ABSTRACT

MONTAGUE, ARCHER ALLEN. A More Muscular Foreign Policy: Saudi Arabia and the Militarization of US Middle East Policy, 1979-80. (Under the direction of Dr. Nancy Mitchell.)

This thesis examines the increased militarization of US Middle East policy in the last two years of the Carter presidency. Following the events of 1979, when the United States lost its key regional ally, Iran, Saudi Arabia became indispensable to the protection of American regional interests. It is through the prism of the American relationship with the Saudis that this shift toward militarism in US Middle East policy is most evident. During 1979-80, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war served to draw Washington and Riyadh closer to each other. This served American interests but it also created a climate conducive to the reliance upon militarism as a primary means of effecting policy.

Following a first chapter that presents a brief synopsis of US/Saudi relations from the founding of the kingdom in 1932 to 1977, the second chapter examines the beginnings of a more active militarization of US Middle East policy prior to the December 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It explores the critical roles of the United States and Saudi Arabia in the arming of Afghan rebels throughout 1979 and also the United States' willingness to develop, at Saudi urging, a close relationship with Mohammed Zia ul-Haq's Pakistan. The third chapter emphasizes the expansion of military power as a primary tool of diplomacy during 1980. It addresses the Carter Doctrine, the outbreak of the Iran/Iraq war and American involvement in the early stages of the conflict, involvement in which the Saudis figured prominently. This chapter also examines preparations for a second, often overlooked, rescue mission into Tehran during the summer and fall of 1980. The fourth chapter examines the benefits of this

more militarist series of policies for the United States, including the potential for an ending of the Iranian hostage crisis as well as a closer military relationship with Riyadh. The fifth chapter offers a parallel assessment of the impact of the more aggressive US policies on Saudi Arabia, focusing on the increased stature of Saudi Arabia in the Arab and Muslim worlds and resulting diminution of regional threats to the kingdom. The final chapter concludes with a brief examination of the consequences of the increased militarization of US Middle East policy through the 1980s and beyond, including the development of an unparalleled network of military facilities and armaments throughout the Saudi kingdom, from which the United States launched defenses of critical oil resources during the 1990s.

A More Muscular Foreign Policy: Saudi Arabia and the Militarization of US Middle East Policy, 1979-80

By
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Biography

Archer Allen Montague was born in Raleigh, North Carolina and currently resides in Tampa, Florida. Mr. Montague has a wife, Norma, and a son, Cameron. He completed his requirements for a Master of Arts in History from North Carolina State University in 2007. Future plans include continuing his education with doctoral studies of American diplomacy toward the Middle East, while also seeking to gain a better understanding of intra-Arab politics and society.

Acknowledgments

This project has been all-consuming for the better part of three years; no one knows this better than my rock, my wife Norma. She has endured countless hours of discussion about US/Saudi relations and the militarization of American foreign policy, bore the financial burden of research trips to California, Atlanta, and Washington, and watched my book collection grow exponentially, always supporting me in my seemingly endless quest for "just one more source." Though she owes me for curing her insomnia, I will always be most indebted to her for the support she has provided me over the course of this project. Thanks also go to my son, Cameron, whose infectious smile and easy manner have ensured that I kept my priorities in focus while providing me with much-needed study breaks. Few things could as effectively halt research as our story times, to my great delight.

Academically, I can think of none who deserve more of my gratitude than my thesis committee chair and mentor, Dr. Nancy Mitchell. She saw potential in me years before I recognized it in myself; I can say unequivocally that I would not be where I am today were it not for her encouragement and support. Thesis committee members Dr. Akram Khater and Dr. Michael Allen likewise have been invaluable resources to me as I have developed this research. Each brought critical new perspectives to my project, perspectives that have encouraged me to broaden and deepen my historical views.

To each one of the people named, as well as countless other friends and family members, I owe a deep debt of gratitude. Thank you all for your support and encouragement; I hope my research makes you proud to have been associated with it.

Archer A. Montague
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A Note on Sources

This project uses many different sources from many different areas of scholarship. Its foundation, however, is solidly in primary documents. Many of these papers were obtained during research at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia and the most recently released are indicated in the footnotes by their distinctive NCL number. Additionally, I have examined recently declassified FOIA requests at the National Security Archive in Washington, DC and obtained documents from the Research Room of the Department of Defense. The document collections available via electronic means from the Digital National Security Archive [DNSA] and the Declassified Document Reference System [DDRS] likewise have been critical components of my research. They include sources from a number of governmental agencies, including the White House, Departments of State and Defense (and their respective intelligence arms), and the CIA.

In developing the underlying premise of my thesis, the militarization of US Middle East policy during 1979-80, I rely heavily upon the theses proffered by historians Andrew Bacevich and Olav Njolstad. Bacevich's chapter on the Carter presidency in The New American Militarism shaped my understanding of Carter's Middle East policy and provided a critical launching point for my research. Njolstad's article, "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years", articulates the changing focus of American foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf region during the Carter presidency. William Odom's "The Cold War Origins of the US Central Command," offers an account complementary to Njolstad's, with the added benefit of being written by one of the officials charged with formulating and implementing this policy.[1]

[1] Colonel (later promoted to General) William Odom served as military liaison to Zbigniew Brzezinski's National Security Council from 1977-1981.

The memoirs of the principals, particularly Zbigniew Brzezinski's Power and Principle, Cyrus Vance's Hard Choices, and Soviet Ambassador Anatolyi Dobrynin's In Confidence, provide unique insights into the overall decision-making processes at work during 1979-80. A 2006 biography of Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan proved to be useful as well; William Simpson's The Prince, while largely anecdotal, quotes extensively from interviews with the prince and visits issues seldom considered by scholars. While each of these works contains self-serving elements, they provide important views into the White House, the Kremlin, and the House of Saud during the period. Articles penned by former Carter officials, including David Newsom and Thomas Thornton, also offer important perspectives on such issues as Washington's interpretations of the Soviet threat and the administration's changing views on US/ Pakistan policy. [2]

While I have relied extensively upon primary sources for my examination of the US/Saudi relationship during the Carter years, secondary sources such as Rachel Bronson's Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia and Nadav Safran's Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security have been instrumental to my research. Safran's work, written in 1991, is a good primer for understanding the internal and external dynamics of Saudi Arabia. Bronson's 2005 book is one of the first scholarly treatments of the US/Saudi relationship to emerge since the watershed of 9/11. Less revelatory than thorough, Thicker Than Oil offers the unique juxtaposition of a traditional Cold War-oriented history of America's relationship with Saudi Arabia alongside a post 9/11 recognition of the centrality of Islamic fundamentalism to US/Saudi relations. And finally, the works of Robert Vitalis, specifically a 2002 article for *Diplomatic History*, "Black Gold, White Crude," and his book, America's Kingdom, provided critical perspective to this thesis. Vitalis' revisionist approach to the

[2] See David Newsom, "America Engulfed," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1981 and Thomas Thornton, "Between the Stools?: US Policy Toward Pakistan During the Carter Administration," *Asian Survey*, October 1982.

origins of the US/Saudi relationship issues an important challenge to the traditional American historiography of the "special relationship."[3]

My research is limited by its reliance upon Western sources. A more comprehensive examination would include regional, particularly Arab, sources; this lacuna is one reason I have kept my focus strictly on US policy. While Saudi Arabia is integral to this examination, its value lies more as a means to American militarization in the Middle East than as an end in itself. The first step to understanding the dramatic shift in US policy during 1979-80 necessarily begins in Washington, DC.

[3] See Vitalis, Robert. America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007; Robert Vitalis, 'Black Gold, White Crude,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 26, No.2 (Spring 2002)

Introduction

One of the most popular history-based polls released each year is the rating of American presidents. Though in no way scientific, this poll nonetheless offers a glimpse into the thinking of diplomatic and presidential historians. A recent *Newsweek* article examined a series of polls taken of historians over the last decade and Jimmy Carter was deemed the eleventh-worst president in American history. The article went on to cite the opinions of several prominent historians, one of whom, the self-described conservative-leaning historian Forrest McDonald, labeled Carter as "completely ineffectual."[4] Such stinging criticism, however, was not limited to the right. Robert Dallek, who describes himself as "an old-fashioned liberal New Deal Democrat," referred to Carter in a 2005 interview as "an ineffective president;"[5] likewise, Carter's presidency has come under withering fire from no less a liberal standard-bearer than Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. himself.[6]

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[4] "Ten Worst Presidents: Conclusion," Jay Tolson, *Newsweek*, 16 February 2007

[5] "TDR Interview: Historian Robert Dallek," *The Dartmouth Review*, 26 August 2005

[6] Schlesinger, Jr. Arthur M., War and the American Presidency 55; Schlesinger notes, "The presidency of Jimmy Carter ... led to concerns about the impotence of the office." This was a mild criticism in comparison to the often-scathing diatribes made about Carter in Schlesinger's posthumously released Journals, 1954-2000, during the Carter years. See also Barry D. Riccio, "The US Presidency and the 'Ratings Game,'' *Historian*, Vol.52, Issue 4, (August 1990)

Much of this perceived ineffectiveness is born of the weakness Carter is thought to have demonstrated in response to challenges from Iran and the Soviet Union during the last two years of his presidency. Facing an increasingly vocal domestic political opposition that was openly advocating a more adversarial approach in foreign policy, Carter's presidency gained a reputation for weakness and impotence. These perceptions have only been magnified over time when contrasted with his successor, Ronald Reagan, whose presidency, rightly or wrongly, is seen as having been decisive and strong in the face of adversity. These perceptions persist within the scholarly community, as evidenced in several recent works dealing with the Carter presidency. In one, Douglas Little's 2002 work American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945, the author notes that

> By the time Jimmy Carter returned to Georgia in January 1981, the United States was in the grips of a Vietnam Syndrome whose chief symptom seemed to be an instinctive aversion to military intervention anywhere. For the Midwestern lifeguard-turned-B-movie-actor who succeeded Carter, the simplest cure seemed at times to be military intervention almost everywhere, including the Persian Gulf.[7]

Historian Rachel Bronson's 2005 study of the United States' relations with Saudi Arabia, Thicker Than Oil, offers a complement to Little's assessment. In clear contrast to the outgoing president Carter, Bronson noted, "Saudi Arabia … welcomed in Ronald Reagan, a president willing to pursue a muscular foreign policy."[8]

Other recent scholarship, however, has begun to reevaluate these notions of Carter as a weak and ineffective president, particularly as the documentary

[7] Little, Douglas. American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 244.
[8] Bronson, Rachel, Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 152.

evidence of his Middle East policy becomes more readily accessible. Several Carter Administration officials have offered accounts that seek to revise this perception of Carter's weakness. Among them is former Carter NSC and CIA official (and current Secretary of Defense) Robert Gates, who devoted an entire section of his book From the Shadows to "Reevaluating Carter."[9] Likewise, scholars such as Andrew Bacevich and Olav Njolstad have looked closely at Carter's foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf region and have come to conclusions quite at odds with the 'conventional wisdom' regarding Carter's decision-making. Far from continuing the historical trend of portraying the president as weak and ineffectual, these scholars have been at the forefront of an alternative view of the Carter administration's Middle East strategy, one recognizing the administration's vital contributions toward a reorientation of America's long-term security interests, specifically in the Gulf region. While Bacevich is less certain of Carter's actual intent, noting, "In a backhanded way, this least militaristic of recent presidents inadvertently created the conditions for the militarization of U.S. policy that was to come," he nonetheless made clear that the president recognized the critical stakes involved. Bacevich pays particular attention to the juxtaposition of an increasingly militarist view of policy and the continuing energy woes facing the United States in the late 1970s. In a 2006 interview, Bacevich recalls his initial response to Carter's 15 July 1979 address on energy policy, forever remembered as his 'malaise' speech:[10]

[9] Gates, Robert M. From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, 176-9.
[10] Jimmy Carter, "Crisis of Confidence" speech, July 15, 1979 http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu/scripps/digitalarchive/speeches/spe_1979_0715_carter

> I remember being dismayed by the Carter speech because it seemed so out of sync with the American spirit. It wasn't optimistic; it did not promise that we would have more tomorrow than we have today, that the future would be bigger and better ... Carter essentially said: If we are serious about freedom, we must really think about what freedom means - and it ought to mean something more than acquisition and conspicuous consumption. And if we're going to preserve our freedom, we have to start living within our means.

Bacevich then recalls:

> It did not set well with me at the time. Only when I was writing my militarism book did I take another look at the speech and then it knocked me over. I said to myself: This guy got it. I don't know how, but he really got it.[11]

In his "militarism book," The New American Militarism, Bacevich cites a decisive national crossroads during the long 1980 election season when, in stark contrast to Carter's calls for sacrifice and increased conservation efforts, Republican presidential nominee Reagan and his adherents called not for

> a need to cut back but of abundance without end. They assured Americans not only that compromising their lifestyle was unnecessary but that the prospects for economic expansion were limitless and could be had without moral complications or great cost. This, rather than the nagging about shallow materialism, was what Americans wanted to hear.

Bacevich concludes that, buoyed by the vision for America as presented by Reagan in 1980,

[11] "Interview with Andrew Bacevich: The Arrogance of American Power," conducted by Tom Engelhardt (19 June 2006) http://hnn.us/articles/25707.html

> the answer to whatever crisis afflicted the United States was to be found not in conservation or reduced expectations and surely not in spiritual renewal; it was to be found in the restoration of U.S. military might, which held the promise of enabling Americans always to have more rather than to make do with less.[12]

Bacevich goes on to lament the fact that, as a result of the seizure of the US embassy in Iran in November, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, and the intensifying domestic pressures the president was facing by late 1979, Carter "in a sense, recants, abandoning the argument of July" by issuing the January 1980 State of the Union address, in which he set forth an aggressive plan for defense of American interests in the Persian Gulf region, known as the Carter Doctrine. [13] Bacevich argues that the enunciation of this new policy signified the president's belated understanding of the implicit calculus of militarism and materialism that fueled (and has continued to fuel) the American citizenry.[14] He ties the late-term Carter policies to the subsequent quarter-century of American military involvement in the Gulf region, noting that "July 1979 to January 1980, that's the pivotal moment that played such an important role in bringing us to where we are today."[15] New evidence suggests that Bacevich's overall thesis is on point, with the caveat that there are important thresholds crossed by the Carter administration both prior to July 1979 and after January 1980 that added to the militarization of American policy in the Middle East.

Olav Njolstad, in an article in *Cold War History*, offers a complementary revisionist view of US Middle East policy during the Carter presidency. Primarily

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[12] Bacevich, Andrew J., The New American Militarism. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005,102-3
[13] Bacevich interview with Engelhardt, 19 June 2006
[14] Bacevich, 181-3
[15] Bacevich interview with Engelhardt, 19 June 2006

interested in how the shift in strategic priorities dictated the move from the Northeastern Asia and European theatres toward the Persian Gulf, Njolstad places the origins of the increased militarism in American Middle East policy squarely on the shoulders of the Carter administration. Tracing the roots of the policies that would be known as the Carter Doctrine back to the first days of his presidency in 1977, Njolstad explodes the notion of Carter as a militarily weak Commander in Chief by recounting the early policy battles that raged within Carter's inner circle. He notes that the first discussions of a Rapid Deployment Force surfaced in mid-1977, well prior to the oft-mentioned catalysts for policy change, specifically the Iranian and Afghan crises of 1979.[16] According to Njolstad, these discussions continued throughout 1978, with Brzezinski pushing "for development of a strategic concept" that would include, among other things, "an East-of-Suez Command entity of some kind, located in the U.S. but equipped to move." By June 1979, the objective as set forth by the White House Policy Review Committee (PRC) called for nothing less than a "perceptible military preponderance." [17] Though Njolstad acknowledges that actualization of the policy initiatives was slow-moving prior to the events of the latter half of 1979, he makes clear that this early-presidency shift toward the Persian Gulf (and also the militarism that it entailed) was of momentous import, a "far-reaching redirection of US geopolitical strategy [that] has not yet been fully recognized by historians of US foreign relations and defense policy."[18]

Other scholars have examined the trend toward American militarism more broadly, examining it within a larger societal framework. Though this thesis does not attempt to delve deeply into the larger issues at play in American society during the late 1970s, it accepts fully the important role that domestic attitudes play on the formation of US foreign policy and certainly does

[16] Olav Njolstad, "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years," *Cold War History*, Vol.4, No.3 (April 2004), 27
[17] Njolstad, 32-3
[18] Njolstad, 22

not discount the emotional intensity of the period, especially in the wake of the Iranian hostage crisis, and its effect on American Middle East policy specifically as the 1980 election season approached. These issues, which Michael Sherry convincingly articulates in his book In the Shadow of War, are just a few of the many facets that contributed to the making of US Middle East policy during 1979-80; the domestic element, while largely peripheral to the boundaries of this work, nevertheless must be considered as part of any broader-reaching analysis of President Carter's actions during this period.

