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Petroleum and Security: The Limitations of Military Power in the Persian Gulf

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PETROLEUM AND SECURITY:

**THE LIMITATIONS
OF MILITARY POWER
IN THE PERSIAN GULF,**

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By

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Faculty

The National War College

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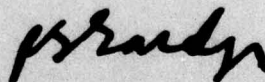
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FOREWORD

The critical problem of petroleum supplies continues as a primary national security issue. In April 1977, the Central Intelligence Agency issued a study that predicted not only an increased American dependency on Arab Petroleum by the mid 1980s, but intensified competition with the Russians over oil as well. A few months later, press reports indicated that a National Security Council Study had concluded that Iran would be the most likely target if the Soviet Union wished to provoke a limited military confrontation within the next decade. In view of these developments, "Petroleum and Security: The Limitations of Military Power in the Persian Gulf" by Bard E. O'Neill is a welcome and timely contribution to the literature on National Security Affairs.

The monograph focuses on the likelihood of American military intervention in the Persian Gulf in the event of two different threats: a Soviet effort to disrupt forcibly oil supplies, and interference with the production or transportation of petroleum that could result from successful insurgent activity. Each of these is examined in terms of an explicit series of factors that previous scholarly analysis has identified as potentially important in explaining and projecting national security policy outcomes.

Besides the intrinsic merits associated with its analysis and conclusions, the study performs an implicit heuristic function by providing a take-off point for further, more concrete analysis of the strategy, force structure, logistics, and basing arrangements that would be required to deal with the most likely threats to American interests in this vital area of the world.



R. G. GARD, JR.
Lieutenant General, USA
President

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PETROLEUM AND SECURITY: THE LIMITATIONS OF MILITARY POWER IN THE PERSIAN GULF

INTRODUCTION

Within the defense intellectual community, three topics have commanded substantial and serious attention over the past two decades: (a) nuclear strategy; (b) defense of Europe; and (c) insurgency. Since the first two issues so clearly involved vital American interests, they have been the subjects of a more or less permanent debate since the 1950's. The third, insurgency, has had a more ephemeral existence. Although a plethora of writings on this subject appeared in the sixties—stimulated, *inter alia*, by the Southeast Asian situation, interest had declined by 1970.¹ Whether current and future developments, especially in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean areas, will reverse this trend remains to be seen.

One consequence of the intellectual focus on the areas indicated was that US security policy relative the Middle East received inadequate systematic consideration; the exception was John C. Campbell's pioneering effort, *Defense of the Middle East*.² The lack of emphasis was, in part, traceable to the experts being divided over the importance of American interests in the Middle East.³ However, in 1973 this situation changed dramatically when the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) imposed an oil embargo and reduced oil production, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quadrupled the posted price of petroleum.

Though the new sensitivity to energy problems led to a veritable deluge of articles and books addressing the general foreign policy implications for the United States, the specific matter of defense policy received little more than intermittent attention. This article is an attempt to help fill the void by probing some of the relevant defense policy considerations that policymakers will have to confront. Because of the exigencies of time and space, the comments below have been restricted to the main oil producing area, the Persian Gulf, and the general question of American military intervention therein.

THE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Military intervention may be defined as the use of force, either directly or indirectly, to achieve national goals and objectives by influencing the behavior of other states.⁴ In this formulation, which is familiar to students of international politics, force is viewed as one of several means used by statesmen in their attempts to accomplish the

articulated aims of their governments in the international system. The other instruments of statecraft, also generally recognized, are diplomacy, economics, and propaganda.

In seeking to achieve their objectives, policymakers normally use the instruments of policy concurrently. The exact mixture and choices will be determined by a number of factors, the salience of which will vary from situation to situation. These factors include the nature of and importance accorded to goals and objectives in a particular context, perceived threats to those goals and objectives, public opinion and demands, capability (especially military), the international structure of power, international values, and the differential interests of the political institutions in the foreign policy process. Such factors and the relationships among them are particularly useful in both organizing a discussion of the limits of American military intervention in the Persian Gulf and in suggesting some explanations for those limitations.⁵

Before addressing each of the independent variables, it should be indicated that the dependent variable, the likelihood of military intervention, can be manifested in a number of ways ranging from its direct application on several levels (nuclear, conventional, insurgency, and counterinsurgency) to its indirect use as a bargaining instrument.⁶ The US involvement in Vietnam exemplifies the direct use of force; whereas, the movement of American naval, air, and ground forces during the Jordanian civil war of September 1970 is an example of its indirect application. To ascertain whether either or both possibilities are likely to obtain and be effective in the Persian Gulf, it is necessary to return to the factors outlined above, examining each as it relates to conditions in that region.

MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE PERSIAN GULF

US Goals and Objectives

The official and grandly phrased goal of US policy in the Middle East since 1973 has been the creation of a "region of peace," composed of a number of healthy, independent nations, cooperating among themselves, free of external interference, and welcoming the constructive participation of outside powers.⁷ To accomplish this goal, the United States identified a number of short-term objectives: (1) settling the Arab-Israeli dispute through a process of negotiation that would result in an interim agreement and the staged implementation of a settlement of all issues, with the USSR expected to play a responsible role; (2) strengthening ties with traditional friends such as Iran, Jordan, and Saudi

Arabia, and restoring relations with the Arab states that severed them in 1967; (3) maintaining the flow of Persian Gulf oil at reasonable prices and in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of the United States and its allies, which necessitates US concern for the stability of the region; and (4) aiding in development, improving trade, cooperating with oil-producing areas in the sound investment of their large foreign exchange balances, and dissuading the European Economic Community (EEC) from adopting discriminatory relations with the Middle Eastern states which would result in damage to US trade.⁸ While all four objectives are related, either directly or indirectly, to the Persian Gulf area, the most significant, as far as security policy in this region is concerned, is the need to maintain the flow of oil at reasonable prices and in sufficient quantity to meet the demands of the United States and its allies.

