ambassador later received criticism for not articulating a harder position to the Iraqi leader, in particular over her statement that the United States had no opinion on Saddam Hussein’s border dispute with Kuwait, her report of the meeting asserted that she “made it clear that we can never excuse settlement of disputes by other than peaceful means.”<sup>1021</sup> In light of the information provided by Ambassador Glaspie, Richard Haass retracted a memorandum he had submitted to President Bush recommending that a stern warning, backed up by military actions, be made to the Iraqi president.<sup>1022</sup> The

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<sup>1016</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 309–310.

<sup>1017</sup> U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory*, 24–25.

<sup>1018</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 310.

<sup>1019</sup> Richard N. Haas, “The Gulf War: Its Place in History,” in Engel, ed., *Into the Desert*, 61.

<sup>1020</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 310.

<sup>1021</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 310–311.

<sup>1022</sup> Haass, “The Gulf War: Its Place in History,” 61.

Bush administration did send a softer message to Saddam Hussein on July 28 that urged a peaceful resolution to the crisis, but without effect. On August 2, 1990, Iraqi military forces crossed the border into Kuwait.

## **B. A NEW WORLD ORDER: DESERT SHIELD AND DESERT STORM**

It was still August 1 in Washington, DC, when the first word of the Iraqi invasion reached President Bush's national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, at 8:30 PM. At approximately 10:00 PM the State Department received a call from the American ambassador to Kuwait, W. Nathaniel Howell, reporting that the Kuwaitis had requested American military assistance.<sup>1023</sup> On August 8, President Bush announced that elements of the United States Army and Air Force had been deployed to assist in the defense of Saudi territory. On August 20, 1990, the White House issued National Security Directive 45 (NSD-45), which provided the rationale for a comprehensive diplomatic, economic, and military response to the Iraqi invasion. This response was guided by four principles that aligned with the broad interests that had been identified in 1989 during the NSR-10/NSD-26 effort:

- The immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait;
- The restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government to replace the puppet regime installed by Iraq;
- A commitment to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf, and;
- The protection of the lives of American citizens abroad.<sup>1024</sup>

NSD-45 also ordered the deployment of American military personnel in what came to be known as Operation Desert Shield, to support two purposes: to "defend Saudi Arabia and other friendly states in the Gulf region from further Iraqi aggression" and to enforce UN sanctions against Iraq that had been directed by UNSCRs 660 and 661.<sup>1025</sup> These personnel would participate in two multinational forces: the Multinational Force for Saudi

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<sup>1023</sup> U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory*, 27, 36.

<sup>1024</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy in Response to the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*, National Security Directive 45 (Washington, DC: White House, 1990), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsd/nsd45.pdf>, 2.

<sup>1025</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy in Response to the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*, 3.

Arabia (MNFSA) and the Multinational Force to Enforce Sanctions (MNFES). In a break from the past, NSD-45 supported Soviet participation in both the MNFES and MNFSA, although Moscow's participation in the latter was contingent on Saudi approval and, if deployed, Soviet forces would be positioned "at a distance from U.S. operations."<sup>1026</sup>

Broadly speaking, the Bush administration's decision to embark upon Operation Desert Shield in 1990 and, ultimately, Desert Storm in 1991 was driven by two considerations. The first was interest-based, and was comprised of two interrelated elements: ensuring access to the region's oil and maintaining the security and stability of "key friendly states in the region."<sup>1027</sup> In July 1990, just days prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz concluded in a memorandum provided to Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney that "the fundamental U.S. interest in the security of the Persian Gulf is oil."<sup>1028</sup> Given the global economy's reliance on the region's petroleum, Wolfowitz highlighted the danger of Saddam Hussein gaining control over it, concluding that "such dominance by a single country would enable it to dictate oil prices and production, placing the economies of the U.S. and its allies in an extremely vulnerable position that would become more precarious as Western dependence on Gulf oil continued to grow."<sup>1029</sup> Wolfowitz's view was echoed by NSC Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs Richard Haass and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who noted that acquiescing to the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait would give Saddam Hussein "sway over Saudi Arabia, OPEC, and Israel," as well as over the remainder of the Gulf Arab states.<sup>1030</sup> Both President Bush and Brent Scowcroft shared this view of the potential implications of the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait for regional security.<sup>1031</sup> These concerns helped scope the targeting of Iraqi military forces, the aim being to "reduce Saddam's military might so that he would no longer pose a threat to the

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<sup>1026</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy in Response to the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*, 4.