The aim of my study is to examine the evolution of a movement toward a militarization of US Middle East policy during the last two years of the Carter presidency. Carter, more than any US President before him, drew a line in the Gulf sands; he made clear that the United States considered the Persian Gulf a vital national security interest. It was in the furtherance of this policy, enunciated in his State of the Union address of January 1980, that Carter exerted American military might in Southwest Asia. The increased reliance upon militarism in US Middle East policy in 1979-1980 is the focus of this research.

The term militarism has become increasingly loaded and unclear. It can describe a societal phenomenon - the increased presence of military accoutrements in civilian affairs - as in Sherry's work[19] - or it can denote the exaltation of the military and war-making, as Bacevich argues. For the purposes of this study, militarism should be defined as the use of overt or covert force and the distribution of arms as a substitute for traditional diplomacy.

An important aspect of the militarization that occurred during the second half of the Carter presidency is its seeming contradiction with the ideals that Carter set forth during his 1976 campaign and in his initial public

[19] See Sherry, Michael S., In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995

pronouncements as president. Historian Robert Schlzinger noted that Carter sought "leadership without hegemony," had campaigned promising to replace "balance of power politics with world order politics," expressed a commitment to human rights, to a new North-South dialogue on economic issues, and to limiting the global arms race.[20] In 2002, former Carter NSC liaison General William Odom, however, argued that this "first among equals" ideal was something of a mirage; he outlines the origins of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force and affirms Njolstad's argument that a militarization of US policy toward the Gulf region was clearly taking shape as early as 1977.[21]

The Odom piece provides the final intellectual underpinning for my research; in addition to the Bacevich and Sherry arguments that provide a theoretical basis for the notion of an American militarism in place during 1979-80, Odom and Njolstad provide a concrete foundation by examining the policy decisions that allowed the Carter administration to rapidly implement force as a primary tool of US Middle East policy in the latter half of his term.

While Odom and Njolstad make compelling arguments that the militarization of US Middle East policy was well underway by early 1979, the policies undertaken after the collapse of the Shah, the hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan appear to have been quite different. A transformation took place: from the Odom/Njolstad perspective of a largely systematic militarist shift in US strategic priorities in the years of 1977-78 to a reactive and disorganized series of militaristic policies that were implemented during 1979-80. It is this conversion I examine; new interpretations in this research are designed to complement previously recognized steps taken toward

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[20] Schulzinger, Robert D. American Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 316-7; see also Zbigniew Brzezinski interview, National Security Archive, 13 June 1997 http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-17/brzezinski1.html

[21] See William Odom, "Cold War Origins of the US Central Command," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 52-82, Spring 2006

a more militarist American foreign policy during the last two years of the Carter presidency.

The Carter Doctrine, the formation of a Rapid Deployment Force [RDF], and the failed hostage rescue attempt in April 1980 are generally recognized as the most visible examples of this shift toward militarism. My interpretation of the evidence, however, suggests a much more elaborate effort to militarize American policy in the Gulf region. Washington's relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 1979-80 were key to this effort. I will offer evidence that it was through the US/Saudi relationship, and specifically through Saudi cooperation in the Afghan and Iran-Iraq wars, that the most tangible and practical avenues emerged for the militarization of US Middle East policy during the final two years of the Carter presidency.

In close coordination with Saudi Arabia, US policymakers embraced a violent politicized form of Islamism based upon the traditions of Saudi Wahhabism. Though similar in some ways to the fundamentalism sweeping through Iran during this period, it differed in one key respect: the pro-American House of Saud wholeheartedly supported it and believed it could effectively channel the direction of its ire. Thus, the Saudis sought to mold the Wahhabi Islamists' unshakable anti-communism into a formidable anti-Soviet force in Afghanistan. It was Washington's embrace of this Islamist movement that provided an important vehicle for the United States to play an active, albeit covert, role in drawing the Soviets into Afghanistan in 1979. The Islamists, viewed by Cold War-era US policymakers almost exclusively in terms of their anti-Soviet tendencies (rather than as a powerful rising political entity in itself), provided both a willing supply of manpower to the Afghan insurgency and virtually unassailable anti-Soviet fervor based as it was in religious principles.[22]

[22] PBS Frontline, "The Saudi Time Bomb?," Mai Yamani interview, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/interviews/yamani.html

The Carter administration coupled this fuelling of an already-virulent Islamic insurgency with a series of high-profile displays of military power in the region, among them the deployment of two carrier battle groups into the Arabian Sea and the dispatch of American military aircraft to Saudi Arabia and Egypt during 1979. These complementary initiatives, according to some observers, played a considerable role in the decision of the Soviets to intervene in Afghanistan in December 1979.[23]

In addition to its critical role in developing, nurturing, and financing the US efforts in Afghanistan, the Saudi royal family also played a major part in the diplomatic overtures made by Washington to both Pakistan and Iraq during this period. In a seeming disavowal of his earlier emphases on human rights and nuclear nonproliferation, Carter came to embrace two Southwest Asian leaders who had taken control of their respective countries in 1979 coups, Mohammed Zia ul-Hak of Pakistan and Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Pakistan quickly emerged from the upheaval in Iran and Afghanistan as a critical frontline state in the protection of what Washington perceived as its vital interests. When the Shah fell, the United States lost key intelligence-gathering assets in Iran; American officials quickly recognized the value of Pakistan in filling these intelligence gaps as well as in providing the infrastructure for supporting the burgeoning Afghan insurgency in 1979. Disregarding its earlier stances against arms sales in general and Pakistan's nuclear ambitions in particular, the Carter administration, encouraged by the Saudis, sought to entice Islamabad into an anti-Soviet front. Though Zia never fully embraced the US/Saudi view of an imminent Soviet threat, he did not discourage the American militarist policies that sprung forth from it.

[23] Westad, Odd Arne. The Global Cold War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 318-20, 325; Soviet Foreign Minister Anatolyi Dobrynin offers a similar account in his memoirs. Dobrynin, Anatoly. In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents. New York: Random House, 1995, 442, 446

Several issues led the United States to seek a closer relationship with Iraq in late 1979 and 1980. After the fall of the Shah in 1979, Baghdad became critical to American interests in the Persian Gulf region; if Washington could not ally itself with the former Soviet client, it must at least silence the rhetoric flowing from the Iraqi capital, which hindered both American peace initiatives and military objectives in the Gulf region. As the most formidable military power in the Arab world in 1979, Iraq posed a threat to any Arab state to which it directed its wrath; the Saudis had long had an ambivalent relationship with Baghdad that was only magnified by the regional tumult of 1979. The strength of Arab solidarity by 1979 had ensured a Saudi/Iraqi commonality of interests, a commonality enhanced by the political alienation of Egypt after November 1977, albeit with a caveat. Both Iraq and Saudi Arabia publicly vilified Sadat for his moves toward a peace with Israel; however, each privately welcomed it because each hoped to fill the leadership vacuum caused by the alienation of Cairo. The United States backed the Saudis in this emerging power struggle, yet the emergence of a more militarist American Middle East policy dictated a series of decisions that not only led to a US/Iraqi rapprochement in 1979-80, but also encouraged Iraq to invade Iran in September 1980. The evidence suggests that the United States provided military support to Baghdad from the outbreak of war in 1980, several years earlier than publicly acknowledged.

A thread that is interwoven into these disparate crises can be found in an Arab military production network based in Cairo. Weapons transiting across the Afghan/Pakistan border as early as spring 1979 as well as those supporting the Iraqi military in its fight against Iran in 1980 were supplied from factories in Egypt. These factories manufactured weapons based on Soviet designs. Therefore, contrary to the assertions of most historians that Egypt was supplying

old Soviet weapons left over from the days of Egyptian/Soviet cooperation,[24] newly released documents suggest that these were new weapons produced and distributed under the watchful eye of American defense and intelligence officials. If this is indeed the case, it indicates a much more active US military involvement in the Persian Gulf theatre in 1979-80 than has previously been acknowledged.

Finally, the September 1980 Saudi request for United States' AWACS aircraft provides the *piece de resistance* for American militarization of Middle East policy by the end of 1980. The mere presence of AWACS in the Saudi kingdom is an example of the militarization of policy and the first test of the Carter Doctrine.[25] What has not been thoroughly explored, however, is precisely what function the aircraft provided to both the Saudis and the Americans. Ostensibly required to provide air defense for the Saudi oil fields, clearly seen by Washington as a vital American interest, the AWACS were more central to the militarization of US Middle East policy than heretofore recognized. The four American AWACS dispatched to Saudi Arabia in late September 1980 were themselves an augmentation of a previous US AWACS deployment, which began with the initial deployment of three of the sophisticated aircraft to the kingdom in March 1979. There is a paucity of available evidence as to whether the AWACS deployed to Saudi Arabia were equipped to provide early warning to Royal Saudi Air Force [RSAF] pilots or whether they were instead 'keyed into' US carrier-based fighters offshore. If it were the latter – as the evidence is beginning to imply - it would suggest the need to reconsider the role of American military personnel in the Persian Gulf region during the initial phases of the Iran-Iraq conflict. Moreover, it is clear that the AWACS deployed to the Persian Gulf region played a key role in the plan for a second hostage rescue attempt. This second

[24] See Bronson, 171; Garthoff, Raymond L. Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon to Reagan. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985, 962; Brzezinski interview with National Security Archive, 13 June 1997.
[25] Brzezinski, Zbigniew, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983, 452

attempt, only acknowledged in passing by most sources, is important as it provides a critical rationale for ambitious and risky initiatives undertaken by the Carter administration in the late summer of 1980.

Perhaps the ultimate legacy of the militarism of American Middle East policy in 1979-80, and what ties Saudi Arabia most tightly to this militarist shift, is the relationship between the two nations that emerged during and after 1979-80. The pursuit of this 'special' relationship was a serious consideration in virtually every decision Washington made with regard to the Persian Gulf region during the last two years of the Carter presidency. Complementing the militarization of US Middle East policy during these years, the increased closeness of the relationship during 1979-80 led directly to the 1981 sale of five AWACS to the kingdom along with one of the world's most advanced air defense systems, a network of military facilities so sophisticated as to be considered to be "equal to the heart of NATO,"[26] and an unspoken defense agreement that would culminate in the deployment of a half-million US soldiers to Saudi Arabia during 1991's Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is critical to this analysis of the militarization of US Middle East policy; this thesis is not, however, a monograph on US/Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia plays an integral role in understanding the rationales for American Middle East policy during 1979-1980, however, it is this process of increased militarization, and the US decision-making that led to it, that is the focus of this thesis.

[26] PBS Frontline transcript, "The Arming of Saudi Arabia." (originally aired 16 February 1993)

Chapter One
Black Gold

"They found the oil for us, and they've been our friends ever since"

Former Saudi Ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar bin Sultan

The Beginning: 1932-1966

The roots of the US/Saudi relationship date back to the beginning of the modern kingdom itself. When founded in 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was still several years from the discoveries of oil that would make it among the most powerful nations on earth. Almost entirely reliant upon the traffic of pilgrims to the twin holy sites of Mecca and Madinah located in the southwestern Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia, the kingdom was decimated by the dramatic reduction in religious travelers caused by the Great Depression of the early 1930s. It was this financial crisis that led the Saudi leader Abd Al-Aziz, later known as King ibn Saud, to grant the first oil concession to the American conglomerate Southern Oil of California (SOCAL) in 1933. It took five years for a SOCAL well to produce crude, but from the first gush, the kingdom was changed forever. Following the success of the first wave of oil exploration, SOCAL, renamed the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC), began lobbying the United States government for assistance to aid the Saudis in their still-desperate financial straits. As World War Two raged throughout the globe, Washington reached out and offered the kingdom assistance under the Lend Lease Act. Acceptance of this

aid culminated in the now-famous meeting between ibn Saud and Franklin D. Roosevelt onboard the USS Quincy in early 1945, during which the newly rechristened Aramco, formerly CASOC, gained exclusive rights to oil production in the rapidly-expanding Saudi oilfields.[27]

The 1950s saw an oil boom in Saudi Arabia, with Aramco riggers, "profane, tobacco-chewing roughnecks from Texas and Oklahoma[,] displacing the missionaries as the most important Americans in the Middle East."[28] It was during this period that the 'TAP line'- the Trans Arabian pipeline- became operational. Designed to carry the vast quantities oil being pumped from the eastern oilfields of Dhahran westward to the shipping and processing centers along the Mediterranean and Red Seas, the TAP line was referred to by a diplomatic staffer stationed in Jidda during the mid-1960s as "one of the great arteries of Empire, the American Empire in the Middle East I mean, because that's in fact what it was."[29] This notion of empire has been vigorously propounded by historian Robert Vitalis, who cites the rise of an American economic imperialism resulting from the tremendous sway held by Aramco officials over the kingdom (and increasingly, Washington) during the post-war period through the 1960s.[30] His arguments offer strong counters to what he refers to as the "official Aramco version of history,"[31] which cites the oil behemoth as a benevolent agent for development. He challenges diplomatic historians "satisfied to reproduce the state-centric assumptions of the functionaries whom they study," and who, according to Vitalis, appear

[27] Trofimov, Yaroslav. The Siege of Mecca. New York: Doubleday, 2007, 19; Bronson, 20
[28] Kaplan, Robert D. The Arabists. New York: The Free Press, 1995, 135
[29] Kaplan, 135
[30] See Vitalis, Robert. America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007; Robert Vitalis, "Black Gold, White Crude," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 26, No.2 (Spring 2002).
[31] Vitalis, "Black Gold," 186-9.

"convinced that there truly is a 'national interest' or at least there truly are people who believe in and act on [its] behalf."[32]

Following the war, the British sought a retreat from many of their pre-war colonial obligations, one of which was primary protector of the Persian Gulf region. When this occurred, the Saudis held out hope that the United States would fill the vacuum; in April 1948 ibn Saud offered Washington virtually unlimited access to facilities inside the kingdom in exchange for American security guarantees. In what would become a great irony of American diplomacy, President Harry S Truman refused the offer. Despite being rebuffed, ibn Saud continued to lobby the Americans and, in 1951, an agreement was made to allow the United States access to the airfields at Dhahran as part of a mutual defense pact.

The emergence of spheres of influence along Cold War lines throughout the 1950s was one of the factors that led to the rise of a potent Arab nationalism under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. When Nasser abruptly nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, British, French, and Israeli forces attacked Egypt, in no small part to derail Nasser's burgeoning popularity among young Arabs. The abject failure of the European/Israeli effort served to further weaken the influence of the British in the region; in January 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower responded by presenting what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. Pledging to "secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism," the pronouncement was a barely-concealed swipe at Nasser, who was at the peak of his popularity in the Arab world.[33] The Saudis, though they had been vocal in

[32] Vitalis, "Black Gold," 196.
[33] Bronson, 73; Safran, Nadav, Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991, 82

their support for the Egyptian leader in the aftermath of the Suez crisis, quietly supported the fledgling American policy by extending the Dhahran lease agreement.

Concurrent with the Suez crisis, there were dramatic undercurrents threatening the stability of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Following the death of ibn Saud in 1953, a competition of ideologies had taken shape in the upper echelons of the Saudi royal family over the future direction of Arab versus Western alignment. Saud, the heir to the throne, sought to align the kingdom with Nasser and Arab nationalism. His brother, Crown Prince Faisal, objected, preferring to cast the kingdom's lot with the West, and particularly the United States. It was only after a 1962 coup in neighboring Yemen, in which Nasser was seen by both Washington and Jidda to have had an active hand,[34] that Faisal's protests were heeded. Fearing that the Egyptians were plotting to next destabilize the Saudi monarchy, Saud abdicated to Faisal, who almost immediately requested assistance from Washington.[35]

Kennedy, unlike his predecessor, sought to engage rather than alienate Nasser. He kept himself abreast of the events in Yemen and was well aware of the Saudi concerns arising from the situation there. However, when Faisal visited Washington in early 1963 to register these concerns personally, Kennedy took the opportunity to encourage the king to pursue domestic reform measures. "Deliberate, controlled internal reform is the best antidote to Nasserism," noted National Security Council Middle East expert Robert Komer in a letter to Kennedy following his meeting with Faisal.[36] Kennedy hoped to use the possibility of military assistance as a carrot to encourage Saudi reform, but when Egyptian jets

[34] Bronson, 85
[35] Safran, 91-3, 96
[36] Bronson, 85

began bombarding areas inside the kingdom's borders, he relented and deployed fighter jets to provide air defense. Saudi domestic reform effectively stalled.[37]

Within five months of the deployment of the fighter aircraft to Saudi Arabia, Kennedy was dead as was the US policy of engagement toward Nasser. The new president, Lyndon Johnson, was much more amenable to the military needs of the Saudis and much less inclined to demand internal reforms in return. Under Johnson, the United States proved willing and able to provide the Saudi armed forces with the tools "to enhance the realm's long-term internal and external deterrent capability," including the establishment of "a vast network of military facilities."[38] By 1966, the American/Saudi relationship was blossoming; within a short year, the United States would find itself ever more inextricably tangled in the jungles of Southeast Asia while the Saudis and their Arab neighbors would find themselves immersed in the third major regional conflict with Israel in two decades.