Although the oil embargo and production cutbacks imposed by OAPEC in October 1973 dramatized the petroleum issue, the United States had already come to the realization that it would be increasingly dependent on oil as a source of energy, with at least 30 to 40 percent of American petroleum imports coming from the Middle East by the 1980's.⁹ But since oil was not evenly distributed throughout the region, certain states were viewed as more important than others. As the former White House energy advisor, James Akins, put it in 1973:

The world's oil reserve picture is even more startling when looked at in detail, for the oil is not distributed uniformly even through the Arab world. Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco and Yemen have virtually none, Egypt has little, Algeria and Libya somewhat more; but the giant reserves are concentrated in the countries of the Persian Gulf: the Federation of Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq and, by far the most important, Saudi Arabia.¹⁰

As a glance at the map of the Middle East shows, this situation made the Persian Gulf the linchpin as far as American, European and Japanese oil needs are concerned—a reality which explains the United States' objective of maintaining the flow of oil from this area. Assertions that the United States could achieve petroleum self-sufficiency by 1980 and thus not be dependent on Middle Eastern oil have proven to be illusory.¹¹

Threat Perceptions

In seeking to secure the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, Washington faces three types of threats which could result in military

intervention: (a) Soviet attempts to either forcibly take over key oil fields or block oil shipping lanes at crucial choke points; (b) interference with the production and shipment of petroleum by revolutionary groups that are trying to overthrow regimes in the area which are friendly to the United States; and (c) a sustained embargo by OAPEC. Since the last mentioned has already received a good deal of attention in both government and academic circles, this article will be confined to an examination of the first two.¹²

A Soviet attempt to directly interfere with Western oil supplies seems quite unlikely in the foreseeable future (5-8 years). To begin with, Moscow's principal aim vis-a-vis Middle Eastern oil at the present time is to encourage its denial to the West and to support higher prices, which swell its own coffers and place substantive stress on the Western economies. Since the unimpressive commitment of resources (largely propaganda efforts) to this objective suggests that the Soviet Union does not accord it high priority, there is little reason to believe that it is prepared to employ force in the area and thereby antagonize its principal clients, Syria and Iraq, as well as risk its considerable investment in both global detente with the United States and regional detente and trade with Iran. Moreover, the Soviets simply lack the technological and managerial capability to replace the oil companies in downstream activities (refining, shipping, and marketing of oil).

Nevertheless, as comforting as such a situation may appear at present, there is no guarantee that it will necessarily remain a part of the political-economic landscape for the indeterminate future, particularly when one considers a recent CIA study which hypothesizes that the Soviet Union will need foreign oil no later than the early 1980's in order to meet its overall needs. While recognizing the fact that many petroleum experts disagree on this point, security planners nonetheless must entertain the possibility that a transformation of the Soviet goal in the international petroleum arena from a negative-denial to a positive-acquisition mode could well converge with other factors, such as a change in Soviet leadership and/or an assessment that detente's terms of reference do not extend, even indirectly, to the Persian Gulf, to produce a Russian stance that is more aggressive. While such a possibility must perforce remain an element in long-term contingency defense planning, the most *immediate* concern is the Kremlin's assistance to revolutionary groups or states seeking to either overthrow the conservative, patrimonial regimes in the area or to annex oil-producing regions in adjacent states (e.g., Iraq's ambitions in regard to Kuwait).

While its present involvement is relatively limited, Moscow has replaced Peking as a supporter—albeit modest—of the Dhofar rebellion in Oman.¹⁴ Both this and other aid to radical movements that oppose traditional, anti-Soviet regimes such as Saudi Arabia could serve a number of purposes. In the first place, such support provides substance to Moscow's claim that it, rather than Peking, should be regarded as the leader of international revolutionary forces. Secondly, there is little doubt that the USSR sees an opportunity to erode Western influence and hence exacerbate the "crisis of capitalism" that it believes is currently convulsing the West. Third, there has been a Soviet desire, reinforced by pressure from the military, to expand its armed presence through the acquisition of bases and related privileges in order to facilitate the projection of Russian naval power in the area. In conjunction with this, there is every reason to believe that the recent Egyptian decision to deny the Soviet Union use of naval installations at Alexandria and elsewhere will provide further impetus along these lines. Whatever Moscow's motives may be at any particular point in time, the fact remains that an increase in its presence and its support for revolutionary groups poses a threat to a number of regimes in major oil producing states which share a long-term interest with the United States in both limiting Russian influence and seeing the flow of oil maintained.

The threat posed by insurgents is complicated by the fact that it extends beyond revolutionary Marxist groups to encompass Ba'thists and radical Muslim organizations as well.* Whatever their ideological complexion may be, many of these movements could constitute a potential threat to the Western economic system if they were willing to sacrifice oil income on behalf of the confrontation with Israel or other issues. This is especially true in the case of Saudi Arabia where a cut-back on oil supplies to the West by a new radical regime is entirely feasible in light of that country's limited absorption capability and excess of revenues.

It is the threat of revolutionary insurgency which led former Secretary of State William Rogers to comment, during a June 1973 visit to Teheran, that "as the threat of major nuclear confrontation declines, subversion continues to be the way to spread an ideology" and that "... this is a danger against which the countries of this region [the

*The terms "revolutionary" and "radical" are used to denote groups which reject both the regional and domestic structures of power and influence in the Persian Gulf area.

Persian Gulf] must guard."¹⁵ Part of his concern at that time was undoubtedly the Iraqi-sponsored subversion in Iran, Oman, and Pakistan and the fear that it might spread to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Gulf sheikhdoms.