<sup>1027</sup> White House, *U.S. Policy in Response to the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*, 1.

<sup>1028</sup> Engel, "The Gulf War at the End of the Cold War and Beyond," 38.

<sup>1029</sup> Engel, "The Gulf War at the End of the Cold War and Beyond," 38.

<sup>1030</sup> Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 63, 72.

<sup>1031</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 399.



region, yet to do so in a way that Iraq was secure from external threats and the balance with Iran was preserved.”<sup>1032</sup>

The second consideration, much broader and less tangible than the first, that drove the Bush administration’s decision to respond militarily to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was directly related to the rapidly concluding Cold War and the emergence of a new world order. Given these significant changes in U.S.-Soviet relations, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait occurred, in the words of one historian, “at a transitional moment in international history and was a part of that transition.”<sup>1033</sup> Thus, for the Bush administration, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was nothing less than “the first test of the postwar system” that was notable for its most significant characteristic, the absence of opposing superpower blocs.<sup>1034</sup> On August 3, 1990, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze joined with Secretary of State James Baker to issue a joint declaration condemning the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Likewise, Moscow had supported several UNSCRs directed at its former client. For the Bush administration, the new era of U.S.-Soviet cooperation would enable the UN Security Council to “perform the role envisioned for it by UN framers” and Moscow and Washington “could, in most cases, stand together against unprovoked interstate aggression.”<sup>1035</sup>

President Bush explicitly highlighted the relationship between the emerging post-Cold War international order and the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait in a September 11, 1990, address to a Joint Session of Congress:

We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective—a new world order—can emerge: a new era, freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have

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<sup>1032</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 432–433.

<sup>1033</sup> Lawrence Freedman, “The International Politics of the Gulf War” in Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *Into the Desert: Reflections on the Gulf War*, 38.

<sup>1034</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 323.

<sup>1035</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 355.

searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak. This is the vision that I shared with President Gorbachev in Helsinki. He and the other leaders from Europe, the Gulf, and around the world understand that how we manage this crisis today could shape the future for generations to come.<sup>1036</sup>

Credible American leadership was the chief prerequisite ensuring the survival of this new world order wherein “the nations of the world had the collective and effective will to implement the resolutions of the Security Council,” in this case to “compel [Iraqi] withdrawal and restoration” of Kuwaiti sovereignty.<sup>1037</sup>

Brent Scowcroft shared President Bush's view of the high stakes associated with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In his view, the situation in the Gulf constituted “the major crisis of our time” given the “the enormous stake the United States had in the situation” and the “ramifications of the aggression on the emerging post-Cold War world.”<sup>1038</sup> The Bush administration's first NSC discussion of the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait, conducted on August 2, 1990, amplified Scowcroft's concerns. He was alarmed that other Bush administration principals viewed the situation in the Gulf more narrowly as the “crisis du jour” and were focused on specific U.S. interests, such as the price of oil and the Middle East peace process, as opposed to the wider and more significant geopolitical ramifications.<sup>1039</sup>

Richard Haass shared Scowcroft's concern over the tone of the August 2 NSC discussion. In a memorandum for President Bush developed in its aftermath, Haass highlighted the danger that American acquiescence to Iraqi aggression carried to the post-Cold War order and to the United States' position as its leader, explaining:

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<sup>1036</sup> George H. W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit,” September 11, 1990, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217>.

<sup>1037</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 320.

<sup>1038</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 317–318.

<sup>1039</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 318; Haas, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 61–62.