The Shift: 1967-1974

From the earliest days of the Saudi kingdom, Islam has played a prominent role in Saudi society. Of particularly strong influence has been the ultra-orthodox sect of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism, a movement that "forms the core of Saudi Arabia's religion, politics, society, and culture."[39] Whereas previous Islamic-based governments prior to the Iranian Revolution had striven to merely integrate Islam into a larger secular system, eschewing the politicization that to do otherwise would necessarily entail, the Saudi royal family went to the opposite extreme: it aggressively sought to curry the favor of the

[37] Bronson, 88
[38] Safran, 119
[39] Anderson, Roy R., Robert F. Seibert and Jon G. Wagner. Politics and Change in the Middle East: Sources of Conflict and Accommodation, Fourth ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993, 151

most fundamentalist of Muslims, the Wahhabists, in order first to attain, and, when that was accomplished, to maintain its grasp on power.

The present incarnation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is actually the third realm of the al-Saud dynastic conquests. The first realm lasted from 1744-1818, while the second lasted from 1824-1891. Both were the product of an alliance between the followers of Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab; Saudi history indicates that it was militarized Wahhabism that gave the first realm its strength, whereas it was "routinized Wahhabism" that ultimately doomed the second realm by making it susceptible to challenge.[40] Therefore, when ibn Saud sought to recapture the territories lost to the Ottoman Empire in his quest for the present realm, history dictated that one of his first goals should be the revival of the militant Ikhwan, or Wahhabist brethren. Ostensibly modeled upon the first community established by the Prophet Muhammad after leaving Mecca, Abd Al-Aziz ibn Saud's incarnation of the Ikhwan was designed to transcend the traditional tribal and familial bonds in favor of a highly-charged Wahhabist-based community that "stirred up militant fanaticism" while its adherents awaited the imam's call for jihad against infidels, seen by the Ikhwan as any non-Wahhabist. The revitalization of the Ikhwan proved critical to the fledgling leader; it provided ibn Saud "a needed buttress to his legitimacy, both internally and externally, while the coupling of the revival with the establishment of Ikhwan settlements promised to provide him with a new power base."[41]

This Saudi exploitation of Wahhabi cohesion exacerbated an already well-established tendency in the Arab world toward the alienation of the general population, whether by monarchical systems or otherwise, from the Western ideals of representative government. This estrangement from the political realm,

[40] Safran, 20-1
[41] Safran, 40-1

according to Middle East historian Robert Kaplan, led inexorably to an ever-greater sense of identity derived from religion, particularly Islam.[42] Over time, it transcended the religious realm occupied by the Saudi people, and religion itself became an integral part of the political governance of the kingdom. To an extent much greater than in any other Gulf state prior to the Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia "dragged" Islam, specifically the virulent, ultra-conservative Wahhabism, into Middle East politics.[43]

It was in service of this politicization of Islam that King Faisal invited into the kingdom thousands of members of the militant Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, who were strongly opposed to Nasser's nationalist policies, for the purposes of "educating" the Saudis. This fit into King Faisal's grand design, which saw a Saudi-led *ummah*, or global Islamic nation, as the only viable counter to the nationalist fervor surrounding Nasser and threatening to engulf the Arab Middle East.[44] The domestic radicalization that ensued, as well as the anti-Israeli sentiment it intensified, threatened to destroy the evolving relationship between the kingdom and the United States when Israeli forces attacked Egypt in June 1967.

The Six Day War of 1967 ultimately benefited the Saudi royal family by diminishing the threat to the kingdom from Egyptian influence in Yemen, and subsequently shifted the regional balance of power from Cairo to Saudi Arabia.[45] American assistance to the Israelis during the conflict, however, created deep rifts between Washington and Jeddah. In response, Minister of Petroleum Zaki Yamani ordered Aramco to cut fuel shipments to the US; the company, facing the threat of a nationalization of the company, quickly obliged.[46] US officials,

[42] Kaplan, 199
[43] Bronson, 104
[44] Trofimov, 21-2
[45] Safran 122; Bronson, 103
[46] Bronson, 99

concerned with continuing American access to military fuel supplies necessary to supporting the Vietnam conflict, protested the embargo. Within days, Faisal quietly allowed shipments of fuel to continue to flow to Southeast Asia unimpeded.[47]

In 1968, the British dropped a bombshell: they announced their intent to formally withdraw from the Persian Gulf entirely by 1971. Though its influence had diminished considerably since the end of World War II, Britain had maintained a credible security presence in the Gulf region, largely by serving as a tripwire against any Soviet encroachment. The British announcement immediately created a power vacuum in the region, with no clear heir to the Anglo role. The United States, paralyzed by Vietnam, was in no position to assume the mantle but was also unwilling to risk losing access to its vital interests in the region. It was from this dilemma that the 'Twin Pillars' strategy in US Middle East policy emerged. By anointing Iran as the primary bulwark against regional interference, the United States had a strong, credible ally in the region to protect its interests; by placing Saudi Arabia as the second 'pillar,' it ostensibly gave the kingdom a greater stake in its own security while ensuring that the United States would have a say in the protection of those interests.

The decade of the 1970s began, much as it would end, in turmoil. Gamal Abdel Nasser's death in September 1970 signaled the effective end of Arab nationalism and the rise of King Faisal's vision of a unified Islamic political front.[48] The British made their exit from the region official in December 1971; five months later, the Iraqis signed a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviets. Almost immediately after the announcement of the Baghdad/Moscow pact, President Richard Nixon pledged to Iran's Shah Reza Pahlavi virtually unlimited access to American conventional weapons. Concerns of

[47] Bronson, 101
[48] Bronson, 93

a major Soviet presence in the region, however, were short-lived. In July 1972, the new Egyptian president Anwar el-Sadat expelled nearly twenty thousand Soviet military advisors and officials from the country, the first step toward closer relations with the United States.[49]

Any perception of a lessening of tensions in the Gulf region was shattered on the sixth of October, 1973, in a surprise blitz on Israeli forces by the Egyptian and Syrian militaries. The Arab forces had Israel on the ropes for the better part of two weeks before Washington intervened decisively, airlifting critical military reinforcements to the Israelis that turned the tide of the conflict. It was the dramatic change in the earlier Arab perceptions of success in the conflict during that second week of the conflict, rather than the American aid itself, according to historian Nadav Safran, that pushed the Arab states over the edge and led Saudi Arabia and its OPEC partners to institute an oil embargo against the United States and other Western nations.[50]

The kingdom's decision to initiate the embargo on the 20th of October 1973 shook the relationship more than perhaps any other single decision made in the history of American/Saudi diplomacy. Prescient observers had long questioned the security of the American reliance upon foreign energy sources in the heart of an increasingly unstable region, among them James E. Akins, who wrote a controversial article outlining his concerns in an April 1973 article for *Foreign Affairs*, and was appointed US ambassador to Saudi Arabia less that three weeks before war broke out.[51] In retrospect, it is not difficult to see the signs of impending instability, which had included numerous stark warnings from Saudi officials concerning the cutoff of oil in response to a lack of engagement

[49] Safran, 139, 144, 147-9
[50] Safran, 157-9
[51] Yergin, Daniel. The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, 590-1, the Akins article referenced is "The Oil Crisis: This Time the Wolf is Here," *Foreign Affairs,* April 1973; see also Bronson, 112-3

on the part of the Nixon administration to the deepening Arab-Israeli crisis. The threat was magnified by the fact that a growing chorus of Arab leaders was becoming eager to utilize the oil weapon in order to achieve their economic and political goals.[52] Until these threats became a reality, leaving massive lines at gas stations across America, Washington had summarily dismissed them. This arrogance would have lasting consequences.

The Embargo and Beyond: 1973-77

For the second time in six years, the Saudi government forced the Delaware-based Aramco to shut off the oil supply to its own countrymen. Despite overwhelming pressure from other Arab leaders to sever Saudi ties to the United States, and perhaps because of not-so-subtle discussions about military 'countermeasures' to the embargo floating through Washington, Faisal quietly allowed, as he had in 1967, the continued shipment of fuel for US military use in Vietnam. However, the general embargo to the United States, unlike the short-lived 1967 shutoff, would last for nearly six months and prove crippling to the US and world economies. Of far greater significance, however, was the dramatic rise in prices that followed the initial shutoff; whereas the embargo created a psychological shock that resonated globally, it was the rise in prices that had the greatest overall effect. In addition to more than quadrupling the price of a barrel of crude oil, from under $2.50 per barrel in early 1973 to over $11.50 by the end of the year,[53] the pricing decisions made by oil ministers gathered in Vienna at the beginning of the conflict, in chorus with those pressed for several months later by the Shah of Iran, would have far-reaching ramifications. "The significance of their action was twofold," notes oil historian Daniel Yergin, "in the price increase itself, and in the unilateral way in which it was imposed." He continues:

[52] Bronson, 115-6; Yergin, 594-7
[53] Yergin, 606; Bronson, 122

> The pretense that the exporters would negotiate with the companies was now past. They had taken complete and total charge of setting the price of oil. The transition was now complete from the days when the companies had unilaterally set the price, to the days when the exporters had at least obtained a veto, to the jointly negotiated prices, to this new assumption of sole suzerainty by the exporters.

Yergin concludes by quoting Saudi oil minister Zaki Yamani in the aftermath of the producing nations' meeting: "The moment has come. We are masters of our own commodity."[54]

The dramatic rise in prices commanded by the oil producing nations altered the political and economic landscapes. It gave the producers leverage over those states that had become dependent upon oil from Middle Eastern sources. It also led to an unparalleled influx of cash into the coffers of these producing nations. For the Saudis, these developments quickly became dual-edged swords. As the most prolific producer of crude oil in the region, Saudi Arabia quickly began to reap the economic benefits of the price increases, as well as to enjoy the increased international stature its oil resources provided. This translated into a more vocal stance on regional issues, especially the plight of the Palestinians. The Saudis moved on several parallel tracks to achieve stabilization of the situation, placing substantial pressure on American officials while simultaneously courting the more radical members of the Arab coterie, specifically Syria and Iraq.[55] This led to the seemingly incompatible policies of the Saudi government funding Syrian arms purchases from the Soviet Union while simultaneously being one of the most ardent supporters of Kissinger's 'shuttle diplomacy,' which began in November 1973 with the hope of ending the Arab-Israeli impasse, but also, perhaps more importantly, the embargo.[56]

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[54] Yergin, 606
[55] Safran, 154
[56] Bronson, 120

The outwardly contradictory nature of Saudi policy was not limited, however, to its foreign initiatives. The kingdom had, only thirty years prior, been virtually destitute. Experts had earlier predicted its imminent demise, yet now the kingdom was flush with revenues, and upwards of $1 billion per week came flooding into the coffers. The kingdom simply could not spend the money as fast as it came in. Other regional producers, such as Iran and Iraq, were benefiting from the new-found oil wealth as well; they, however, were busy translating their surplus cash into military hardware, which they were much better equipped to do than was Saudi Arabia, whose military structure remained miniscule and largely impotent. Saudi concern over the arming of their rivals likely contributed to Yamani's pragmatic approach to oil policy after 1973. Yamani's was virtually the only voice during this period arguing for a price reduction and, while it certainly could be construed as an olive branch toward the United States, it more likely was the result of careful consideration of the Saudi's own best interests. Yamani reasoned that, in addition to the tremendous social and political strains placed on Saudi society by the rapid influx of wealth, a long-term increase in crude prices would inevitably lead the industrial nations to seek lower-priced alternative sources of energy.[57]

American policymakers quickly sought to integrate the abundance of Saudi cash into the American economy. Since oil is a fungible commodity and sold on a global market, and therefore impossible to completely embargo to a single nation while continuing to export to others, a relatively minor series of adjustments to US procurement strategies and distribution policies helped to ensure that the American economy would not be so vulnerable to such crises in the future.[58] Aside from seeking a more diverse supply system, a key component to this strengthening of American oil security was to encourage the Saudis to integrate

[57] Safran, 169-70
[58] Robert Johnson, "Persian Gulf in US Strategy: A Skeptical View," *International Security*, Summer 1989 Vol. 14, No. 1, 125.

their oil revenue into the United States economy. The initiative, from an American perspective, was a great success; within five years, Saudi Arabia was the single-largest holder of US dollars and government securities in the world. Further, crude prices had remained steady since the official end of the embargo in March 1974.[59]

The integration of Saudi capital into the American economy coincided with a dramatic rise in cooperation between the two nations. Following meetings in June of 1974, the United States and Saudi Arabia signed a series of agreements that effectively codified the 'special relationship' between them; these agreements were an early milestone in the militarization of US Middle East policy, with American defense officials initiating plans for Saudi defense that would eventually become some of the most sophisticated networks of military facilities and technologically-advanced weaponry systems in the world.[60] In return, the Saudis assumed a prominent mediation role in talks between Israel and the Arab states during 1975-6 in support of Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy efforts.[61]

The Carter Presidency Begins: 1977-78

As historian Steven Spiegel noted in The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict, Jimmy Carter "had barely settled into the Oval Office when it became clear that he intended to deal extensively with Arab-Israeli matters."[62] This resonated with the Saudis, who were already playing an important role in mediating a regional peace. The Saudi royal family, apart from Arab solidarity, had domestic reasons

[59] Bronson, 126
[60] Long, 54-9; Safran, 171-5, in January 1975, the US and Saudi Arabia initiated the relationship by signing an agreement for the sale of 60 F-15E/F fighters as part of what would become nearly $2 billion in military sales to the kingdom in fiscal year 1975 alone.
[61] Quandt, William B. Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993, 256
[62] Spiegel, Steven. The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy from Truman to Reagan. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985, 329

for aligning themselves with the Palestinians: the Palestinians held major influence within Saudi Arabia and, as the Palestinian movement both gained popular support and radicalized in the 1970s under the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasir Arafat and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) under George Habash, any other stance could have irreparably damaged the royal family's domestic and regional stature as well as potentially make their critical interests targets for terrorist activity.[63]

Carter spoke more forcefully than had any of his predecessors of the need for a more equitable solution to the Palestinian crisis; this was a logical extension of the centerpiece of his early foreign policy, the linkage of human rights to America's relations with other nations. This focus on human rights, when projected onto the Palestinian cause, endeared Carter to many on the Arab street. It was an illustration of just how much the Saudi strategic position had changed since the late 1940s when Carter in May 1977 stated, "I don't believe there is any other nation with whom we've had better friendship and a deeper sense of cooperation than we've found in Saudi Arabia," adding that Saudi oil policies were "responsible and unselfish."[64] Those pronouncements by Carter would translate into actions when, in 1978, the president tied a Saudi request for an additional sixty F-15s to the sale of military equipment pledged to Egypt and Israel in return for their responsiveness to recent peace initiatives. Though he knew that linking the Saudi package to the much more politically-attractive Israeli and Egyptian sales posed a serious Congressional and domestic public-opinion challenge, Carter believed that such a risk would translate into Saudi support for the emerging American peace initiatives.[65] Though it ultimately did not elicit Saudi support for what would become the Camp David framework,

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[63] John C. Campbell, "The Middle East: A House of Containment Built on Shifting Sands," *Foreign Affairs*, 1981 Special Issue Volume 60, Issue 3, 16
[64] Spiegel, Other Arab-Israeli, 333
[65] Quandt, William B. Saudi Arabia in the 1980s. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1981, 120; Long, 122

Carter's willingness to take political risks on behalf of the Arabs did have the effect of publicly positioning him closer to Sadat and thus the Arab position.[66]

The Saudi monarchy, which had sided with other Arab states in denouncing the Camp David Accords in a November 1978 summit in Baghdad,[67] nevertheless sent an emissary to Washington several weeks later to nuance their stance. Stating that their position at Baghdad was calculated to give them "more influence with the radicals in the future," the Saudi diplomat iterated the conditions under which his government could accept the agreement, namely that Egypt not sign a separate peace with the Jewish state and that there must be "some mention of ultimate Israeli withdrawal from Arab occupied territories and some mention of Jerusalem."[68] The eventual Camp David agreement, signed on March 22, 1979, proved to be an Egyptian separate peace agreement with the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories left ambiguous; the Arab reaction was predictable. The Arab League, headquartered in Cairo, was promptly relocated to Tunisia and a major Arab arms manufacture consortium, also based in Cairo, was shuttered. The Saudis, who had been subsidizing the Egyptian state since the end of the 1973 war, quite publicly ended aid to Sadat under pressure from the other Arab states, including the moderate King Hussein of Jordan. It was within the context of this rupture in Arab unity, splintering any revival of the Nasser-era pan-Arabism, that a second chasm, this time of the Muslim world, opened, caused by the Islamic revolution in Iran.