Similar apprehensions were evinced by the Shah of Iran. His security and military forces have taken steps to counter Iraqi moves in the largely Arab Khuzestan province in southeastern Iran and along the mountainous central and northern frontier between Iran and Iraq. In addition, Teheran responded to the decision of Baghdad and others to support the insurgents in Oman's Dhofar province by sending aid and eventually combat units to the Sultan. In order to mitigate the impact of Iraqi assistance to dissident tribesmen in southeastern Iran and Pakistan, whose aim is to carve out an independent Baluchistan, the Shah publicly indicated strong support for Pakistan's territorial integrity.¹⁶

Besides its support for insurgent movements, especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO),¹⁷ Iraq also applied coercive pressure on Kuwait to make territorial concessions in 1961 and again in 1973. In the former instance the British intervened to thwart Baghdad, while in the latter a combination of Iranian countermeasures and international diplomacy led to a cessation of hostilities. Although it is true that Iraq's foreign policy in the Persian Gulf has become more conciliatory since it concluded a treaty with Iran in March 1975, and since it decided to turn its attention to internal economic development, doubts remain about the longer term future given the ideological, historic, and ethnic rivalry between the two states.

MILITARY FORCE: ITS LIMITATIONS

In seeking to cope with the threat of revolutionary insurgency as well as an overt Soviet threat to interfere with oil supplies, the United States has a number of means at its disposal, including the use of the military instrument of statecraft. The feasibility and possible effectiveness of using force, however, is conditioned by a number of aforementioned factors—public opinion and demands, capabilities, the international structure of power, international values, and the interplay of policymaking institutions and bureaucratic agencies.

The Public Role

The first constraint on US policymakers derives from the role of the public, that is, perceived public opinion, demands from important

interest groups, and supports rendered to the political system. While much could be said about public opinion, suffice it to point out that the mood of the American populace in the wake of the Southeast Asia conflict has been marked by aversion to foreign military involvement. Indeed, if anything, both the attentive and mass publics have been increasingly preoccupied with such domestic issues as air pollution, inflation, and crime.¹⁸ Such attitudes are, of course, hardly conducive to the endorsement of US military actions in the Persian Gulf. In view of the introversion of the American people and their generally recognized apathy concerning international affairs, we may hazard an educated guess that most citizens are probably unaware of the location and importance of the Persian Gulf and generally indifferent towards developments there. Accordingly, it would seem difficult, indeed, to persuade the public to support the use of US military force against insurgent groups that are threatening the regimes in oil-producing states, especially since the threats which are posed by such groups are, at best, indirect, gradual, ambiguous, and small-scale challenges to America's well-being. Nonetheless, it is not too difficult to imagine what the public's response to an intervention in, say, Oman would be like with the Vietnam experience still indelibly etched in its consciousness.

The same public orientation which functions as a constraint when it comes to the possibility of a direct counterinsurgency role in the Persian Gulf would also seem to militate, at least initially, against a US military response to a Soviet threat in that region. Yet, it also seems probable that if the USSR took the unlikely step of interfering overtly with the flow of oil, and such an action had a severe impact on the US economy, the public could be persuaded to endorse the use of force to alleviate conditions of substantial relative deprivation.¹⁹ In other words, actions that caused a significant diminution of the American standard of living could alter the public mood and thus remove existing opposition to the use of force. In fact, it would not be surprising to find labor, business, and consumer groups articulating demands that the government take effective steps to deal with the external causes of economic dislocation at home.

Capabilities

Naturally, any contemplation of the use of force in the Persian Gulf will be affected by existing military capabilities and their relevance to the kind of threat posed by an adversary. The possibility of a localized Soviet threat in the Persian Gulf, for instance, places a premium on the projection of naval force into the area; and, since the British decided on

March 1, 1971, to drastically curtail their historic role in the region, the burden has fallen on the United States. However, since the Soviet navy's previous activity in the region has been rather modest, Washington has until recently been content to rely on a small symbolic force, usually composed of two destroyers and a converted landing ship, the USS *La Salle*, which functions as a command ship.²⁰ The purpose of this naval presence has been, and remains, largely symbolic—that is, to demonstrate continued US interest in the area and to dissuade the USSR from taking aggressive actions against friendly states such as Saudi Arabia or Iran. Whether or not present deployment patterns, which include periodic visits by carrier task forces, would be sufficient to cope with a Soviet threat has been the subject of an intensifying debate, with the small, British-owned, atoll of Diego Garcia, 1,000 miles south of India, acting as a catalyst.²¹

A number of prominent experts on the Persian Gulf have pointed out that the Soviets now have from 12-20 ships in the Indian Ocean (the number varies from time to time) and have increased their ship days (2,000 in 1969 compared to 8,000 in 1973), an average of four to one over the United States.²² Simultaneously, it may be pointed out that Moscow has acquired three “bases” in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf at Umm Qasr in Iraq, Aden in the Peoples Democratic Republic of the Yemen (PDRY), and Berbera in the Somali Republic. Moreover, it is suggested that the opening of the Suez Canal has given the Soviet Union the potential to augment its presence in the region, thus upsetting the local balance of Soviet-American deployments.²³

To cope with these developments, the supporters of an increased US military role in the area argued that the “austere” facilities at Diego Garcia needed to be upgraded by lengthening the airfield runway, deepening the harbor, and installing shore facilities, steps that would allow both the Navy and Air Force to increase their forces in the area and preclude the Navy from being taxed to the point where its capabilities in other regions, such as the Western Pacific, would be reduced.²⁴ Finally, supporters of the Diego Garcia upgrading proposal suggest that congressional funding might provide a bargaining chip that would induce the Soviets to consider an arms limitation agreement in the region.²⁵

Those who oppose or are skeptical about the value of improving Diego Garcia and upgrading the American military force in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf region have responded in various ways. In particular, opponents have argued that the creation of a full-fledged naval base on Diego Garcia would prompt the Soviets to seek a similar installation,

thus triggering an arms race that would have a destabilizing effect, because it would increase the chances of great power rivalry intersecting with local conflicts and then escalating.²⁶ While conceding the Soviet use of Umm Qasr, Berbera, and Aden, the opponents hasten to point out that none of the three facilities can be considered a permanent base.²⁷ Moreover, they also emphasize that Soviet reliance on a waterway as vulnerable as the Suez Canal would make little military sense, since its closure in wartime would isolate ships in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.