I am aware as you are of just how costly and risky such a conflict would prove to be. But so too would be accepting this new status quo. We would be setting a terrible precedent—one that would only accelerate violent centrifugal tendencies—in this emerging “post Cold War” era. We would be encouraging a dangerous adversary in the Gulf at a time when the United States has provided a de facto commitment to Gulf stability—a commitment reinforced by our statements and military movements—that also raises the issue of U.S. reliability in a most serious way.<sup>1040</sup>

Over the course of the autumn and winter of 1990, the U.S. military footprint in the Persian Gulf continued to grow, and eventually surpassed 500,000 personnel when Operation Desert Storm commenced on January 16, 1991.<sup>1041</sup> The decision to commence Operation Desert Storm had been codified the previous day with the promulgation of NSD-54, *Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf*. Citing the same four purposes as NSD-45 had in August 1990 to provide the rationale for Operation Desert Shield, NSD-54 assigned a panoply of tasks for the U.S. military. Two of these tasks were at the strategic level: (1) defending Saudi Arabia and the GCC states and (2) conducting “operations to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait.”<sup>1042</sup> These broad objectives were supported by several supporting ones that included preventing the launch of Iraqi ballistic missiles, destroying Iraqi nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, eliminating the Iraqi Army’s elite Republican Guards “as an effective fighting force,” and annihilating Iraqi ability to command and control its military forces.<sup>1043</sup> Finally, U.S. and coalition forces were directed to break the will of Iraqi forces and encourage defections while also eroding public support for Saddam Hussein’s government. After 42 days of combat, only four of which involved engagement between opposing ground forces, Iraq capitulated.

American strategic interests contributed significantly to the rationale behind the Bush administration’s decision to commit the United States to a war against Iraq over the sovereignty of Kuwait. Indeed, protecting access to Persian Gulf oil and ensuring the

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<sup>1040</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 322.

<sup>1041</sup> Shannon Collins, “Desert Storm: A Look Back,” January 11, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/explore/story/Article/1728715/desert-storm-a-look-back/>

<sup>1042</sup> White House, *Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf*, National Security Directive 54 (Washington, DC: White House, 1991), <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsd/nsd54.pdf>, 2.

<sup>1043</sup> White House, *Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf*, 2.

security of regional friendly states were explicitly listed in NSD-54, which authorized “military actions designed to bring about Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait.”<sup>1044</sup> These interests were aligned with those articulated in 1989 in NSR-10 and NSD-26, both of which were largely continuations of the Reagan administration’s July 1983 NSDD-99 policy, in particular NSDD-99’s pledge to directly intervene in regional conflicts that threatened American allies or the continued flow of oil from the Gulf. The Bush administration policy went one crucial step beyond its predecessor, however. While the Reagan administration’s decision to embark on Operation Earnest Will marked the first time that military force had been used in support of American security policy in the Persian Gulf, the NSD-45 and NSD-54 decisions committed the United States to large-scale ground combat against a regional power that threatened American interests. This decision to decisively intervene in a regional conflict complied with the security policy articulated in NSDD-99 and NSD-26 and solidified the United States’ position as the guarantor of regional security and stability.

While strategic interests had contributed to the decision to go to war with Iraq in 1990, the threat posed by the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait to the emerging post-Cold War order was decisive. It raised the stakes of the crisis well beyond the threat it posed to American strategic interests and it magnified the significance of the U.S. military in fostering the new world order President Bush described on September 11, 1990. The conviction that the success of a new world order was in the balance and that restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty was the *passe-partout* that would enable the world to realize the vision that had led to the creation of the United Nations and the United Nations Security Council during World War II narrowed the menu of plausible policy options available to the Bush administration in 1990/1991 to one: commit the United States to a war against Iraq over the question of Kuwaiti sovereignty. This decision marked the culmination of the evolution of American security policy in the Persian Gulf from the arm’s length security policies of the Nixon and Ford years to the hands-on policy of direct American military involvement in the region that had started during the Carter administration. The United States has been at war in the Persian Gulf ever since.

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<sup>1044</sup> White House, *Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf*, 2.