The Iranian revolution was among the most transformative events of the twentieth century for American foreign policy. It dramatically altered the shape and direction of US Persian Gulf policy by replacing almost overnight one of the most stalwart defenders of American interests in the region with the most

[66] Spiegel, Other Arab-Israeli, 349-51
[67] See the final statement of the Arab conference, "Baghdad Summit: The Palestinian Question is the Essence of the Conflict," *MERIP Reports*, No. 73, Dec. 1978, p.22-3.
[68] Quandt, Peace Process, 298-300

virulent of adversaries. Beyond the tectonic shift in US/Iranian relations, it had instantaneous and momentous implications for American policy in the Gulf, none more so than with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Whereas the Saudis had been an integral part of the 'twin pillars' defense strategy initiated by the Nixon administration during the early 1970s, they had always assumed a secondary role to Iran, with their primary function being their proximity to American interests rather than their ability to act in defense of them.[69] Now, with the fall of the Shah, Saudi Arabia was critical to US policy. Considerations as to the implications of such a close relationship with Washington had been given little thought prior to 1979. For the Saudis, it was owing to deference to Iranian primacy in the region; in the minds of American policy planners, it was the perceived stability of Iran. It was during a New Years celebration in Tehran in December 1977, just over thirteen months prior to the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini, that Jimmy Carter famously referred to the Shah and his leadership as "an island of stability."[70] His words would come back to haunt him, and the repercussions would be both immediate and long-lasting.

[69] Peterson, J.E. Defending Arabia. New York: St. Martins Press, 1986, 145
[70] The American Presidency Project, "Tehran, Iran Toasts of the President and the Shah at a State Dinner," December 31st, 1977 (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=7080)

Chapter Two
Chaos in Southwest Asia

Any examination of US Middle East policy must explore the motivations of the United States' key allies in the region, as these play a critical role in the reception American policies receive. For Saudi Arabia, few, if any, issues were more important than Islam. This, in turn, had a dramatic influence on American policies and actions. The Saudi kingdom was seen in Washington, even as its financial clout grew exponentially throughout the 1970s, as "anachronistic" and "patriarchal … with no historical or political legitimacy," according to Middle East historian J.E. Peterson.[71] The Saudis sought to counter this perception by, in conjunction with a series of mediation efforts, exploiting their authority in the realm of the religious, as two of the most important Islamic holy sites, Mecca and Medina, are located in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the origins of the modern Saudi state itself can be traced to the early 20th century agreement between ibn Saud and the Wahhabist tribesmen who controlled much of the landscape prior to its becoming a kingdom. Ibn Saud, in exchange for unchallenged control over the

[71] Peterson, 134; Harry S. Allen, Irvan Volgyes, **"**Israel, the Middle East, and U.S. Interests," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (Sep., 1984), 68-9

religious territory, solemnly pledged to uphold and protect the fundamentalist tenets of Wahhabist Islam, a pledge that remains in effect to this day.

A major difficulty for the Saudi ruling family has been to balance the anti-modernist sentiments of much of its populace, many of whom adhere strongly to the Wahhabist sect of Islam, with the larger geopolitical considerations that are required of one of the most important suppliers of petroleum-based energy on the face of the earth. The challenges of walking this tightrope were exacerbated by the influx of "uncontrolled wealth" and the Western influence that accompanied it in the 1970s; modernization in the kingdom was balanced by vast amounts of Saudi oil revenues being poured into mosques and Islamic centers throughout the Muslim world.[72] This precarious balance threatened to tilt as the lines were blurred further between strictly fundamentalist Muslim followers and the growing movement dedicated to the transformation of fundamentalist Islam into a political entity, known as Islamism. There was significant concern in Arab capitals of a crossover between the two groups, particularly in the wake of the explosion of Islamism that occurred during one month in late 1979.

November 1979 began with the storming of the American Embassy in Tehran by supporters of the burgeoning revolutionary movement led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The result of this takeover was the capture of 52 American embassy employees while an American public watched stunned and an American president stood seemingly impotent in the eyes of the world. The promises long made to foreign governments, that the United States would back its allies and protect them from threats, now rang hollow in the wake of the Shah's ouster; the specter of a group of students bringing the world's greatest superpower to its knees sent shockwaves through the international community. In few places

[72] Peterson, 134; Yezid Sayigh, "The Gulf Crisis: Why the Arab Regional Order Failed," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 1991),16

was this recognition more stinging than in Saudi Arabia.[73] The Saudi royal family, facing its own fundamentalist Islamic population, had been under considerable pressure from its public for its increasingly close relationship with the United States. Now the negatives of such a close association with America seemed to dramatically outweigh the positives, especially after the 20th of November. On this day, a band of radical Saudi Wahhabists stormed the Grand Mosque in Mecca, where they remained for nearly two weeks. Before being flushed out by Saudi armed forces, the attackers killed hundreds of people and heavily damaged the sacred mosque.

Though often seen as an event of secondary importance in comparison to the other crises that would take place in the last two months of 1979, the Mecca incident has recently received a second viewing in light of current events. The September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States have created a cottage industry of scholars and journalists eager to shed light on the roots of al Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism; in nearly all of these recent works, the November 1979 siege of Mecca and the Saudi reaction to it both figure prominently.[74] The Saudi leadership has been roundly criticized for its response to the uprising; Rachel Bronson, in her work Thicker Than Oil, states that, in the wake of Mecca, "Saudi leadership sought to outbid domestic and neighboring extremists,"[75] while Yaroslav Trofimov, whose book The Siege of Mecca offers the most penetrating account of the crisis to date, cites the Saudi government's "sickening arrogance, cruel incompetence, and bewildering disregard for the truth" as its ultimate legacy in the aftermath of the crisis.[76]

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[73] Even prior to the hostage crisis, Crown Prince Fahd had bemoaned the "US seeming indifference and impotence" with regard to the events in Iran. 10 October 1979, West meeting with Fahd, DNSA # IR03247

[74] See Rachel Bronson, Thicker Than Oil, Yaroslav Trofimov, The Siege of Mecca, and Wright, Lawrence. The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9-11. New York: Random House, 2006 for accounts of the siege in Mecca

[75] Bronson, 148

[76] Trofimov, 7

This incident shone an increasingly critical spotlight on Saudi Arabia, illuminating what had heretofore been largely an internal issue, maintaining control over an ultraconservative Muslim population in the face of rapid and often unsettling modernization and the burgeoning threat posed by the Islamist movement. It led some American policymakers to question the viability of the state quietly being anointed as America's most important strategic asset in the Arab Middle East.[77] The dramatic threat posed to the Saudi ruling family by the mosque crisis, however, quickly became secondary to another regional crisis: the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. For the Saudis, the Soviet action allowed them to deflect attention from their heavy-handed defense of the holy city of Mecca (as well as growing accusations of corruption and malfeasance against the royal family) by leading the mobilization of a unified Muslim front against the 'godless' Russians. For the United States, in addition to providing a ready-made proxy force to use against the Soviets, acquiescence to the Saudi mobilization of radical Islamists was seen as the push needed to overcome the Saudi concerns over a closer military relationship.[78] As Trofimov would pointedly remark, "it was precisely this ideology [Islamism] that American policymakers- and the House of Saud- found right after the crisis in Mecca to be of great value on the Cold War battlefronts."[79]

From the earliest days of the Iranian and Mecca crises, American officials recognized the power and potential of the radical fundamentalist movement coursing through the veins of Islam. Most observers thought Washington considered this movement to be a danger that urgently needed squelching; the events in Iran that brought down the Shah provided glaring proof of just such a notion. However, for Zbigniew Brzezinski, there was a converse perspective. By the beginning of 1979, he and his National Security Council staff were revisiting

[77] Safran, 357-8
[78] Safran, 325
[79] Trofimov, 7

the possibility, initially broached by the Eisenhower administration two decades earlier,[80] of channeling the immense energy associated with Islamism into a tangible political force. Recognizing that a substantial population of Muslims resided in the southern Soviet provinces, Brzezinski began questioning whether these areas were as susceptible to fundamentalist tendencies as were the Iranians and Saudis. A January 1979 memo from NSC staffer Paul Henze to Brzezinski detailed the existence of currents of a Soviet "Muslim religious underground," stating that there was "evidence that the phenomena are growing not declining" and, most importantly, that this "does demonstrate that the USSR are not immune to the effects of religious resurgence that are so dramatically demonstrated in Iran." In concluding, Henze noted to Brzezinski that "we need to learn more about these trends and, perhaps, if we can, help them along."[81]

A major obstacle to the Iranian Islamist movement taking shape in the Middle East region was its lack of transportability; however, this did not preclude Saudi leaders from voicing to American officials their concerns regarding the potential for migration of the movement into the fragile Saudi state. These concerns were essentially dismissed in a memo from NSC Middle East expert William Quandt to Brzezinski, in which Quandt discounted the probability of an Iranian-styled political Islamic fundamentalism inflaming the entire region. "Pan-Islam is not likely to become a significant international force," he stated. "There are too many regional and cultural divisions within the Muslim world for united political action."[82] A March 1979 intelligence assessment echoed Quandt's view, noting that

[80] Bronson, 64; Weiner, Tim. Legacy of Ashes. New York: Doubleday, 2007, 136-7
[81] 26 January 1979 Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski re: Muslim religious underground in the USSR, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL), NSA/Horn file, box 3, folder 1/79
[82] 13 February 1979 William Quandt to Brzezinski re: Studies of Islamic fundamentalism, JCPL NLC# 6-51-4-8-7

> the more extravagant notion of a resurgence of a politically militant Islam directing its fire in concerted fashion on a range of secular pro-Western governments … is overdrawn. Iran aside, the politics of Islamic states remains focused on local concerns, and various Islamic groups so far show no signs of developing a leadership or a philosophy that crosses national borders.[83]

The report went on to consider the benign effects of the recent politicization of Islam in Iran and Egypt: "Khomeini has shown the power of Islam as a force for mobilizing the masses" in Iran, while Anwar Sadat, in recognizing the appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, "tolerates its newly active role as a symbol of political liberalization, and considers it a counterforce to the political left."[84] It was this utility as "a counterforce to the political left" to which Brzezinski and others would affix their policy.

Islam as a Tool of Policy

Brzezinski acknowledged in 1998 that American support for the Afghan resistance began much earlier than was previously recognized, stating that "it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul," a directive that Brzezinski explained to the President "was going to induce a Soviet military intervention."[85] However, this did not occur spontaneously; the NSC had been debating, at Brzezinski's insistence, since at latest February 1979 "a coherent and systematic plan for Afghanistan."[86]* Key to this emerging plan was the assistance being

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[83] March 1979 NFAC intelligence assessment, The Resurgence of Islam, JCPL NLC# 6-52-1-2-5

[84] March 1979 NFAC intelligence assessment, The Resurgence of Islam, JCPL NLC# 6-52-1-2-5; see also Zbigniew Brzezinski interview, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (15-21 January 1998); Trofimov, 43

[85] *Le Nouvel Observateur* Brzezinski interview

[86] 21 February 1979 Brzezinski to Henze re: Afghanistan, JCPL NSA Staff materials, Horn/special chron file, box 3, folder 2/79

* In a memo Brzezinski sent to Vice President Walter Mondale in late November 1979, the National Security adviser would recall that 'for more than two years I have been urging Radio Liberty to develop plans for increasing broadcasts to Soviet Muslims.' This strongly implies that

supplied by the Saudi government which began, according to some estimates, as early as April 1978.[87]

The Saudis explained that their aid to the Afghan resistance forces was a necessary facet of their role as "protector of Islam," and claimed that their rationale for helping the rebels was to offer defense of a sovereign Muslim state from the 'atheistic' Soviets. It was critical, therefore, for the Saudis to cultivate in regard to Afghanistan sentiments they sought to minimize in their own kingdom, namely a politically-charged form of Islam. In Afghanistan, they hoped to channel the rage of Muslim fundamentalism against the Soviet puppet regime of Mohammed Nur Taraki. To do this, the Saudis called thousands of their native Wahhabists to jihad, or holy war, against the pro-Soviet forces of the Afghan government during late 1978 and early 1979.[88] By late March 1979, this strategy was taking form and was recognized by American officials, as indicated by an FBIS intelligence analysis. "Moscow has expressed serious concern," the document stated, "over the upsurge of internal resistance to the pro-Soviet Afghan government and over the political-religious impact of Islam in the area."[89]

This perceived "upsurge of internal resistance" was due in large part to a brutal turning point in the growing Afghan conflict. In mid-March 1979, an uprising in the west of Afghanistan at Herat came to symbolize the difficulties the Soviets would face in their quest to establish a stable pro-Soviet regime in Kabul; the uprising was punctuated by extreme violence: the "body parts of Soviet advisors, their wives and children were triumphantly paraded through the

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using Islam as a counter to Communism was not a new idea for Brzezinski, but instead had figured into his planning at least since late 1977. 26 November 1979 Brzezinski to Mondale re: Broadcasts to Muslims, JCPL NSA Staff materials, Horn/special chron file 8/79-4-80, box 4 folder 11/79

[87] Trofimov, 176

[88] Trofimov, 244

[89] 21 March 1979 FBIS trends re: USSR-Afghanistan, "Moscow Sees Feudal, Religious Forces Jeopardizing Regime," JCPL NLC# 23-61-2-2-5

streets."[90] In their study based on KGB archives, Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin note that, in the wake of clashes such as Herat, it was Islam that emerged as the "unifying bond of opposition to the PDPA [Afghan Communist Party] and its Soviet backers;"[91] additionally, this "serious military challenge" signified the dramatically increased confidence of the Afghan Islamist opposition. This confidence provided a clear contrast to the despair of the Soviet leadership, for whom Herat substantially added to the fears they had for the future of the Afghan communist revolution.[92]

These concerns were not lost on American officials who, in the months when the fury of the Islamist movement was only just beginning to reverberate throughout the region, had begun to more clearly recognize the power that could be harnessed in the service of the American anti-Communist ambitions. During this period, the spring of 1979, Brzezinski met with senior Saudi leadership, including King Khalid and Crown Prince Fahd. This series of meetings offers a glimpse of the shift in American perspective toward the usefulness of the fundamentalist Islamist movement. They also illustrate the fact that the United States by this time had begun to more fully embrace the Saudi notion of a politically-oriented Muslim movement as a counter to the Soviets. Referring to the dramatic and explosive recent prominence of Islam and Islamism, Brzezinski told Khalid, "The present divisions are really signs of rebirth in the Arab world. This is a revival of enormous magnitude. It is a powerful factor in world affairs and we welcome it." In establishing the link between the rise of Islam and the emerging American strategy, Brzezinski stated unequivocally that "the revival of Islam and Arab institutions was essential; the alternative is communism." To stress this point further, Brzezinski went on to recall being "extremely impressed" by the faith of people in "Muslim areas of the USSR" and urged the king to begin

[90] Andrew, Christopher and Vasili Mitrokhin. The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World. New York: Basic Books, 2005, 391-2
[91] Andrew, 389
[92] Westad, 306-8

broadcasting religious programming to the Soviet Union.[93] Brzezinski used his meeting later that day with Prince Fahd to reiterate that, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is Muslim and the United States is predominantly Christian, it was religion that tied the two nations most closely: "the president believes that our countries are linked not only by interests but by a shared belief in God and a special spiritual bond."[94] This rhetoric provided a marked contrast between the religious nations of America and Saudi Arabia, and the 'godless' Soviet Union; within weeks of Brzezinski's return to Washington, this dichotomy became a key operating principle behind the Carter administration's efforts to halt Soviet influence in Afghanistan.