As far as the overall naval balance in the area is concerned, the opponents submit that the arguments of the proponents are fallacious in that they neglect the fact that only six to seven of the Soviet ships are combat vessels and that in any case the French and British deployments, when combined with those of the United States, outnumber the Soviet ships.²⁸ Because of this, they believe that the political and financial costs of developing Diego Garcia outweigh the gains. In other words, expending close to \$200 million, antagonizing India, Australia, New Zealand, and Sri Lanka, and placing Britain under pressure from the latter states is simply not worth the effort.²⁹

Somewhat unexpectedly, critics of the Diego Garcia proposals have received some support from the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William E. Colby. Testifying before Congress in July 1974, Colby implicitly warned that an expansion of US Navy facilities in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf might spark an arms race with the USSR, since it would motivate the Russians to increase the pace of what is presently a slowly expanding presence.³⁰ Colby's views notwithstanding, President Gerald Ford indicated in his first press conference on August 28, 1974, that he favored the "limited expansion" on Diego Garcia and did not view it as a challenge to the Soviet Union. The Senate approved an initial \$18.1 million for the expansion of facilities two weeks later. By the summer of 1977 Congress had appropriated \$55.8 million for expansion of air and naval support facilities, raising the total cost, including equipment, to \$173 million.³¹

Until such time as a number of key issues in the debate are clarified, it will be difficult to arrive at a meaningful judgment as to which side of the argument is the more compelling. Specifically, there is a need for a far better understanding of such matters as the meaning and significance of the term "base," the strategic importance of an advantage in terms of "ship days," the exact nature of the future military utilization of Diego Garcia, the intensity of regional opposition and its concrete implications for the United States and the feasibility of viewing the US,

French, and British forces as an integrated unit that would be useful in furthering American foreign policy objectives.

For the present, we can only note that the United States has decided to proceed with the expansion of Diego Garcia, a step which not only reflects the new importance accorded to the Persian Gulf but also signals an intention to establish the military capability believed necessary to deter the adoption of an aggressive Soviet policy in the future and to have the resources necessary to respond effectively if deterrence fails.

The controversy which surrounds the military requirements of meeting a Soviet threat is not replicated when it comes to an assessment of the threat posed by radical insurgent groups. While the actual US capability to deal with such a problem would appear to be degraded by the present deemphasis on counterinsurgency forces in both the Army and the Air Force, the military does retain substantial potential in this regard, owing largely to the reservoir of trained personnel with experience in Southeast Asia. Thus, the real issue is not an absence of human and material resources, but rather the present mission orientation and organizational emphasis on nuclear and conventional warfare. Since the United States does retain the military potential to become involved in counterinsurgency actions, capability does not appear to be a significant constraint on policymakers. Hence, the reasons for rejecting such an option must be found elsewhere.

The International Structure of Power

Another factor which affects the choice of alternatives available to decisionmakers is the international structure of power. Though it is now commonplace to suggest that the distribution of power in the international system is either pentagonal (the US, USSR, Japan, Europe, and China) or hexagonal (if the oil producers are included as an entity), the overriding consideration, as far as the use of force is concerned, remains the American-Soviet bipolarity in the military sphere. Since, as a matter of long-standing policy, Washington wishes to avoid any military confrontation with the Soviet Union, because of the obvious risks involved, the main purpose of stationing or augmenting military units that are in close proximity to Soviet forces would be to deter Moscow from clearly threatening vital American interests. In the Persian Gulf this means dissuading the Soviets from directly and forcefully seizing control of petroleum resources. Given the present judgment that the Soviets are not inclined to undertake such steps, the United States has maintained only the previously mentioned small

symbolic naval force in the region. However, should the reopened Suez Canal lead to a sizeable increase in Russian naval forces in the region, the United States would probably be moved to respond in a similar, albeit not necessarily symmetrical, manner by increasing its naval deployment. But, again, the main purpose would be to underscore the credibility of US concern for its interests, especially oil.

In the event that this regional application of deterrence should fail, US policymakers would face some difficult choices. How, for example, the United States might respond to either a serious threat to, or an attack on, Iran is not clear, although it is possible to speculate on such a scenario. Confronted by an intensifying crisis, which included, among other things, the movement of Soviet troops toward the Iranian frontiers, the United States could consider a number of options. At the outset it could alert air, naval, and ground units in the area in the hope that this would be sufficient to deter Soviet military action. In addition, military units could be moved into the region. In the event of a Soviet attack Washington's initial reaction would probably be limited to naval and air support, followed by the transport of ground forces to the area. The purpose of such a modulated response would be twofold: to avoid escalation to general warfare and to persuade the Soviets to terminate hostilities. In a word, while the bipolar structure of military power in the international system does not rule out superpower conflict in the Persian Gulf (or elsewhere for that matter), it does reduce its likelihood and, failing that, would probably function to limit the use of force during the incipient stage of hostilities.