## IX. CONCLUSION: WHY AND WITH WHAT CONSEQUENCES?

This study has examined the evolution of American security policy in the Persian Gulf from 1969 to 1991, when the George H. W. Bush administration decided to embark on operation Desert Storm. The research question that drove this study's analysis is *why, and with what consequences, did American security policy in the Persian Gulf evolve from an arm's-length approach that leveraged other powers to a hands-on approach whereby the United States became the unilateral guarantor of regional security?* This study argued that, starting with the Carter administration and continuing through the Presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, American policy makers departed from the practice of the Nixon and Ford administrations and chose to view the region through a Cold War lens. This outlook resulted in American security policy being shaped by three interrelated beliefs between 1977 and 1991:

- The Soviet Union is confidently and successfully executing an offensive strategy designed to improve its geostrategic position vis-à-vis the United States. In contrast, the United States is becoming tentative and indecisive in the face of Soviet "victories" and "gains."
- The Soviet Union aggressively exploits regional instability to enhance its prestige and influence.
- The security of the Persian Gulf and its petroleum resources is essential to the survival of the West and of Japan, and vulnerable to Soviet encroachment.

These beliefs were apparent from the earliest days of the Carter administration. Their internalization by American policy makers over three presidential administrations narrowed the range of plausible policy options down to one: direct American involvement in any Persian Gulf security crisis. They shaped the Reagan administration's Persian Gulf security policy, which was largely continued by the George H. W. Bush administration.

From November 7, 1970, when the Nixon administration issued NSDM-92, through the January 20, 1977, inauguration of Jimmy Carter, the Nixon and Ford administrations completed four studies related to American security policy in the Persian Gulf: NSSM-66, NSSM-181, NSSM-182, and NSSM-238. Of these four reports, only NSSM-66 produced a policy decision, NSDM-92 on November 7, 1970. While not all of these reports produced a new or modified Persian Gulf security policy, they displayed a remarkable level of consistency in several important areas. Each report consistently elevated indigenous social, political, and economic forces above Cold War factors as the principal shapers of the Persian Gulf strategic environment. These indigenous forces placed constraints on both American and Soviet policy in the region. Furthermore, in contrast to the views expressed in 1977–1991, all four studies discounted the Soviet threat to the region and consistently viewed the prospects for Moscow enhancing its position and influence in the Persian Gulf with a great deal of skepticism. Indeed, Soviet policy in the region was constrained by the same forces that affected the United States. Additionally, several factors worked against the Soviets. As the 1970s unfolded, the region's growing oil wealth, the strong economic relationship between the Gulf oil-producing countries and the United States, and staunch Saudi anticommunism limited Moscow's ability to make meaningful inroads into the Gulf. Close Soviet relations with Iraq and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the so-called radical Gulf states, further constrained Soviet influence in the region by placing Moscow in a paradox: Moscow's support for Iraq and the PDRY clouded its relations with the Gulf Arab states, leaving the Soviets no other option but to continue to maintain close relationships with the Gulf radicals. Finally, as the Ford administration was preparing to hand off to the Carter administration both the CIA, in its December 1976 study, and the NSC, in NSSM-238, assessed that the Persian Gulf region was a comparatively low priority in Soviet foreign policy and considered the prospects of the Soviets seizing the area through military force to be unrealistic.

This perspective changed during the Carter administration, whose view of the region and the key events which occurred in and around it was shaped by the Cold War and the three beliefs discussed above. These three beliefs were present from the beginning of the Carter administration, and were reflected in the 1977 PRM-10 Comprehensive Net

Assessment and Military Force Posture Review. Belief that the Soviets had achieved a position of strength over the United States in the Persian Gulf and that Moscow exploited regional instability as a source of strategic leverage marked significant departures from Nixon and Ford administration thinking. When combined with the belief that Persian Gulf oil was vital to the survival of the West, Carter administration policy options narrowed to one: pursue a hands-on security policy and abandon the Nixon and Ford administrations' policy that relied on regional allies as the primary guarantor of American interests in the region. Thus, from its earliest days, the Carter administration pushed to develop military capabilities that could be quickly deployed to the Persian Gulf to safeguard U.S. strategic interests and labored to gain access to critical infrastructure in and around the region that would enable the United States to more effectively project power into the region. In this view, the promulgation of the Carter Doctrine on January 23, 1980, when President Carter asserted that any assault by any outside force on the Persian Gulf would be met with a U.S. military response, simply articulated publicly policy preferences and initiatives that had long been in circulation within the administration.