"Get CIA, ICA [International Communication Agency], State, Congressional leaders to hit back- mention atheistic nature of SU [Soviet Union]/Afghan govts,"[95] President Carter scribbled in the margin of a March 29, 1979 memo outlining Soviet allegations of an American role in assisting the Afghan rebels. The next day, memoranda were dispatched to the directors of both Central Intelligence and ICA "instructing them to step up output on Soviet actions in Afghanistan in implementation of the president's recent request," which was to emphasize the "atheistic, anti-Islamic nature of both the Soviet and Afghan regimes." Other memos during that period went further in seeking to create a religious chasm between communists and Muslims by stressing the "incompatibility" of the Soviet ideology with Islam.[96] In a 1998 interview, Brzezinski would respond to a question concerning his role in fueling the rise in modern-day Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, "What is more important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some

[93] 17 March 1979 Meeting with King Khalid, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]
[94] 17 March 1979 Meeting with Fahd, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]
[95] 30 March 1979 Memo for Vance re: Soviet Allegations Concerning US Role in Afghanistan, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Country file, box 1, folder: Afghanistan, 1-77-3-79
[96] 06 April 1979 Hoskinson to Brzezinski re: SCC meeting, April 6, 1979, JCPL NSA/Horn box 3, folder 4/79

stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?"[97]

A Growing Confidence

Evidence suggests that, throughout 1979, the private posture of the administration in Washington was at odds with its public pronouncements concerning the Soviets. The fact that, as Brzezinski has since acknowledged, the United States sought to draw the Soviets into Afghanistan beginning in the spring and summer of 1979 indicates that Washington recognized a Soviet weakness that Brzezinski believed could (and should) be exploited. As the Soviets grew more deeply entrenched in Afghanistan, the United States made every effort to maximize the damage. "It is hard to see how the Soviets can come out winners," stated a September 1979 memo from NSC staffer Thomas Thornton to Brzezinski. "Most likely, the Soviets have been pushed a big step nearer their moment of truth in Afghanistan ... whatever the Soviet role in this [Taraki's ouster], they should be made to look as if they had a hand in the operation."[98] Indeed, by early 1980, Brzezinski felt confident that he had the Soviets where he wanted them; in January, he urged the president to maintain his public outrage over the Soviet invasion, telling him "There is no need to freeze the US-Soviet relationship any further, but by the same token we should have no illusions about an early improvement *nor should we strive for one* [author's emphasis]."[99]

Brzezinski's confidence was again on display in a March 1980 meeting with Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatolyi Dobrynin. Dobrynin, according to Brzezinski's account of the conversation, stated that the invasion was the

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[97] *Le Nouvel Observateur* Brzezinski interview

[98] 17 September 1979 Thornton to Brzezinski re: What Are the Soviets Doing in Afghanistan?, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Country File, box 1, Folder: Afghanistan, 4-12/79

[99] 09 January 80 Brzezinski to Carter re: A Long Term Strategy for Coping with the Consequences of the Soviet Action in Afghanistan, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Country file, box 1, folder: Afghanistan, 1/9-31/80; DDRS # CK3100092090

result of a "deteriorating situation" (which had been exacerbated if not indeed perpetrated by Washington) that "gave them no choice" and also that Moscow "would be willing to give guarantees that it had no designs against Pakistan or Iran."[100] Dobrynin, whose assurances of non-intervention toward these states had also been relayed to Secretary of State Vance in late January 1980,[101] was brusquely dismissed by Brzezinski. The National Security Adviser coolly stated that "it is not our intention to humiliate the Soviet Union"[102] though he certainly intended to punish them. Dobrynin would later recall that "he had never encountered anything like the intensity and scale of this" anti-Soviet campaign being led by Brzezinski.[103]

Alliance Politics

This private assuredness of Brzezinski's was much more in line with the sentiments of America's allies in Europe than were the public expressions of outrage and indignation of the president. Aside from the Chinese, who had been strong advocates for a toughening American posture toward the Soviets for their own geopolitical purposes, the prevailing attitude internationally was that diplomacy was preferable to military deterrence. In the draft of a letter to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and German chancellor Helmut Schmidt addressing the Afghan situation, a frustrated Carter remarked in the margin: "NATO heads of government should not get together if to do so would only reveal [serious] division and weakness among us."[104] He was referring to the stark difference of opinion among the Allies over the geopolitical importance of the Soviet invasion in contrast to that of the continuation of détente. Fearing the

[100] 17 March 1980, memcon of Brzezinski/Dobrynin meeting, JCPL, Brzezinski Subject File, Box 20, folder: Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) [1/80-3/80]
[101] Dobrynin, 452
[102] 17 March 1980 Memcon, Brzezinski-Dobrynin meeting, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 20, folder: Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) [1/80-3/80]
[103] Dobrynin, 451
[104] 27 March 1980 Brzezinski to Vance re: Messages to Thatcher, Schmidt, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 20, folder: Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) [1/80-3/80]

destabilizing effects of military measures, the European heads of state consistently urged the United States to seek diplomatic and perhaps economic remedies to the situation, steps that Brzezinski did not favor.

The National Security Adviser's hawkish sensibilities had been awakened in 1979 by what he increasingly viewed as an opportunity to diminish Soviet influence; his role as arbiter of the information received by the president allowed him to shape and, in some cases, manipulate messages intended for Carter.* This did little to narrow the widening gap between the US and her allies during the first half of 1980, when Carter was vehemently "trying to arouse Western European consciousness of the threat to them which the Soviet attack on Afghanistan represents," though he acknowledged to the Chinese premier "that the US was having some difficulty in accomplishing this goal."[105] This difference of opinions between the Americans and the Europeans, according to Cyrus Vance, came to a head over Afghanistan; its roots, however, lie in the rupture of détente more generally.[106]

The United States was, however, having no difficulty convincing the Saudis of the threat posed by the Soviets. Deeply anti-Communist in their own right, the Saudis had been at the forefront of anti-Soviet activities in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula throughout the 1970s. The Saudi and American governments had been working together to provide resistance to Soviet proxy advances in North Yemen since 1978. The countries of North and South Yemen (the Yemen Arab Republic [YAR] and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen [PDRY], respectively) had been in a state of almost constant turmoil for the two

* Raymond Garthoff makes a similar point regarding Brzezinski's inordinate influence on Carter in his work, Détente and Confrontation, see 943 notes, as does Odd Arne Westad, Global Cold War, 328, and Bill, James A. The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988, 260

[105] 10 July 1980 memcon, Carter-Premier Hua Guofeng meeting, DDRS # CK3100159500

[106] Vance, Cyrus. Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983, 391,393

decades prior to 1978. From the Egyptian military intervention of the early and mid-1960s, which would become known among the Egyptians as "our Vietnam,"[107] to the civil war that led to the formation of the PDRY in 1971, the Saudis had consistently feared a unified Yemen. It was in response to this fear that Riyadh sided with the YAR in a proxy war against the more leftist PDRY.[108] King Faisal's belief that he had the ability to "destroy the regime" had guided the initial Saudi policy toward the Yemens; when he realized the fallibility of his assertion, he (and Khalid, who followed) took a more accommodating stance.[109] Regardless, "by the late 1970s the Saudis were deeply engaged in Yemeni affairs, with aid programs paralleling less obvious forms of political manipulation."[110] The Saudis increasingly felt as though they were being encircled by an encroaching Communist threat;[111] when a new round of fighting broke out in February 1979, the Saudis were quick to intercede on the side of North Yemen, and sought to involve the United States as well. Though Washington initially tried to link assistance in the Yemeni conflict to Saudi acceptance of the Camp David Accords,[112] this insistence was soon shelved and aid began to flow.[113] In addition to arms assistance, the United States deployed three AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia, backed by carrier-based "armed F-15s [that] could be here tomorrow."[114] Military affairs expert Anthony Cordesman notes that "Saudi officials were ... highly impressed with the US AWACS'

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[107] Robert D. Burrowes, "Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic, 1962-1990," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.23, No.4 (Nov. 1991), 486, 492
[108] Safran, 131-2
[109] Safran, 213-4, 231
[110] William Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, 27
[111] Quandt, Saudi Arabia, 68, 82; former Undersecretary of State David Newsom offers a rebuttal to this concern, noting, "In 1978 Saudi Arabia evoked the Soviet threat to extract US support for North Yemen; the Saudis, however, were keenly interested in gaining support for their own objectives there." David D. Newsom, "America Engulfed," *Foreign Policy*, No.43 (Summer 1981), p.17-32, 21
[112] Safran, 232
[113] Johnson, Maxwell Orme. The Military as an Instrument of US Policy in Southwest Asia. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983, 14
[114] 17 March 1979, memcon, meeting with Crown Prince Fahd, JCPL, Brzezinski Subject File, Box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]

performance"[115] and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff David Jones noted that the American firepower amassed in the Gulf in March 1979 "could destroy the entire South Yemeni airforce in a matter of hours."[116]

War By Proxy

By spring 1979, the United States and Saudi Arabia, in coordination with the Egyptians, Pakistanis and Chinese, sought to roll back Moscow more directly. Though Raymond Garthoff suggests that Chinese covert assistance to the Afghan resistance may have begun as early as 1978,[117] no evidence is available to implicate the United States in direct military support until the spring of 1979. A 1981 article in the Manchester (UK) *Guardian* outlines the framework for the early assistance, noting that Washington was "the operation's primary planner and coordinator," led by the CIA. A central tenet of the action, according to journalist Carl Bernstein, was deniability; the article refers to a series of January 1980 meetings between Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Chinese officials where the message was that

> We [the US] let it be known that were going to do certain things. They [the Chinese] let it be known they were going to do certain things. It was an implicit agreement. Instead of a joint operation, we would do things in parallel.[118]

In April of 1979, Brzezinski, according to his memoirs, "pushed a decision through the SCC [White House Special Coordination Committee] to be more sympathetic to those Afghans who were determined to preserve their country's

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[115] Cordesman, Anthony H. The Gulf and the West: Strategic Relations and Military Realities. Boulder: Westview Press, 1988, 256

[116] 17 March 1979, memcon, meeting with Crown Prince Fahd, JCPL, Brzezinski Subject File, Box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]

[117] Garthoff, 921

[118] Carl Bernstein, "How CIA Provides Arms For Afghan Rebels," Manchester *Guardian Weekly,* 09 August 1981; 02 January 1980 memorandum, Afghanistan: Harold Brown's trip to China, DNSA # CH00481; Brzezinski, 433

independence."[119] Throughout September and October of 1979, Brzezinski had been meeting with the Saudis and Egyptians to discuss options for the Afghan operations.[120] By mid-December 1979, the White House was actively exploring "the possibility of improving the financing, arming, and communications of the rebel forces to make it as expensive as possible for the Soviets to continue their efforts."[121]

A major component of this plan was to more closely coordinate with the Saudis on their preferred conduit of funding to the rebel forces: Islamic relief agencies. The favored agency for the Saudis was the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), according to former CIA official Robert Baer.[122] This gave the Saudis a fig leaf, as the aid was ostensibly going to Afghan refugees escaping the fighting by going into Pakistan; it also ensured that a Muslim organization controlled the funding. According to Baer, the Saudi government had contributed $5.5 billion through relief agencies and direct governmental contributions to the rebel cause by 1981 and was matching the American funding dollar-for-dollar from the beginning of the US effort in March 1979.[123] Brzezinski recognized the benefits of using an Islamic-based charity to cover activities in Afghanistan. A memo from Brzezinski to Carter on January 9, 1980 urged the president to consider assistance "outside the UNHCR [the United Nations High Commission for Refugees] context (perhaps through Islamic organizations) [which] could allow us to further the resistance effort more effectively."[124] This would give the administration greater freedom to provide covert assistance

[119] Brzezinski, 426-7
[120] Garthoff, 923
[121] 17 December 1979 SCC meeting on Iran, JCPL Brzezinski subject file, box 31, folder [meetings-SCC 230: 12/15/79]
[122] Baer, Robert. Sleeping With the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003, 141
[123] Baer, 100; see also Woodward, Bob. Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, 372
[124] 09 January 1980 Brzezinski to Carter re: Long Term Strategy, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Country file, box 1, folder: Afghanistan, 1/9-31/80

because it would be handled by Saudi-friendly Muslim organizations rather than United Nations relief agencies. The idea was further justified in an SCC meeting later that week, when committee members suggested that Soviet bloc officials in the UNHCR "could use their positions to make it difficult for refugee camps to support the insurgency in Afghanistan." The SCC concluded that "State [should] examine the alternative ways of supporting refugees in Pakistan other than through the UNHCR so that the UNHCR cannot, if it chooses, interfere seriously with refugee camps supporting the insurgency."[125]

Pakistan on the Front Line

Apart from the financial assistance offered by the United States for the Afghan insurgency, another critical aspect of the overall plan was ensuring the security of Pakistan against any potential encroachment by Soviet forces. In support of this goal, the Saudis were instrumental in presenting to Washington the military needs of Pakistan, and stressing the imminence of a threat from the Soviets. Evidence shows that the Soviet threat to Pakistan was overblown; instead, the arms packages offered to Islamabad (and famously dismissed as 'peanuts' by the Pakistani leader) were largely a quid pro quo for its support of the Afghan refugee camps that served as way-stations for rotating rebel forces. This tilt toward Pakistan – a state that Brzezinski himself referred to as "unstable"[126] - is important to any examination of the Saudi role in the militarization of US regional policy during this period. Before 1978, a priority of the Pakistani government was the cultivation of relations, not with the West, but with Muslim and nonaligned states; among the most important of these

[125] 14 January 1980 SCC meeting minutes, JCPL, Brzezinski subject file, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) [4/78-4/79] through Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) (11/80-12/80) box 20, Folder: Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) [1/80-3/80]
[126] 26 December 1979 Brzezinski to Carter, Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan, DDRS # CK3100098563

relationships was with Saudi Arabia.[127] Reciprocally, Pakistan was viewed as "unimportant" to a Carter administration that, in the words of former NSC staffer Thomas Thornton, was "ambivalent or even hostile" to the Pakistani state during the first year of the Carter presidency.[128] For an administration that had sought to tie foreign policy to such lofty notions as human rights, nonproliferation, and a dramatic reduction in arms sales, Pakistan was a pariah.[129]

It was only in 1979, when the twin crises of Iran and Afghanistan emerged, that Pakistan gained importance to Washington. Suddenly, "the earlier set of global concerns was no longer the focus of the relationship but seemed now more like matters to be circumvented in a new cooperative relationship."[130] Pakistani leader Mohammed Zia ul-Haq, who had been installed following a 1979 military coup, was firmly supported by the Saudi leadership, who led the charge in urging Washington toward better relations with Islamabad. Among the most critical goals of the United States during this period was the resumption of intelligence gathering from listening posts close to the Soviet Union; the posts, previously located in Iran, were relocated to Pakistan in 1979. This factored into Washington's decision, in the wake of a November 1979 attack on the American embassy in Islamabad, to praise Zia and his military for their "immediate" response. Most contemporary accounts, however, disagree with Carter's positive assessment of the Pakistani response to the embassy assault; author Steve Coll cites CIA after-action reports noting that, for domestic reasons, Zia did little to

[127] W. Howard Wriggins, "Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.57, No.2 (Summer, 1984), 292
[128] Thomas Thornton, "Between the Stools?: US Policy Toward Pakistan During the Carter Administration," *Asian Survey*, Vol.22, No.10 (October 1982), 960, 966
[129] Thornton, 961
[130] Thornton, 969; this "nuclear problem" is apparent in talking points for Secretary Brown's January 1980 visit with Chinese officials, January 1980, Talkers for Geng Biao-First Session, DNSA# CH00478

stop the uprising and "decided that since he couldn't save the Americans inside the embassy anyway, he might as well just let the riot burn itself out."[131]

Not all Pakistani officials were concerned by the implications of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan; this contrasts with the American perception which, Thornton noted, exhibited "a considerable, perhaps excessive, sense of urgency."[132] Thornton continued: officials in Washington, particularly Brzezinski, did not adequately recognize this Pakistani apprehension in dealing with Islamabad. Whereas Zia was willing to make Pakistan available as a loyal ally of the US, he was only willing to do so "at a very high price": in addition to advanced military equipment, Islamabad sought a more comprehensive security commitment from Washington, one that encompassed all threats (including from its rival, India). Brzezinski, mistakenly believing that the US and Pakistan were "working out equally shared interests" regarding the perception of an imminent Soviet threat, was not inclined to offer such guarantees to Zia.[133]

Egypt as Arms Broker

Another, less apparent, avenue for US assistance to the Afghan rebels came from Egypt. The Bernstein expose for the *Guardian* in August 1981 described a "complex, far-flung programme ... to provide the Afghan resistance with the weaponry of modern guerrilla warfare." The program was run by the CIA, outside of "normal diplomatic channels" and marked, according to Bernstein, the first time US-provided weapons had been used to kill regular soldiers of the Soviet Army. The weapons, he noted, "have been Russian-made or, often, replicas, making them untraceable to their real suppliers" and included

[131] Coll, Steve. Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001. New York: Penguin Group, 2004, 32; see also Trofimov, 115 and Wright, 101-8
[132] Thornton, 969; see also Wriggins, 287
[133] Thornton, 970

rocket-propelled grenade launchers, anti-aircraft guns, and AK-47s. Egypt, Bernstein continued, had been a major supplier, providing "weapons obtained from the Soviet Union during the years of Egyptian-Soviet friendship" as well as "tons of replicated Soviet armaments, turned out in factories on the outskirts of Cairo."[134] Rachel Bronson would later add that "the US sought to maintain plausible deniability by scouring the globe for Soviet weaponry, which would help hide America's hand," reiterating the point that Egypt had "inventories full of aging Soviet weaponry" and that "the US and Saudi Arabia offered [Sadat] very generous terms for supplying them to the Afghan mujahideen."[135] Author George Crile, in Charlie Wilson's War, wrote that the US/Saudi effort involved only weaponry that could have "conceivably" been captured by Afghans in combat. Crile also noted that the US Air Force flew weapons provided by the CIA into Saudi Arabia, where they were unloaded, repackaged, and flown to Pakistan in Saudi cargo planes.[136] While this answers many of the questions regarding how the Afghan insurgency received the Soviet-origin weaponry, it does not adequately explain the "tons of replicated Soviet armaments" Bernstein claims were manufactured in Egyptian factories. While Bernstein comes close to uncovering the true origins of the Egyptian arms, stating that "in October 1980, the Carter administration and the Islamic states committed themselves to a significant increase in the level of aid, particularly heavy equipment for anti-tank and anti-aircraft warfare,"[137] he misses a critical element.