While the international structure of power would most probably place restraints on American decisionmakers in the context of a Soviet threat, it would have little, if any, inhibiting effect on the use of military force in a counterinsurgency role. The reason for this is that the indirect and ambiguous nature of Moscow's relations with various revolutionary groups precludes insurgent conflicts from being interpreted as a direct Soviet-American confrontation. Thus, if we are to explain an American disinclination to become involved in insurgencies, it is necessary to focus on other variables.

International Values

While it is probably true that international values have little impact on national decisionmakers, they cannot be blithely dismissed in all cases.³² To consider their role in the Persian Gulf context, it is necessary to identify the salient values in the international system and their relationship to the three threats discussed above. One scholar has

suggested that in the contemporary international setting, the major values are self-determination, political independence, and economic development.³³ Whether they will function as constraints on or as a rationale for the use of military force appears to vary with the nature of the threat. Soviet moves to seize the oil fields, for example, would not only provide a fillip for the notion of using force, but would place Moscow in an antipodal position relative to the values noted above. As a consequence, such a move would have the effect of legitimatizing counteractions, including the threat of use of force by the United States and others.

In cases where radical insurgents or governments threaten the flow of oil, the role of transnational values appears ambiguous. Aside from the fact that the same value can be interpreted various ways, the actions prescribed by different values are not consistent. The values of self-determination and political independence, for instance, would probably be invoked by both sides in a conflict. On the one hand, it could be argued that the use of American military forces against radical groups constitutes a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of other states, while, on the other hand, states threatened by insurgents may welcome active US participation on the grounds that it is necessary to preserve their political independence. Moreover, as noted above, different values may be used to justify different courses of action. Even if one accepts the view that US military intervention is contrary to the values of political independence and self-determination, the value of economic development could be cited as justification for the use of force, because of the threat to the economic well-being of industrialized states which is inherent in actions that interrupt the flow of oil.

To summarize, international values are unlikely to constitute an important barrier to the use of force in response to any of the threats. In the event of an aggressive Soviet action, they would appear to reinforce a decision to use force, while in the insurgent framework their ambiguity and inconsistency tend to dilute their significance.

Institutional Restraints

Bureaucratic factors will also play a role in any decisionmaking related to the use of force in the Persian Gulf. Although the complex and changing patterns of interaction involving key political personalities and vested interests make it difficult to foresee precisely which agencies will take what positions in the face of threats to vital American interests, accumulated knowledge of the policy process does suggest several impressions that are pertinent here.³⁴ In the first place, one

might anticipate that a Soviet challenge would lead the Departments of State and Defense as well as the National Security Council to advocate a forceful yet cautious response. In the case of the State Department, the general balance of power philosophy imparted by Henry A. Kissinger appears to have become institutionalized to the point where it will endure for some time. Since Soviet interference with the West's oil supply would pose a trenchant danger to the overall global aim of maintaining the East-West equilibrium, it could not be countenanced. At the same time, however, the State Department's functional imperative of resolving international disputes peacefully would incline it to urge that any use of force be judiciously measured in the hope that crisis diplomacy could somehow avert a major confrontation. Likewise, the members of the National Security Council apparatus would probably evince similar proclivities given their responsibility for American security. Beyond their emphasis on the cautious use of force both the State Department and the National Security Council would no doubt investigate counteractions involving the other instruments of statecraft. The Department of Defense, on the other hand, would probably confine its attention to military options. Even here, however, a gradual response would seem to find favor in as much as the services are fully aware of the perils of a generalized conflict and, accordingly, have developed graduated response strategies, plans, and capabilities.

When it comes to an involvement on the counterinsurgency level, there is little reason to expect any government agency to exude much interest because of the damaging effects of Vietnam. This is especially true of the military which perceives itself as the scapegoat of the Southeast Asia tragedy and which, as pointed out earlier, has deemphasized its counterinsurgency forces. As a consequence, we can expect the various agencies in the policy process to limit their recommendations to aid, training, and political support for regional powers that feel directly threatened.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As the foregoing analysis suggests, the major variables affecting military intervention have a differential impact, depending on the nature of the threat. Paradoxically, of the two threats under consideration, the most dangerous one, a conflict with the USSR, seems the most conducive to a military response. In the event of an overt threat or use of force by the Soviet Union which jeopardized the flow of oil, the public would probably accept, if not endorse, countermeasures by the United States. Moreover, as indicated earlier, the United States has the capability to take military actions on a number of levels. While the inter-

national structure of power and institutional interaction do not rule out such military intervention, they do function as restraints. For one thing, the current nuclear balance of terror gives both sides a stake in limiting any conflict that might arise. Since key policymakers appear to be quite sensitive to the dangers inherent in any confrontation between the superpowers, they would most likely opt for a controlled, low-level use of force as a backdrop for diplomatic overtures designed to reestablish the status quo antebellum. Within this framework, the role of international values does not loom significantly.

The threat involving radical insurgents is more complicated. Given the small-scale challenges posed by such groups, there is little likelihood that a neo-isolationist, post-Vietnam public would support an involvement where reasonably precise calculations of the long-term gains, costs, and risks were elusive. Although the military possesses the *potential* capability to engage in counterinsurgency operations, its present deemphasis on that mission would seem to suggest a lack of enthusiasm. While the international structure of power and international values would appear to play little, if any, inhibiting role, bureaucratic resistance would probably militate against intervention on this level, especially if such a step threatened the larger global edifice of detente. Moreover, there is an alternative short of military intervention which involves the use of military resources in a manner that is both politically and strategically feasible.