The Reagan administration viewed the Persian Gulf through the same three beliefs that had shaped its predecessor's thinking, and its security policy, codified by NSDD-99 in July 1983, continued Carter administration priorities, such as directly confronting Soviet direct and indirect threats to Gulf security and stability, enhancing the ability of U.S. military forces to project power into the region, cultivating closer security relationships with the Gulf Arabs, and mitigating regional conflicts. The Reagan administration went a significant step further, however, with NSDD-99's assertion that the United States would directly intervene in regional disputes if it judged that its interests were sufficiently threatened. Four years later, in 1987, the Reagan administration backed up its policy when it commenced Operation Earnest Will.

The Bush administration's Persian Gulf security policy, NSD-26, was a continuation of the 1983 Reagan policy and it carried forward NSDD-99's pledge to directly intervene in regional conflicts that threatened American allies or the continued flow of oil from the Gulf. This was despite the fact that the Cold War conditions that inspired and justified American intervention in regional conflicts had largely dissolved by

1990. Nevertheless, the Bush administration's 1990 decision to deploy over half a million military personnel to the Persian Gulf and to go to war against Iraq in 1991 was aligned with the Cold War-inspired policy direction set forth in NSDD-99 and in NSD-26. Despite the significant changes to the Persian Gulf strategic environment caused by the ending of the Cold War, American policy makers, now motivated by a desire to develop a new world order, retained their predecessors' predisposition in favor of direct military intervention in the region's conflicts. The unwinding of the Cold War did not dissipate the effect of the policy choices made while it was underway. On the contrary, its ending created conditions in which those choices could finally be given direct effect. The last step in getting the United States to war in the Persian Gulf was for the Soviets to get out of the way of a course of action whose basic conception they inspired.

The Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations' policy choices were based on dispassionate and clear-headed assessments of ends, ways, means, risks, and consequences, with proponents of military intervention arguing, in effect, that "inaction would invite disaster" for American strategic interests.<sup>1045</sup> These claims were difficult to refute. When examined through the lens of the three beliefs that shaped the views of American policymakers throughout this period, the decision to embed the United States more deeply into the Persian Gulf appears rational and sensible.<sup>1046</sup> If U.S. leaders believed that the Soviet Union was an aggressive power with designs on controlling the Middle East and its oil, that the Soviets exploited regional instability as a key enabler to their strategy, and that Persian Gulf oil was essential to the West's survival, it would have been irresponsible not to develop the military and supporting capabilities that would enable the United States to rapidly project power into the region and intervene in regional conflicts that threatened

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<sup>1045</sup> Lears, "Pragmatic Realism versus the American Century," 87, 118. Both this paragraph and the following one are heavily influenced by T.J. Jackson Lears' discussion of pragmatic realism, William James, and Randolph Bourne. On page 87, Lears writes "The anti-imperial tradition prospered when it hewed to the pragmatic spirit of William James and Randolph Bourne: grounded in the actualities of experience, distrustful of abstraction masquerading as realism, and radically empirical in its willingness to take seriously all forms of evidence." Lears continues in his next paragraph "Futurist arguments for intervention could seem superficially pragmatic and realistic in their warning that inaction would invite disaster. Such claims were not easy to evaluate and carried more weight on some occasions than on others. But a more consistent pragmatic realist, or at least one truer to the Jamesian tradition, might well observe that war is the least predictable of human enterprises and the least subject to management and control."

<sup>1046</sup> Lears, "Pragmatic Realism versus the American Century," 87.



American interests. There was no apparent reason why conflicts originating within the region, fueled by animosities Americans had come to discount as irrelevant to those interests, should be approached any differently.