Recently declassified documents show Brzezinski describing to President Carter steps being taken to counter the events spiraling out of control in the Middle East in 1978-79. Key among these steps was "working with the Egyptians

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[134] Carl Bernstein, "How CIA Provides Arms For Afghan Rebels," Manchester *Guardian Weekly,* 09 August 1981
[135] Bronson, 171
[136] Crile, George. Charlie Wilson's War. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003, 217
[137] Carl Bernstein, "How CIA Provides Arms For Afghan Rebels," Manchester *Guardian Weekly,* 09 August 1981

to build up their indigenous arms production base,"[138] a program that had begun well prior to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. According to William Quandt, President Carter had promised Anwar Sadat a "massive" military and economic relationship in return for signing the Israeli/Egyptian peace treaty.[139] Part of this relationship was managed - in great secrecy - by the CIA and Department of Defense, using the $1.4 billion Arab arms manufacturing consortium, known as the Arab Military Industries Organization (AMIO), based in Cairo, that the Saudis had closed in protest of the Camp David Accords.[140]

The United States had offered Egypt assistance in maintaining its existing stocks of Soviet weaponry; in addition to this assistance, however, an August 1980 SCC brief cites the CIA's "success in getting 60 SA-7s and 20 launchers for immediate use [redacted]. DoD reported good progress in discussions with the Egyptians on the SA-7 production program endorsed by the group on July 28, 1980."[141] The fact that, according to the meeting notes, the CIA was taking responsibility for the distribution of Soviet-design shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile systems while the Pentagon was in charge of production of the same type of weaponry in coordination with the Egyptians provides strong circumstantial evidence supporting Bernstein's assertion, albeit with the caveat that the weaponry being provided by Egypt had much more of an American fingerprint than Bernstein recognized.

The Irish journalist Andrew Cockburn, who has written extensively on Middle East policy issues, noted that this arrangement between the United States and Egypt was operational when Cairo later acknowledged its military assistance

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[138] 07 November 1979 Brzezinski to Carter, Long Term Military Relationship with Egypt, DDRS # 3100114204

[139] Quandt, Peace Process, 314

[140] Saudi News Agency, 'Liquidation of the AMIO from 1st July,' 15 May 1979; Saudi News Agency, "Saudi Defence Minister on the Liquidation of AMIO,' 30 May 1979; Thomas Lippman, 'Saudis to Close Arab Arms Firm to Punish Egypt,' *Washington Post*, 15 May 1979

[141] 06 August 1980, Special Coordination Committee meeting notes, JCPL, NSA Staff Material Horn/Special, Chron file 5/80 through Evening reports file 11/77-1/78, box 5, folder 8-9/80

to Saddam Hussein's Iraq in its decade-long conflict with Iran; he referred to Egyptian factories providing Soviet-model weaponry to the Iraqis with "express permission" from the US government as a way to get money to the Egyptians without it being specifically aid-based.[142] This Egyptian aid to Iraq is significant in two ways: it helps establish a pattern of American policy decision-making and it reveals a reliable network for the procurement and distribution of extensive stocks of weaponry that otherwise would have been subject to legislative restrictions. These restrictions, codified in the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, stipulate that arms sold to foreign nations are only to be used for three purposes: self-defense, internal security, and functions related to United Nations operations.[143]

Infighting and the Carter Doctrine

In Zbigniew Brzezinski's memoir, he recalled that, "by late 1979, the Soviet threat to the Middle East, magnified by the Iranian disaster, demanded our urgent attention."[144] However, the evidence now indicates that the regional threats had been receiving the administration's "urgent attention" well prior to the end of 1979. The president, eager to exhibit Washington's willingness to defend its interests, offered, less than one month after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the 1980 State of the Union address that served as the platform for his new Middle East policy framework, known as the Carter Doctrine. Stating that the United States would defend, with force if necessary, its vital interests in the Persian Gulf region, the doctrine was the culmination of years of discussions within the White House dating back to the 1973 OPEC oil embargo. It had come close to fruition during the first part of the Carter presidency; the fall of the Shah

[142] Cockburn, Andrew and Leslie. Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the US-Israeli Covert Relationship. New York: HarperCollins, 1991, 323
[143] Federation of American Scientists, "Arms Sales Monitoring Project handbook," Ways and Means, http://www.fas.org/asmp/library/handbook/WaysandMeans.html
[144] Brzezinski, 443

in Iran coupled with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan ensured that it became a reality.

Though there was a rather tepid response in the Middle East to the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine, the Saudi leadership privately expressed its appreciation of the forcefulness of the American intent. However, other Arab states, particularly Syria, viewed the announcement as a plan by the United States to exploit the Afghan situation to further its own hegemonic designs.[145] This view was shared by the Soviets, who, according to Raymond Garthoff, had no intention of pursuing any ambitions in the Gulf region which they saw as much more of a Western preserve and largely off-limits.[146] Many in the US policy-making bureaucracy recognized this perspective. In fact, only a minority of American officials saw the Afghan intervention as a prelude to a larger Soviet move into the Gulf.[147] Of the officials who questioned the President's and Brzezinski's views, Cyrus Vance was among the most vocal. Vance would recall in his memoirs that he perceived the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a case of Moscow defending its interests, and that the divisions between the US and its European allies, as well as the divisions within the Washington bureaucracy, were rooted in the larger disagreements over how to deal with the Soviets more generally; the Afghan invasion had merely brought these conflicting views to the forefront.[148] Vance's tenure as Secretary of State was punctuated by efforts to encourage a balanced American policy toward the Soviets; these entreaties were largely disregarded by Brzezinski, who, according to the former Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatolyi Dobrynin, had by 1980 "clipped Vance's wings."[149]

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[145] Safran, 319
[146] Garthoff, 932
[147] Vance, 384-8, Newsom, 20; Rex B. Wingerter, "AWACS and US Strategy," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.11, No.2 (Winter 1982), 190
[148] Vance, 384-6, 388, 391-3
[149] Dobrynin, 457

There were a number of reasons why Vance and other officials disputed the notion of Soviet action beyond Afghanistan in the wake of the invasion. Aside from the various statements coming both publicly and privately from Soviet sources regarding Moscow's limited intentions,[150] the importance of the region's oil for Japan and the Western nations, as well as the resurgence of a virulently anti-communist Islam had tied the Soviets hands. [151] These important constraints were largely disregarded by Carter in his public statements. In his address to the nation in the wake of the Soviet intervention, the president, referring to Afghanistan as a "small, unaligned, sovereign nation," warned, "This invasion is an extremely serious threat to peace because of the threat of further Soviet expansion into neighboring countries in Southwest Asia." Carter asserted that the intervention was "a deliberate effort of a powerful atheistic government to subjugate an independent Islamic people." He added: "If the Soviets are encouraged in this invasion by eventual success, and if they maintain their dominance over Afghanistan and then extend their control to adjacent countries, the stable, strategic, and peaceful balance of the entire world would be changed."[152]

This rhetoric bears little resemblance to the situation as presented by modern historians. The action taken by the Soviets in 1979-80 can be seen, according to both Garthoff and Westad, as within the basic principles of détente as established in 1972. It was considered by the Kremlin to be a "defensive measure ... intended to preserve, not upset, an existing geopolitical balance."[153] Afghanistan was never within the American sphere of influence and was far from "unaligned," an argument consistently iterated by Vance and bolstered by a January 1980 Congressional Research Service report stating that, during the two

[150] Dobrynin, 452; 28 December 1979 Carter to Brezhnev, DDRS # CK3100073545; 29 December 1979 Brezhnev to Carter, DDRS # CK3100052426
[151] Olson, William J. US Strategic Interests in the Gulf Region. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1987, 45
[152] Jimmy Carter, "Address to the Nation on Afghanistan," 04 January 1980
[153] Garthoff, 936-7

decades prior to the intervention, Afghanistan received fully 95% of its military weaponry and training from the Soviet Union.[154]

The Vietnam Syndrome and a Prelude to Invasion

Brzezinski has stated that if the United States had been "tougher sooner," the Soviets would have resisted the temptation to enter Afghanistan.[155] The administration had been under immense pressure to act strongly and decisively in the wake of the Iranian hostage crisis; the Soviet invasion only added gasoline to an already intense fire. Garthoff suggests that this self-flagellation on Brzezinski's part regarding the American reaction is a reflection of the deep hesitation and second-guessing permeating the policy-making apparatus in Washington in late 1979.[156] Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, however, has suggested that Moscow took quite a different view of American intentions; far from seeing the opportunity for action in the specter of American impotence, according to Dobrynin, it was the direct threat coming from the American side (as perceived by the Soviet leadership) that drove Moscow to take actions it might not have otherwise.[157]

Driven by dire predictions from Brzezinski, often based upon World War Two-era pronouncements from Moscow that had been largely discounted by American intelligence sources,[158] as well as immense pressure from a growing chorus of conservative critics, Carter became increasingly hawkish toward the Soviets after the invasion; he "was determined to make them pay for their

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[154] Westad, 316-30; Garthoff, 927-37; 10 January 1980 CRS Issue brief on Afghanistan, DNSA # AF00789
[155] Brzezinski, 432
[156] Garthoff, 931
[157] Dobrynin, 442, 446
[158] See 26 December 1979 Brzezinski to Carter, Reflections on Soviet Intervention JCPL, NSA-Brzezinski Country File, Box 1, Folder: Afghanistan, 4-12/79; 03 January 1980 Brzezinski to Carter, Strategic Reaction to the Afghanistan Problem, DDRS # CK3100098578; Brzezinski, 427; and Garthoff, 941-2

unwarranted aggression."[159] However, as is now becoming clearer, the United States' and its allies' actions played a critical role in pushing the Soviets into Afghanistan. Cable traffic during the spring and summer of 1979 consistently reiterates the perception among both American and Soviet officials there that the Soviets did not intend to use large-scale military actions against the Taraki government. Conversations between the regime and Moscow, however, do indicate the growing sense of Soviet concern that Afghanistan was slipping from the Soviet grasp.[160] German Democratic Republic ambassador to Afghanistan, Dr. Hermann Schweisau, iterated the specter of a growing "dilemma" for the Soviets in Afghanistan in a conversation with his American counterpart, Bruce Amstutz. "Afghanistan borders the Soviet Union," Schweisau noted, "and just as you have a special interest in anything happening in Canada and Mexico, the Soviet Union has a special interest in Afghanistan."[161] Subsequent conversations Amstutz held with Soviet emissaries yielded similar impressions of the Kremlin's hesitation to act in Afghanistan, despite Moscow's increasing concern with "the flames of Islamic fundamentalism burning toward their borders."[162] Soviet documents indicate a tangible anxiety on the part of Soviet policymakers about the growing Islamic character of the Afghan insurgency as early as March 1979.[163] According to Garthoff, the Soviets were hoping that the mere presence of military strength would allow the Afghan army to fend off the growing rebel

[159] Garthoff, 951
[160] 18 July 1979 Bruce Amstutz to State Department re: GDR Ambassador Reports that Soviets Hope to Replace Amin, DNSA # AF00587; 17 March 1979 "Transcript of Telephone Conversation between Kosygin and Taraki," (Cold War International History Project, CWIHP ID# 5034DBD7-96B6-175C-91C6BFBB21B1EFF3); 11 May 1979 Vance to Tehran embassy re: Request for Information on Afghanistan and PDRY, DNSA # AF00547; 24 May 1979 William Crawford to David Newsom, Soviet- Afghan Relations: Is Moscow's Patience Wearing Thin?, DNSA # AF00560; 21 July 1979 "Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan and Amin," (CWIHP ID# 5034DCA2-96B6-175C-9712988732320D6E)
[161] 18 July 1979 Bruce Amstutz to State Department re: GDR Ambassador Reports that Soviets Hope to Replace Amin, DNSA # AF00587
[162] Weiner, 365
[163] 'Soviet Communication to the Hungarian Leadership on the Situation in Afghanistan- March 28, 1979,' (CWIHP ID # 5034D4E2-96B6-175C-9DA066D0E4A50A22)

factions; when this did not occur, the Soviets were forced to take on an ever-larger counterinsurgency role themselves.[164]

Though the Soviets were likely unaware of the extent of aid being funneled into Afghanistan via Pakistan by Washington and its allies during 1979, evidence indicates a progressive Soviet unease with the growing American military presence in Southwest Asia. The introduction of the US carrier task forces *Midway* and *Kitty Hawk* into the North Arabian Sea in November 1979[165] had been the latest in a series of concerns raised by Soviet officials. According to Dobrynin, Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov believed that the growing American presence signaled the United States' intent to intervene and establish Afghanistan as a forward operations base in the event of war with the Soviet Union.[166] The collapse of detente, as Odd Arne Westad argues in Global Cold War, exacerbated Soviet anxieties. "It was this perceived US challenge," notes Westad, "that increased the urgency of a solution to the Afghan crisis; the situation in Kabul went from being 'unstable' to 'demanding a Soviet response.'"[167]

The Soviets thus faced a two-pronged threat: first, they were dealing with an insurgency on their doorstep that threatened to destabilize a substantial portion of their own population, and second, they faced the looming menace of American action against neighboring Iran, which just one month before had

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[164] Garthoff, 915; see also 17 March 1979 "Telephone Conversation between Kosygin and Taraki," (CWIHP ID# 5034DBD7-96B6-175C-91C6BFBB21B1EFF3); 18 March 1979 "CPSU Central Committee Politburo Decision paper on Afghanistan," (CWIHP ID# 5034DBC7-96B6-175C-95984A10F00D9D18); 28 June 1979 "Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report to CPSU Central Committee on Situation in Afghanistan," (CWIHP ID# 5034DC73-96B6-175C-97349C11420A4CA2)

[165] According to the US Navy, this was the first time since World War II that two Naval carrier task forces had been simultaneously deployed in the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea theatre in response to a crisis situation. http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/ships/carriers/histories/cv63-kittyhawk/cv63-kittyhawk.html

[166] Dobrynin, 446; see also Dobrynin, 442, and Coll, 49

[167] Westad, 318-20, 325

taken control of the US embassy, holding fifty-two of its employees hostage. Though hindsight shows that Washington had no firm plans for reversing the Iranian situation, this was far from clear to the Soviets in late 1979. The Carter administration responded to the threat by enhancing the American military presence in the Gulf, which Brzezinski referred to as both "horizontal and vertical escalation," described as the freedom "to choose either the terrain or the tactic or the level of our response."[168] The National Security Adviser did not, however, concern himself with the apparent disconnect between the security this policy of escalation and the insecurity it engendered in the Kremlin. It played a significant role in generating Moscow's view, by December 1979, that intervention in Afghanistan was "the only solution to a specific situation on their border that was threatening Soviet security."[169] Though Secretary of State Vance recognized the importance of Afghanistan for the Soviet Union, his more moderate views were rebuffed by Brzezinski and, ultimately, Carter as well.[170] It was this duality of pressures that led Moscow, by late December 1979, to "keep what they had paid for."[171]

[168] Brzezinski, 445
[169] Garthoff, 928; see Dobrynin, 446
[170] Vance, 388, 394
[171] Garthoff, 947

Chapter Three
Testing the Doctrine

"That America's standing as protector of the Gulf has been enhanced by the Iran-Iraq war is widely assumed in Washington"

The Economist, 25 October 1980

Beginning in early 1979, a series of crises beset the Carter presidency, leaving the international community questioning American ability to protect its interests. As Daniel Yergin noted in The Prize, the storming of the US embassy in Tehran "served to demonstrate the weakness, even nakedness, of the [oil] consuming countries- in particular, of the United States, whose power was the basis of the postwar political and economic order." Further, Yergin ominously continued, "it seemed to establish that world mastery really did lie in the hands of the oil exporters."[172] Other commentators reflected similar sentiments; Gary Sick would later recall that the events of 1978-79 had all conspired to create "the impression that the United States had lost all capacity to influence regional events" and that the United States was "left strategically naked in the region with no safety net." This conclusion, according to Sick, was seemingly confirmed by a high-level review of US military capabilities submitted in November 1979.[173] Carter and Brzezinski desperately sought to counter the perception that America

[172] Yergin, 701-2

[173] Gary Sick in Lesch, David W. ed. The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment, Third Ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003, 293-4

was the 'sick old man.' Their proposed solution was formally enunciated on January 23rd, 1980 in the State of the Union address.