What I have in mind is the present policy of coupling significant arms sales to friendly Persian Gulf states, especially Iran, with military advice and assistance. This policy, which is consistent with the American emphasis on self-reliance, and the public, congressional, and institutional reluctance to intervene in the internal conflict of other states, is enabling Teheran to play a stabilizing role in the region by actively opposing revolutionary groups and regimes such as PFLO, Iraq, and the PDRY. While such a policy does raise questions and apprehensions among those who oppose the Shah's autocratic domestic structure, as well as among those who feel that a local arms race might spur regional hostilities, it does make sense on the international level, largely because Iran shares the American interest in securing the flow of oil and is quite unlikely to join its Arab neighbors in any oil embargo.³⁵

Besides creating an interdependency that would seem to undermine the imposition or prolongation of a future embargo, the recent arms transactions with Saudi Arabia are also designed to foster internal political stability, for they provide the latter with the wherewithal to cope with insurgent threats to the monarchy. In short, arms sales and mili-

tary assistance may be considered a viable alternative to the use of American military forces against radical groups that threaten United States' interests in the Persian Gulf.

To summarize, the military instrument of statecraft might well be employed in the defense of vital American interests in the Persian Gulf. At the same time, however, a number of considerations would converge to limit its direct or indirect application to a Soviet threat. In the event of insurgent threats to friendly regimes, it would most likely be eschewed.

ENDNOTES

1. The attention to insurgency was closely related to the prevailing views about the nature of communism in the early 1960's. As is generally recognized, the Kennedy Administration retained a cold war perspective that viewed Moscow and Peking as integral parts of a more or less monolithic movement that was seeking to undermine the West by subverting third world nations. Both Chinese and Russian endorsement of "Wars of National Liberation" and the outbreak of several such conflicts reinforced this notion and, as a consequence, much time and effort was expended on the study of insurgency. By 1970, interest in the subject of insurgency declined as a new image of the communist world as polycentric became ensconced in the minds of policymakers. Moreover, within academia the focus of study shifted more towards the general phenomenon of political violence, with scholars such as Ivo K. and Rosaline L. Feierabend and Ted R. Gurr leading the way.

2. John C. Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958). A more recent book which covers some aspects of defense policy in the Middle East is *Soviet-American Rivalry in the Middle East*, edited by J. C. Hurewitz (New York: Praeger, 1969). See in particular the article by Laurence W. Martin.

3. With the emergence of the Sino-Soviet dispute in the late 1950's and early 1960's and the consequent splintering of the communist block, a number of scholars and government analysts initiated a reappraisal of the general and regional interests of the United States. As far as the Middle East was concerned, the outcome of such analyses was a dissensus on the basic question of the importance that the Middle East should have in American foreign and security policy calculations.

On the one hand, some observers, such as Laurence Martin and J. C. Hurewitz contended that the Middle East was vital to neither superpower. While Hurewitz made little effort to justify his position, Martin argued that the area was losing its importance because the Europeans had gradually shed their commitments east of Suez and were increasingly acquiring alternate routes for trade and sources of oil. Moreover, he also emphasized the fact that the increased range and capability of strategic nuclear forces had contributed to the decline in the military significance of the Middle East.

On the other side of the argument, Walter Laqueur concluded that while it was true that intrinsically the Middle East was less important to the United States, balance of power considerations would continue to be operative. In particular, he warned that Soviet control of the area would decisively tip the world balance of power. Walter Laqueur, *The Struggle for the Middle East* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1969), pp. 188-189. Also see J. C. Hurewitz, "Origins of the Rivalry," and Laurence W. Martin, "The Changing Military Balance" in J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *Soviet-American Rivalry in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp. 17, 61-64.

4. Frederic S. Pearson defines military intervention as the movement of troops or military forces by one independent country, or a group of countries in concert, across the border of another independent country, or actions by troops already stationed in the target country. See "American Military Intervention Abroad: A Test of Economic and Non-Economic Explanations," paper presented at International Studies Association/Midwest Meetings, November 1964, p. 7. While this particular conceptualization does little damage to Pearson's work, it is too restrictive for my purposes, because it fails to account for the use of military forces within a region but outside the territorial configuration of nation-states (e.g., the deployment of naval vessels in the Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean). For the purposes of my paper, military intervention *excludes* such phenomena as assistance, technical aid, and equipment sales.

5. Scholars have combined these factors in various ways. At the present time it is fashionable to place them in a tri-level paradigm that differentiates among international, domestic, and individual variables. For K. J. Holsti, international values and events and the global structure of power compose the international level; public opinion, interest group demands, capability, and bureaucratic interplay fall within the domestic sphere; and psychological orientations—values, attitudes, beliefs, analogies, doctrines, and ideologies—constitute the individual level. See K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), especially chapter 12. See also William D. Coplin, *Introduction to International Politics* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 35-54 and 140-149. The psychological variable is not examined in this article because of the uneven and incomplete data available on the chief architects of American foreign policy.

6. There are, of course, a number of options available on each level, a fact which is reflected in the literature dealing with the various types of armed conflict (e.g., Herman Kahn, *et al.*, on nuclear warfare, Robert Osgood on limited warfare, and John J. McCuen on insurgency). For a representative sampling, see the articles included in Part II, "Strategy and the Use of Force," *American Defense Policy*, edited by Richard G. Head and Ervin J. Rokke (3rd ed., Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 40-265.

7. *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970's: Shaping a Durable Peace*, A Report to the Congress by Richard Nixon, President of the United States, May 3, 1973 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 141. Hereafter referred to as FPR (Foreign Policy Report).

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-142; see also *Foreign Policy Outlines*, "Arabian Peninsula/Persian Gulf," (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, August 1973).