The United States' prolonged, and continuing, engagement in the Persian Gulf invites the inference that the policy choices that brought it about were, at a minimum, insufficiently attentive to the knock-on effects of military intervention in a region where the forces of order have long struggled to make themselves felt. After the Gulf War American ships and aircraft took a leading role in patrolling and enforcing no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq and conducted punitive air and missile strikes in response to Saddam Hussein's violations of UN-mandated restrictions on its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs, tabbed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and on its ballistic missile inventory. In 1994, after Saddam Hussein positioned 80,000 troops along the Kuwaiti border, the United States deployed a mechanized infantry division and several hundred aircraft to the region before the Iraqi forces were pulled back. Following this short crisis, the continuous U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia increased to approximately 7,000 personnel.<sup>1047</sup> As can be seen, far from providing what George H. W. Bush described as an "elusive path to peace," Operation Desert Storm spawned a new set of security concerns that ultimately helped to motivate even more extensive American military intervention.<sup>1048</sup>

The sustained presence of large numbers of U.S. military personnel deployed on the sacred ground of Saudi Arabia to support enforcement of UN sanctions contributed to Osama bin Laden's anti-Americanism and drove him "to concentrate on the malevolent role of the United States and develop a seething contempt for the supine way that the Saudi elite had collaborated."<sup>1049</sup> This sentiment helped motivate the September 11, 2001, attacks by al-Qaeda that killed nearly 3,000 people in New York City, at the Pentagon, and

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<sup>1047</sup> Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies*, 288.

<sup>1048</sup> The University of Virginia, "September 11, 1990: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress" September 11, 1990, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/september-11-1990-address-joint-session-congress>.

<sup>1049</sup> Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies*, 351; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 169.

in Pennsylvania. The September 11, 2001, attacks initiated another round of American military operations, first in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and later, in 2003, against Iraq in what became known as Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While Operation Iraqi Freedom successfully defeated the Iraqi Army and deposed Saddam Hussein, conditions in Iraq deteriorated significantly, and the United States military settled in for a long counterinsurgency and stabilization campaign that lasted through 2011, when American forces withdrew from Iraq after suffering 3,528 killed and 32,031 wounded in action.<sup>1050</sup> Ultimately, Operation Iraqi Freedom had a destabilizing effect on the region, elevated Iran's position in the Gulf, and contributed to Syria falling into a state of civil war. American forces returned to Iraq in 2014 to counter a new threat, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), that had routed the American-trained and equipped Iraqi Army and established a self-proclaimed caliphate in the territory it conquered in Iraq and Syria. The civil war in Syria produced a refugee crisis that "encumbered Syria's neighbors and roiled European politics, strained U.S.-Turkish relations to the point of crisis, led to direct hostilities between Iran and Israel, provided a vector for Russia's resurgence in the Middle East, and challenged international norms around weapons of mass destruction and the protection of civilians."<sup>1051</sup> These factors created a new set of security concerns for the United States in the Persian Gulf.

In 2015 Moscow deployed military forces to Syria and directly intervened in the civil war in support of its client, Bashar al Assad. In 2019, members of a Congressionally appointed bipartisan Syria study group argued for sustained American military involvement in the conflict and warned that Moscow had, through its intervention, "reestablished itself as a crucial player in the region's politics for the first time in

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<sup>1050</sup> "Casualty Status as of 10 a.m. EST December 9, 2019," Department of Defense, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/casualty.pdf>.

<sup>1051</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Syria Study Group September 2019 Final Report and Recommendations* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2019), <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20191016/110096/HHRG-116-FA13-20191016-SD001.pdf>, 4.

decades.”<sup>1052</sup> The study group recommended that the United States military continue to be engaged in the region to “consolidate gains following the defeat of ISIS.”<sup>1053</sup>

Turning toward Russian involvement, the study group also recommended that the United States work with Moscow on a political settlement to the conflict, while also continuing activities “that increase the costs to Russia for its actions in Syria.”<sup>1054</sup> There is much irony in the fact that, in 2019, American security policy in the Persian Gulf had, to all appearances, come full circle: bipartisan voices were once more recommending that the United States adopt a hands-on policy of direct military involvement to reestablish regional stability and head off Moscow’s attempts to expand its influence. Nearly 40 years after the promulgation of the Carter Doctrine, and nearly 29 years after Operation Desert Storm, America’s leaders were once again focused on how Moscow might exploit regional instability to enhance its position in the Persian Gulf, and how American arms might be used to stop them.

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<sup>1052</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Syria Study Group September 2019 Final Report and Recommendations*, 8.

<sup>1053</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Syria Study Group September 2019 Final Report and Recommendations*, 10.

<sup>1054</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Syria Study Group September 2019 Final Report and Recommendations*, 11.

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