Known now as the Carter Doctrine, the plan was one of the boldest initiatives set forth by an American president since the Truman Doctrine thirty years earlier. And, like the Truman Doctrine, it would have far-reaching implications, many of which are still barely understood even a quarter-century later.[174] The Carter Doctrine, centering on protection of interests in the Middle East, "marked a major threshold in evolution of US strategy and a new conviction that this region represented a major strategic zone of US vital interests, demanding both sustained attention at the highest levels of US policymaking and direct US engagement in support of specifically US interests." It was, in the words of Sick, "without precedent."[175] Though not announced publicly until 1980, the incipient new policy had been a high priority of the Carter administration since 1977; from the first outlines of the emerging framework, one thing was apparent: Saudi Arabia would be critical to its success.[176]

Concurrently, the United States sought to improve its relations with the regime of Saddam Hussein. Given the fact that Iraq and the United States had severed diplomatic ties years earlier, opportunities for such a rapprochement were limited, but they gained importance following the fall of the Shah. As early as March 1979, this notion of a reconsideration of US/Iraqi diplomacy appears to have been accepted by both Brzezinski and the president. In an important meeting with Crown Prince Fahd, the National Security Adviser relayed a series of messages from President Carter, communications that offered a glimpse into the policymaking that would emanate from Washington for the coming twenty months. In this meeting, Brzezinski declared to Fahd that "we are prepared to

[174] See Njolstad
[175] Sick in Lesch, 294
[176] See Odom; 07 August 1979 Sick to Brzezinski re: VBB-Middle East Force Presence, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 33, folder: Meetings-VBB-8/79-9/79

use force if necessary to protect the vital interests of ourselves and our friends," a premise that would be publicly enunciated less than a year later with the Carter Doctrine and that signified the more militant foreign policy initiatives already under serious consideration in Washington. Brzezinski concluded his meeting with Fahd by stating that "it is in our long-term interests to increase our relations with Iraq and Syria, and we welcome your suggestions on how that might be done."[177] This declaration of American diplomatic intent and request for the Saudi leadership's assistance in achieving it presaged a December 1979 CIA intelligence assessment entitled "Realities in the Middle East." This intelligence estimate noted the increasing potential for conflict between Iran and Iraq although the consensus was that the probabilities of such a conflict "appear unlikely in the near term."[178] There is reason to believe that Washington and Riyadh would not have been displeased with the rising tensions.

Over the years, there has been persistent speculation concerning the possibility that President Carter gave either a tacit or perhaps even an explicit 'green light' to Saddam Hussein prior to the September 1980 Iraqi assault on Iran. In his book With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990, Bruce Jentleson acknowledges this conjecture and cites Carter's denial in his memoirs of any such 'green light.' Jentleson concludes that "President Carter's denial ... does seem credible."[179] Documents released more recently would seem to suggest a different conclusion. While there remains a paucity of evidence to conclusively establish the veracity of these claims, there is enough documentation to begin to piece together involvement of the United States in the

[177] 17 March 1979 Memcon, Meeting with Fahd, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]
[178] December 1979 CIA intelligence assessment, "Realities in the Middle East," JCPL NLC # 6-51-7-7-5
[179] Jentleson, Bruce W. With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1994. 34-5

Iran/Iraq war much earlier than the acknowledgements of assistance to Iraq in 1982-83.[180]

The US relationship with Iraq was strained throughout the 1970s, in large part due to Baghdad's very public military supply relationship with the Soviets. Formal diplomatic ties with Iraq had been severed following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; though Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, continued to make public denunciations of superpower, specifically American, involvement in the Middle East and had been one of the most vocal opponents of the Camp David Accords, the fall of the Shah in Iran altered the United States' calculus considerably. Any sign of moderation on the part of Baghdad was commended by Washington; this included a series of what former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Morris Draper called "intriguing" comments the Iraqi leader made concerning the Israeli/Palestinian issue.[181]

Despite the fact that "we knew Saddam Hussein was a blood-thirsty man," recalled Draper, "during those days [1980-81], we kept thinking of balance-of-power politics. We viewed Iraq as a bulwark against revolutionary Iran." Thus, Draper continues, "our attitude toward Iraq was essentially to keep knocking on its door- not begging- but making it clear that we were prepared to talk at senior levels and thought it was stupid not to do so."[182] The end result was that, not unlike the shift made toward Pakistan, the American moves toward Baghdad in 1979-80 came at the price of foregoing many of the moral components so

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[180] Cordesman, Anthony H. The Iran-Iraq War and Western Security, 1984-87. New York: Jane's Publishing, Inc. 1987, 36; Seymour M. Hersh, "US Secretly Gave Aid to Iraq Early in Its War Against Iran," *New York Times*, 26 January 1992; see 07 October 1983, Veliotes to Eagleburger, "Iran-Iraq War: Analysis of Possible US Shift from Position of Strict Neutrality," DNSA IG00139 for the early State Department discussions concerning a shift "in favor of Iraq."

[181] Interview with Morris Draper, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 44; the most 'intriguing' position consisted of Iraq stating that it would "have no problem existing in the same area with Israel if the Palestinians could agree to a settlement of some kind and be satisfied."

[182] Interview with Draper, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, 44-5

integral to Carter's earlier foreign policy initiatives. "The fascist, totalitarian nature of Saddam's regime was unfortunate," lamented author Robert Kaplan in his book The Arabists, "and his radical posture against Israel was inconvenient, but the old adage 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' was something that just could not be ignored."[183]

Early Intelligence-Sharing

Former White House officials and ambassadors have acknowledged the possibility of intelligence sharing early in the conflict. In 1992, following Operation Desert Shield, Seymour Hersh wrote a piece for *The New York Times* alleging a US/Iraqi intelligence-sharing operation that had begun in the spring of 1982, a year before the official tilt toward Iraq was acknowledged.[184] Since Hersh's report, evidence has emerged suggesting an even earlier beginning for the program, perhaps during the first days of the conflict. Former Reagan administration NSC staffer Howard Teicher has stated, "I believe that some of that [intelligence] information contributed to Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Iran in the first place."[185] In an interview for the PBS series *Frontline*, former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Akins described a US pre-war report on the economic, political, and military disintegration of Iran that suggested "the [Iranian] government would not last much longer ... A copy of such a report was given to the Saudis, and the Saudis were quite impressed by it because they were deathly afraid of the government of Iran's mullahs. What the Saudis did with this report is where the narrative breaks down," he concluded.[186]

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[183] Kaplan, 263

[184] Seymour M. Hersh, "US Secretly Gave Aid to Iraq Early in Its War Against Iran," *New York Times*, 26 January 1992; see 07 October 1983, Veliotes to Eagleburger, "Iran-Iraq War: Analysis of Possible US Shift from Position of Strict Neutrality," DNSA IG00139 for the early State Department discussions concerning a shift "in favor of Iraq."

[185] Howard Teicher interview, "Arming Saudi Arabia" transcript, PBS Frontline

[186] James Akins interview, "The Survival of Saddam" transcript, PBS Frontline

Though Akins notes that no Iraqi officials have ever publicly acknowledged receiving this report from the Saudis, he states that "if he [Saddam Hussein] got confirmation of his conclusion [that Iran was at the breaking point] from an American report, that would have made him even more determined to move against Iran."[187]

Teicher offers a similar account, stating that both the Saudis and the Jordanians passed American intelligence on Iran's weakened capabilities to Baghdad. He noted that much of this intelligence came directly from Pentagon sources, who believed that "Iran's advanced military systems were not being properly used or maintained." This led to the consensus, according to Teicher, that the Iranian military, already seriously weakened by numerous purges of senior officers, "would not be capable of sustaining modern combat for more than several days." US officials, notes Teicher, "were clearly aware that [these] American assessments would reach Baghdad."[188]

The Iraqi government's strong rebuke of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan reawakened a relationship between Baghdad and Washington that had lain dormant since the Six Day War of 1967. The Iranian revolution had toppled the main pro-American pillar of security in the region, prompting a frantic search for a replacement. The movement of Baghdad away from the Soviet sphere of influence was eagerly embraced by the United States and Saddam Hussein's "moderation" became a prominent feature in US analyses of the dictator and his regime.[189] Though Brzezinski has denied meeting with the Iraqi leader himself in the run-up to the war, he did meet with King Hussein of

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[187] Akins interview, "The Survival of Saddam" transcript, PBS Frontline

[188] Teicher, Howard and Gayle Radley Teicher. Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush. New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1993, 103

[189] 07 December 1979 CIA NFAC assessment, US Relations with the Radical Arabs, JCPL NLC-6-51-7-9-3; 29 May 80 memo for Brzezinski re: Additional Information Items, JCPL NLC-1-15-5-17-1

Jordan in the weeks before the conflict began. According to author Kenneth Timmerman,

> In the summer of 1980, the Iraqis were very eager to get US approval for their invasion of Iran and they dispatched senior government officials, including their then-foreign minister, to Saudi Arabia and to Amman, Jordan, to consult with American officials to make sure that we would not oppose the invasion of Iran ... And on August 5th, 1980, Hussein himself made a state visit to Saudi Arabia. According to some reports, he informed the Saudis of his intention to go to war. Six weeks later Iraqi forces launched attacks deep inside Iran.[190]

Andrew Cockburn, in Dangerous Liaisons: The Inside Story of the US/Israeli Covert Relationship, also cites this August 1980 meeting between Saddam and King Khalid; further, he states that Khalid, having checked with the Carter Administration first, gave Baghdad its blessing and pledged support for the impending war. Cockburn continues, "Saudi reports suggest that Washington, in the form of National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, was enthusiastic." Cockburn quotes former Carter NSC staffer Gary Sick, who recalled that Brzezinski believed that "Iran should be punished from all sides. He made public statements to the effect that he would not mind an Iraqi move against Iran."[191]

Additional evidence suggesting the sharing of intelligence between the US, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq can be found in a 2006 biography of Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan. In it, Bandar describes his role as a fighter pilot for the Royal Saudi Air Force during the early days of the conflict. Bandar recalled, "I remember we worked with the Iraqis to give them AWACS information, as they [the Iraqis] were going to hit targets in the southern part of Iran. I remember them landing in Saudi Arabia where we refueled them so that they could go back home ... Of

[190] Kenneth Timmerman interview, "Arming Saudi Arabia" transcript, PBS Frontline; these accounts are reiterated in Furtig, Henner. Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia Between the Gulf Wars. Reading, United Kingdom: Garnet Publishing, 2006, 62; and Cockburn, 317-8

[191] Cockburn, 317-8

course, within a couple of years of that war … I went to Washington, initially for the AWACS deal, and then to become military attaché there."[192] According to Bandar's timeline, this places the Saudis giving AWACS intelligence to Iraq during the fall of 1980, as Iraqi fighters were, according to the available evidence, using Saudi airfields only during the initial phases of the conflict.[193] Further, Bandar acknowledges, and all accounts corroborate, he was in the United States full-time by mid-1981 assisting the Reagan administration in passing the Saudi AWACS sale. One could extrapolate that the AWACS were conceivably requested by the Saudis immediately following the Iraqi invasion to fulfill this very function, though, in fact, AWACS aircraft had already been deployed to the kingdom well prior to the invasion and were simply augmented by the September 1980 deployment.[194] The first deployment of US-manned AWACS planes had occurred in March 1979, in response to a Saudi request stemming from the conflict between North and South Yemen. A curious aspect of the second AWACS deployment in September 1980 is that, according to Nadav Safran, the anti-Camp David sentiment had created a condominium of sorts between Saudi Arabia and the Soviets over the PDRY in the aftermath of the 1979 YAR/PDRY conflict. Though this agreement, Safran notes, had been temporarily sidetracked by Saudi Arabia's backing for the American position on Afghanistan, "*The understanding was enhanced* (author's emphasis) by the Soviets' support of a March 1980 coup in PDRY," which installed a more accommodating regime.[195] This prompts the question: What was the mission of US-manned AWACS aircraft after early 1980? An SCC meeting checklist dated 11 January 1980 suggests that the Saudis had ended American reconnaissance flights over Yemen some time prior to that date. One of the AWACS in the region had, however, been

[192] Simpson, William. The Prince. New York: HarperCollins, 2006, 177
[193] Bernard Gwertzman, "Muskie Assures Iran on US Role," *The New York Times,* 20 October 1980
[194] Cordesman, The Gulf and the West, 256; see 17 March 1979 memcon, Meeting with Crown Prince Fahd, JCPL Brzezinski Subject File, Box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]; 18 March 1979 memcon, Meeting with Anwar Sadat, JCPL Brzezinski Subject File, Box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]
[195] Safran, 236

reassigned; the same SCC memo notes that it was part of an "upcoming operation" that would require that it "overfly Saudi Arabia and Oman."[196] Given that the Yemeni mission had ostensibly ended by January 1980, a follow-up question emerges: Why then was it necessary to deploy an additional four US AWACS aircraft to join those already deployed in order to mount a defense of the Saudi oilfields?[197] Was one or more of them intended to gather intelligence that, according to Bandar bin Sultan, was then passed to Iraq via the Saudis and Jordanians? Though he offers no date as to when it began, historian James Bill cites a 1984 acknowledgement by Saddam Hussein himself that "Iraq had use of intelligence provided by AWACS flown by American pilots based in Saudi Arabia."[198] These individual pieces of evidence lend plausibility to the notion that it was the Carter administration in 1980, rather than the Reagan administration in 1982, that initiated support to Baghdad after the commencement of the war. The rationale of this policy cannot be fully understood, however, without viewing it through the prism of American relations with the Saudi kingdom in 1980. The next chapter will begin to illuminate these motivations, from both an American and a Saudi perspective.

[196] 11 January 1980 SCC checklist, JCPL, Brzezinski Subject file, box 31, folder: Meetings SCC 249 1/10/80
[197] Safran, 304
[198] Bill, 306

Chapter Four
Precarious Power

Geopolitically, no peril loomed larger for the Carter White House in 1979-80 than the Soviet threat to the Persian Gulf region, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski.[199] This was, however, at least in part, a monster of the administration's own making. Having committed in March 1979 to draw the Soviets into what Brzezinski would later refer to as the "Soviet Vietnam," the US waited for the trap to be sprung, which it was in December of that year. Though the administration was under increasing pressure domestically to stress the imminent danger posed by the Soviet "intervention," as Brzezinski himself would refer to it, the reality on the ground was developing quite differently. Carter's political opponents encouraged and applauded the President's ever-more ominous statements regarding the intentions of the Soviets, all the while painting him as a weak and ineffectual commander-in-chief incapable of fending off the Soviet menace.

Arne Westad notes that, "while impervious to any of its theoretical underpinnings," neoconservative figurehead Ronald Reagan became during the

[199] Brzezinski, 443

late 1970s "by far the most eloquent spokesman for US interventionism." Further, by 1980, Westad continues, "with the Carter administration's slow debilitation in a battle against revolutionary Islam handing him the presidency … Reagan happily conflated all threats to American security under one heading:" blame the Soviets.[200] The neoconservative movement had made dramatic strides in the mid-1970s by shifting the domestic political discourse to the right. One of their major complaints was that detente misread the strengths of the Soviet Union. This led to the Team B exercise, which offered a starkly more threatening evaluation of Soviet military capabilities and prompted Reagan to assert that the United States had "become Number Two in a world where it is dangerous- if not fatal- to be second best."[201] The neoconservative charges against détente grew more mainstream in the wake of the 1976 debacle in Angola and the ongoing SALT negotiations, reaching a fever pitch after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. When Reagan challenged Carter for the presidency in 1980, there was little doubt that the US/Soviet relationship would take center stage.