9. James Akins, "The Oil Crisis: This Time the Wolf is Here," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1973, pp. 462-468; R. M. Burrell, "Producers and Consumers of the World Unite!," *New Middle East*, September 1972, pp. 32-33; *New York Times*, April 16, 1973, and April 20, 1963 (hereafter referred to as NYT). For the other

side of the argument in 1973 see M. A. Adelman, "Is the Oil Shortage Real?" *Foreign Policy* 9 (Winter 1972-73), pp. 69-107; and Stephen D. Krasner, "The Great Oil Sheikdown," *Foreign Policy* 13 (Winter 1973-74), pp. 123-148.

10. Akins, "The Oil Crisis," p. 466.

11. Despite the emphasis on Project Independence, John C. Sawhill, Former Director of the Federal Energy Administration, has acknowledged that current efforts are at best designed to reduce dependency on foreign oil from 35% to 20 to 25%. See *The Christian Science Monitor (CSM)*, September 5, 1974. For more recent indications of the increased reliance on Arab oil see *CSM*, March 26, 1976; *NYT*, March 29, 1976; and most especially, *The International Energy Situation: Outlook to 1985* (Washington, DC: The Central Intelligence Agency, April 1977). Hereafter referred to as *C.I.A. Report/1977*. The Department of State indicated in May 1977 that 38% of oil imports in 1976 came from the Arab countries. See *Oil and Energy*, GIST (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, May 1977).

12. The possibility of using military force to seize Arab oil fields in response to an embargo has received considerable attention. See, for instance, Robert W. Tucker, "Oil: The Issue of American Intervention," *Commentary*, January 1975, pp. 21-31; Miles Ignatus, "Seizing Arab Oil," *Harpers*, March 1975, pp. 45-62. However, for the most serious examination see *Oil Fields As Military Objectives: A Feasibility Study*, Congressional Research Service report prepared for the Special Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on International Relations (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1975).

13. On Soviet economic relations with Iran see *NYT*, July 4, 1973. According to reports, the USSR was the largest consumer of Iran's non-oil exports. Such relations have not prevented Teheran from registering its concern about Soviet arms transactions in the area. See, for example, *Ettelaat* (Teheran), August 13, 1973, as cited in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Middle East and North Africa* (hereafter referred to as *FBIS/MENA*), August 22, 1973, p. K2; and *Ettelaat*, August 14, 1973, as cited in *FBIS/MENA*, August 22, 1973, pp. K2-K3. The role nationalism plays in mitigating Soviet influence, even among client states such as Syria and Iraq, is well known and needs no comment here. Equally well known is the lack of Soviet technological capacity to replace the oil companies in downstream activities. For this, and other aspects of the Soviet Union's policy vis-a-vis energy, see the chapter by Abraham Becker in *The Energy Crisis and U.S. Foreign Policy*, edited by Joseph S. Szyliowicz and Bard E. O'Neill (New York: Praeger, 1975). For projections concerning the Soviet need for OPEC oil in the early 1980's see *C.I.A./1977*, pp. 12-13. Information on the contrary argument may be found in *NYT*, June 11, 1977, and *The Washington Post* (hereafter *WP*), June 12, 1977.

14. While the Soviet Union aids Iraq which, in turn, assists various liberation organizations in the region, its direct role has vacillated. Recent reports indicate, for example, that it has decided to decrease its support for PFLO in Oman in

favor of concentrating on the Yemeni-Somali area. See *Al-Hayah* (Beirut), September 11, 1974; *NYT*, April 5, 1976.

15. See *NYT*, June 12, 1973.

16. Iraqi machinations in the Baluchistan area are probably less publicized than their conventional operations against Kuwait and their subversive activities directed against Oman and Iran. For Iraqi subversive activities, see: Alvin J. Cottrell, "From Iraq With Love," *Near East Report*, Vol. XVII, No. 12 (March 21, 1973), page 48; "Viewing the News," *Near East Report*, Vol. XVII, No. 8 (February 21, 1973), p. 29 and 32; *Time*, May 5, 1973; *NYT*, May 15 and July 4, 1973; interview of the Shah by Girilal Jain, *The Times of India*, June 29, 1973.

17. The revolutionary organization seeking to overthrow the Sultanate in Oman has redesignated itself several times. Previously known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf and then as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and The Arab Gulf, it is now known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. The last change is significant because it reflects an apparent policy alteration which stresses Oman exclusively. In part, this is a result of a desire to lessen the overt threat to the Union of Arab Emirates, which in turn, it is hoped, will decrease the latter's support for Oman and Iran. In addition, there are signs that the other Arab countries were not enthusiastic about threats against states which were granting economic and military assistance to the nations involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict and which had agreed to use the "oil weapon" in the battle with Israel. On these points see *Aden Voice of the Omani Revolution*, August 6, 1974; interview of Ahman Abdas-Samad, *Aden Voice of Oman* in *FBIS/MENA*, August 23, 1974, pp. C1-C5; interview of President Salim Rubayi Ali in *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), September 11, 1974; the statement issued after the second PFLO general conference in *FBIS/MENA*, August 9, 1974, pp. C1-C5; excerpt from the national action program of PFLO, *FBIS/MENA*, August 20, 1974, p. C2. Reports from the area in late 1975 and early 1976 suggested that the PFLO had fallen on hard times as the Sultan's Armed Forces managed to isolate insurgent units along the PDRY border. Attempts by the PFLO to relieve pressure through appeals for support from the Arab League by and large fell upon deaf ears. See *NYT*, January 11, 1976, and January 18, 1976.

18. For example, see the results of a Gallup poll on public attitudes toward international affairs conducted in January 1974 in *NYT*, June 16, 1974.

19. According to a tentative Federal Energy Administration report entitled "The Economic Impact of the Oil Embargo on the American Economy," approximately 500,000 people lost jobs and economic output in the first quarter of 1974 dropped by \$10 to \$20 billion as a result of the embargo. See Reginald Stuart, "Harm to Economy Laid to Oil Freeze," *NYT*, September 3, 1974. A recent analysis of public opinion and the use of military force abroad concludes, among other things, that, depending on the nation threatened, between two and four times as many people would support the use of American forces to defend against

an external attack as against an indigeneous insurgency. See Bruce Russett and Miroslav Nincic, "American Opinion on the Use of Military Force Abroad," *Political Science Quarterly*, Fall 1976, p. 431.

20. Alvin J. Cottrell, "The Political Balance in the Persian Gulf," *Strategic Review*, Vol. II, Winter 1974, p. 34; *San Diego Union*, September 1, 1974. In addition, the United States periodically sends small task forces into the Indian Ocean.

21. In late 1966 the United Kingdom and the United States signed a 50-year agreement to develop the base at Diego Garcia. The latter is part of the British Indian Ocean Territories. See *Business Week*, March 27, 1971, p. 64.

22. Cottrell, "The Political Balance...", p. 33; *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1977.

23. See, for instance, the interview of Admiral Worth H. Bagley, Commander-in-Chief, US Naval Forces Europe, in *U.S. News and World Report*, December 24, 1973. William C. Moore lists other Soviet facilities in the larger area as Socotra (naval anchorage and airfield), Mogadiscio (airfield), Chagos Archipelago (anchorages), Mauritius (fuel rights), and Singapore (fuel rights). See *Human Events*, August 3, 1974.

24. Summary of the testimony of former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., before Congress in *NYT*, March 31, 1974.

25. Such proposals were reportedly made in 1971 but with little effect. On March 9, 1977, President Carter proposed that the Indian Ocean be "completely demilitarized" and the USSR responded that it was willing to open negotiations on the matter. See *NYT*, April 7, 1977. On the bargaining chip argument see Judith Miller, "US Navy Still Pressing for Base in Indian Ocean," *WP*, May 19, 1974. The specific military advantages that could result from the improvement of Diego Garcia's facilities are: (a) accommodation of carriers and polaris submarines; (b) refueling, crew change, and repair; (c) basing for antisubmarine aircraft, C141's, C5's, SR-71's, and KC-135's. Although Admiral Thomas Moorer indicated that B-52's might also use Diego Garcia, a Navy spokesman said in September 1974 that the width of the proposed airfield runway was insufficient. However, since the Navy has apparently broached the possibility of using B-52's in an antisubmarine role, accommodations at Diego Garcia cannot be ruled out. On these points see *Business Week*, March 27, 1971, p. 64; *NYT*, March 21, 1974; *U.S. News and World Report*, June 24, 1974; *The Boston Globe*, June 9, 1974; *The Kansas City Times*, September 5, 1974; *San Diego Union*, April 7, 1977; *NYT*, April 7, 1977.

26. *NYT*, May 12, 1974.

27. The Soviets have denied that the three ports are "bases." See *NYT*, September 1, 1974; *CSM*, September 9, 1974; *The Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 1974.

28. Miller, "US Navy . . .," *WP*; *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1977. The French maintain 20 ships in the area, according to *The Baltimore Sun*, March 26, 1977.

29. *Ibid.*, One fear of India is that of superpower rivalry in the area and an arms race spinoff involving local powers. See *Atlas World Press Review*, June 1974. Not surprisingly, Pakistan has supported the Diego Garcia proposal. Iran, meanwhile, has refrained from opposing the move. Since Peking is unable to project its own naval force into the area and fears encirclement by the USSR, it sees the US role in balancing the Soviet Union as serving its short-term interests. At the same time, however, Hsinhua, the official press agency, has indicated that China's defense planners feel that a naval war between the two superpowers is inevitable. Interestingly, most of the blame is placed on the USSR. See *Intelligence Digest*, September 1974; *The International Herald Tribune* (Paris), July 8, 1974; *The Boston Globe*, June 9, 1974.

30. *The Baltimore Sun*, August 3, 1974; *U.S. News and World Report*, September 9, 1974. Colby also indicated that in his view the Soviets were probably leery of having a substantial portion of their fleet on the wrong end of a blocked Suez Canal.

31. The transcript of the news conference can be found in *NYT*, August 9, 1974. On the expenditures see *WP*, April 7, 1977.

32. One scholar who has argued that international values have minimal impact on decisionmaking is Werner Levy. See "The Relative Irrelevance of Moral Norms in International Politics," in *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, edited by James N. Rosenau (revised ed., New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 191. However, the fact that values do at times enter the decisional calculus is demonstrated by Attorney General Robert Kennedy's raising the moral aspect during the Cuban Missile Crisis deliberations. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1965), p. 738.

33. Holsti, *International Politics*. . ., p. 373.

34. Prognosticating about the role of bureaucratic factors during crisis situations is an especially hazardous undertaking, for, as Stephen D. Krasner has pointed out, the personalities of key actors usually affect the otherwise normal institutional interplay. Moreover, the President has the capability to restructure action channels under crisis conditions. Perhaps this is one reason why the best empirical examinations of bureaucratic politics are *ex post facto* accounts (e.g., Graham T. Allison's analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis). For a representative sampling of studies dealing with the bureaucratic politics see the articles by Graham T. Allison, Morton H. Halperin, *et al.*, in chapter 6, *American Defense Policy*, *op. cit.* See especially Stephen L. Krasner, "Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland)," *Ibid.*

35. There are many who believe that the infusion of arms into the Persian Gulf is highly dangerous because it increases the chance that force will be used to settle regional conflicts. Moreover, they question the sale of more sophisticated equipment to Iran on the grounds that the latter is already the dominant local power. See Dale R. Tahtinen, *Arms in the Persian Gulf* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1974), pp. 30-31.

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