In a 1981 article for *Foreign Affairs*, former Undersecretary of State David Newsom noted that "a Soviet thrust into the area [the Persian Gulf] is neither as likely nor as feasible as current discussion would suggest."[202] This echoed assessments made by intelligence officials during the last two years of the Carter administration. The consensus within the intelligence community from 1979 was that the Soviets posed the greatest threat as a retaliatory, rather than expansionist, force. That is, the Soviets would defend against American encroachments on their interests themselves, but did not harbor any long-term, aggressive, expansionist goals.[203] A June 1979 CIA analysis viewed any

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[200] Westad, 282-3, 332-3
[201] Cahn, Anne Hessing. Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, 48
[202] See Newsom, "America Engulfed"
[203] 17 January 1979 Quandt to Brzezinski re: Soviet Middle East Policy, JCPL NLC-6-51-3-3-3; June 1979 CIA assessment, "Changes in the Middle East," DNSA # IR02628; 17 August 1979 CIA

increasingly aggressive posturing viewed on the part of the Soviets toward the Saudis as little more than rhetoric to pressure the kingdom into better relations: "The Soviets may, in fact, believe that a Saudi perception of a Soviet threat is necessary to induce a more forthcoming Saudi policy. The dilemma for the Soviets is that, while the perception alone may tempt the Saudis to deal with the USSR, actual Soviet involvement in aggressive moves may drive the Saudis back toward the United States."[204]

By February 1980, Iran had expanded its anti-Communist purges and pledged support for the Afghan Mujahideen.[205] This forced the Soviets to retreat from their earlier demarches toward Tehran[206] and prompted NSC staffer Paul Henze to note in a April 11, 1980 memo to Brzezinski that he did not "question current intelligence assessments that there is no indication that the Soviets are actually preparing to move" [Henze's emphases] toward Iran. By 1980, the Soviets recognized that events in Iran and Afghanistan, as well as the Carter Doctrine, had diminished their openings into the region; Iraqi control over the Baghdad Pact had shuttered it completely.[207] According to Westad, the only realistic potential for Soviet entry into the Persian Gulf region in 1980 was through the Yemeni crisis, which was more a civil war than a burgeoning East-West confrontation; KGB records indicate that, even in the perceived Marxist stronghold PDRY[208], "the almost continuous and frequently homicidal internal power struggles made it, from Moscow's point of view, more of a liability than an

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assessment, "Iran and the USSR after the Shah," DDRS # CK3100219663; 15 December 1979 NFAC assessment, "Soviet Efforts to Benefit From the US-Iran Crisis," DNSA # IR03508

[204] June 1979 NFAC intelligence assessment "Changes in the Middle East," DNSA # IR02628

[205] 05 February 1980 intelligence memorandum, Iran Task Force, re: Bani-Sadr's Foreign Policy Views, DDRS # CK3100160311

[206] 17 August 1979 CIA estimate, Iran and the USSR after the Shah, DNSA # IR02906; 21 November 1979 memo re: Soviet, Iranian and Pakistani Comments on Mecca, Islamabad Situations, DNSA # TE00608; 15 December 1979 NFAC intelligence assessment, Soviet Efforts to Benefit From the US/Iran Crisis, DNSA # IR03508

[207] Safran, 387-88

[208] Westad, 250

asset."[209] An Iraqi agreement with Saudi Arabia in March of 1980 to bolster the anti-Communist faction in North Yemen, in which Saddam Hussein offered Iraqi military assistance "to liberate South Yemen from communist agents and their masters" combined with covert American arms via the Saudis to effectively end that Soviet foray as well.[210] Soviet arms sales, though massive, had not led to any appreciable increase in influence among the Arab countries by 1980.[211]

In response to the Iraqi invasion of Iran, the Soviets cut off all arms shipments to Baghdad, as the outbreak of the war was seen by Moscow as a "major blow" to Soviet policy in the Gulf. [212] According to Arne Westad, the Iraqi invasion of Iran, and Moscow's failure to prevent it, served to ensure "that the Soviet wish for a regional anti-imperialist front," conceived in response to Arab disenchantment with the Camp David Accords, "remained unfulfilled."[213] Soviet diplomats were subsequently noted to have "quite freely criticized the Iraqis for their aggression" against Iran.[214]

Though anti-Communist sentiment in the Middle East did not translate into vocal Arab support for the United States, it did resonate with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis had, since the mid-1970s, been subverting Communist movements in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, they were natural allies of the United States against pro-Soviet regimes in Southwest Asia. By 1979, the United States knew that access to Saudi facilities was critical to a credible response to a threat

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[209] Andrew, 141
[210] Timmerman, Kenneth R. The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991, 74; Golan, 173
[211] Jentlesman, 37; See also Golan, 169-70, 173
[212] Olson 73; Hermann Eilts, "Security Considerations in the Gulf," *International Security*, Vol.5, No.2 (Autumn 1980), 5, 17; M.S. El Azhary, "Attitudes of the Superpowers Toward the Gulf War," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1944-), Vol.59, No.4 (Autumn 1983), 617; Golan, 168
[213] Westad, 298
[214] 15 October 1980 Sick to Brzezinski re: PRC on Iraq/Iran, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 25, folder: Meetings-PRC 153, 10/16/80; September 1980 'Moscow and the Iraq-Iran Conflict;' JCPL NLC # 23-56-2-2-1; 22 September 1980 CIA NFAC memo re: Soviet Reactions to Iraq-Iran Hostilities, JCPL NLC # 6-34-2-4-2; see also Golan, 173-4

to American interests in the Gulf region. US officials sought to use the opportunity provided by the heightened sense of threat after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to expand their access to the kingdom. The Iraqi invasion of Iran gave Washington added impetus, with a confident Brzezinski noting that gaining such access "could not be viewed as provocative to the Soviets since it was merely an expression of US determination to protect our vital interests."[215]

The Hostages and Militarization

By mid-1980, desperation had set in at the White House. An April 1980 hostage rescue attempt had gone terribly awry, with eight American servicemen dying at Desert One. All attempts at rapprochement with the new Iranian government had failed, as had efforts aimed at pressuring the Iranians to release the 52 American hostages held since November 1979. US intelligence suggested that Iranian President Bani-Sadr did not share Washington's concerns "that Iranian support for the [Afghan] rebels may ultimately lead to Soviet moves against Tehran."[216] Likewise, he did not appear to be impressed that the failed rescue mission indicated that the United States had the "ability to mount significant military operations against Iran."[217] Referring to the cacophony of threats to the Iranian regime, including

> hostilities with Iraq, the Kurds, the activities of [Iranian interim Prime Minister Shapour] Bakhtiar and [Major General Gholam] Oveissi, and the continuing sabotage and disruption within Iran ... all are assumed to have an American connection and play to the fears of the revolutionaries that we are out to overthrow them. We should do nothing to relieve them of this fear, as long as the hostages are held.

[215] 15 October 1980 Sick to Brzezinski re: PRC on Iraq/Iran, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 25, folder: Meetings-PRC 153, 10/16/80; Brzezinski, 453
[216] 05 February 1979 intelligence memorandum, "Bani-Sadr's Foreign Policy Views," DDRS# CK3100160311
[217] 07 May 1980 decision paper on Iran, DDRS # CK3100113687

Further, according to the agenda notes for the 07 May 1980 White House Policy Review Committee [PRC] meeting on Iran**,** the Iranian clerics should be encouraged to believe that

> the US is dangerous, unpredictable, and is prepared to give full support to the opponents of the revolution unless the crisis is resolved. The anger toward Iran within the US is widespread and deep.[218]

Few actions could have illustrated this unpredictability better than to provide tacit or explicit acquiescence to Baghdad's invasion of Iran in September 1980.

Soon after the seizure of the hostages in November 1979, American analysts began considering bold American action to return the hostages safely. A 20 November 1979 contingency paper urged administration officials to consider such actions to "remind all of US power and Iranian weakness" and, further, to "galvanize Iranian military into positive action."[219] This line of thinking would gain traction throughout the crisis, with American officials increasingly looking to moderate and pro-Shah elements within the Iranian military as an alternative to the fundamentalist Islamic regime that had gained a foothold in Tehran. Key to this strategy was the withholding of critical war materiel from the Iranian military. Much of the intelligence describing the decay of the Iranian military hinged on the fact that there was a paucity of spare parts for the aging inventories of American weapons purchased during the Shah's tenure. Without these parts, American analysts assumed, the Iranians were increasingly vulnerable to attack. Thus, the reasoning continued, an imminent threat to Iran, such as that posed by the Iraqis in late summer 1980, could well have the desired effect of either encouraging the Iranian military to act against the Khomeini regime, or forcing the Iranians to trade the hostages for desperately-

[218] 07 May 1980 decision paper on Iran, DDRS # CK3100113687
[219] 20 November 1979 contingency paper on hostage trials, JCPL NLC # 6-30-1-10-0

needed spare parts.[220] In a conversation with Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky less than a month after the outbreak of war, US ambassador to Hungary Phillip Kaiser noted Kreisky's "belief that Bani-Sadr understood the importance of freeing the hostages as a prerequisite for better relations with the United States which the Iranians needed in their present circumstances."[221] President Carter would recall in his memoir Keeping Faith that, after it became clear that the conflict between Iran and Iraq was not to be a short-lived affair, "if the fighting were halted *but the threat remained*, [author's emphasis] the belabored Iranians might possibly decide it was in their best interest to release the prisoners in order to restore some of their standing in the international community, bring an end to our economic boycott, and gain the use of their confiscated billions of dollars."[222] This statement underlines Carter's recognition of the utility of a threat of conflict, if not of actual war - an engagement expected by nearly all initial observers, including Secretary of State Edmund Muskie, to result in a quick and decisive victory.[223]

These estimates were made in large part based upon intelligence such as that provided to Brzezinski on March 18th, 1980. In this memo, the National Security Adviser was informed that

> the chief of operations for the Iranian Air Force recently told a group of officers that morale in the air force has hit rock bottom ... pilots were uneasy about their future and they had no faith in their aircraft because of the lack of spare parts. Reportedly, more than fifty percent of air force personnel were opposed to Khomeini and secretly wanted another revolution to wipe out the mullahs, rid Iran of fascist Muslims, and move toward an unoppressed society.[224]

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[220] 20 November 1979 contingency paper on hostage trials, JCPL NLC # 6-30-1-10-0
[221] 20 October 1980 Kaiser cable re: conversation with Kreisky, DDRS # CK3100328329
[222] Carter, Jimmy. Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982, 559
[223] Warren Christopher to Ambassador to Italy Richard Gardner, "Secretary's Conversation with Foreign Minister Colombo," 30 September 1980, DNSA # IG00030
[224] 18 March 1980 Situation Room memo for Brzezinski, Noon Notes, JCPL NLC # 1-14-5-23-5

'Rosy' assessments such as this would have likely encouraged the United States to welcome Iraqis delivering the coup de grace to the Khomeini regime.

"A Quick Iraqi Victory"

The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq prompted a flurry of American intelligence assessments on the conflict. These assessments, some filed in the immediate hours after the outbreak of fighting, offer an important window into the data that policymakers had in the late summer and early fall of 1980 and they indicate the rationale for decisions that the evidence suggests were made during that period. History shows the conflict between Iran and Iraq to have been one of Saddam Hussein's most devastating miscalculations, causing millions of casualties and bloodshed on a horrific scale for the better part of a decade. In spite of warnings issued by Crown Prince Fahd to Saddam Hussein during the summer of 1980, recounted later by Prince Bandar, cautioning the Iraqi leader against engaging the Iranians in "a long war of attrition," most contemporary observers believed, as did Paul Henze in April 1980, that the Iranian military would be unable to mount any resistance.[225] Former NSC staffer Howard Teicher recalled as well that "most of the [Washington] bureaucracy was certain that Iraq would destroy the remnants of the Iranian Air Force in a matter of days, and the war would be over in little more than a month."[226] This opinion certainly reflected intelligence assessments of the time[227] and suggests the possibility that American intelligence on Iranian aircraft was making its way to Baghdad from the beginning of the conflict. The Saudis themselves, reputedly warned about the impending attack, did little to prepare for a regional conflict aside from assessing the "implications of a quick Iraqi victory ... disregard[ing] problems that might arise from the hostilities themselves, since Iranian military power was expected to be swiftly neutralized by Iraqi action" and making plans for its own

[225] 11 April 1980 Henze to Brzezinski, Iran and the Soviets, DDRS # CK3100469805
[226] Teicher, 104
[227] See 22 September 1980 memorandum, Current Developments, JCPL NLC # 12-46-1-27-8

subsequent military build-up.[228] This view that the war would be short-lived was not limited strictly to the United States and Saudi Arabia. In The Prize, Daniel Yergin recalled that the popular sentiment in the Middle East in 1980, that "there is a government on every street corner in Iran," was not limited to the Arab public; "In Vienna, where the triministerial OPEC meeting had been disrupted by news of the attack," noted Yergin, "the virtually universal assumption was that the war would be over in one or at most two weeks."[229] Given such optimistic predictions, and considering that there was virtual consensus on the decisive edge held by the Iraqis, the benefits of the conflict gave every indication of outweighing the costs for both the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The American intelligence estimates from the day fighting began echoed the theme of Iranian military weakness that had been so prevalent over the past year. In one memo, the analysts concluded that

> Iran has virtually no capability to sustain military operations at a high level of intensity. Iran's ground forces in the southwest consist of only one, half-strength regular division reinforced by lightly armed Revolutionary Guards. We believe it alone would not be able to provide organized resistance against a major Iraqi ground offensive for more than a few days.[230]

Subsequent scholarship on the decline of the Iranian military makes clear that, on paper, the armed forces at Tehran's disposal by September 1980 had been crippled if not destroyed. Brookings Institution scholar Kenneth Pollack notes that, even by early 1979, American officials recognized that "the Shah's armed forces were broken" due to mutinies and defections estimated to be as high as

[228] Safran, 362
[229] Yergin, 710
[230] 22 September 1980 memorandum, Current Developments, JCPL NLC # 12-46-1-27-8

an average of one thousand soldiers per day.[231] The mass exodus of Iranian military officials to Iraq in order to escape systematic purges by the Revolutionary leadership, which had claimed an estimated twelve thousand officers by September 1980, only exacerbated this trend.[232]

Despite the November 20th, 1979 memo that cited the potential for a "galvanization" of the Iranian military "into positive action" as a result of an American military threat, Washington's dramatic response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had all but precluded any direct US action against Iran, lest Washington lose the international moral high ground.[233] US officials therefore continued to hold out the hope that the Iranian military would rebel, as indicated by an analysis from September 22nd, 1980 on "The Impact of Escalation on Area States." In it, analysts noted that

> if Iranian losses mount, we cannot discount the possibility of significant domestic political changes ... if moderates can convince Khomeini that the survival of the Islamic Republic is at stake, more pragmatic leaders may exploit the situation to weaken the influence of the extremists. Moderates might push for obtaining military spare parts from the West or for appointment of a strong military officer as Minister of Defense. Such a move could weaken the extremists' influence over policy decisions.[234]

This view was held widely enough among American officials to derail attempts by advisors like Howard Teicher, who had urged a more cautious approach to reestablishing relations with Iraq. As Teicher recalled, "The Arabists in the US government saw the Iraqi invasion as an opportunity to eliminate the growing

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[231] Pollack, Kenneth M. The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America. New York: Random House, 2004, 134

[232] Pollack, 186; see also Mehran Kamrava, The Modern Middle East: A Political History Since the First World War. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 176

[233] See Pollack, 165

[234] 22 September 1980 memorandum, "Impact of Escalation on Area States," JCPL NLC # 6-34-2-5-1

threat of Iranian-sponsored Islamic fundamentalism, thereby reducing the danger to America's interests in the Arab world, while paving the way for improved US/Iraqi relations."[235] A tilt toward Baghdad would aid Washington in countering both Iranian and Soviet threats to American interests in the Persian Gulf region.*

Tilting Toward Iraq

Former career national security official Richard Clarke has written in his memoirs, Against All Enemies, that soon after the war began, his State Department team was asked to "draft options to prevent an Iranian victory or, as we entitled one paper, 'Options for Preventing Iraqi Defeat'."[236] The tilt toward Iraq began years before 1982, when the Reagan administration removed Iraq from its list of state terrorist sponsors and began overt military assistance to Baghdad. Diplomatic probes, and possibly intelligence sharing, began prior to the initiation of conflict in September 1980; serious efforts at a rapprochement began soon after the taking of the hostages. By late November 1979, contingency papers were including suggestions about "sending high-level emissaries to Iraq"[237] while CIA estimates concluded that "Iraq's pragmatic president Saddam Husayn is willing to mute Iraq's differences with the US to the extent necessary to gain ... access [to American technologies]." The assessment continued, acknowledging that Iraq was the best-equipped Arab state to serve as a counterweight to the new Islamic regime in Tehran: "Iraq also shares with the United States an antipathy to the rise of Khomeini in Iran ... there is room for the US to exploit these concerns ... The willingness of the US to talk frankly to the

[235] Teicher, 102

* This tilt in response to Iranian and Soviet threats to American security interests is the central rationale for US assistance to Iraq in Bruce Jentleson's book; however, he perceives this shift to have occurred beginning in 1982 rather than 1980 as my interpretations indicate.

[236] Clarke, Richard A. Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror. New York: The Free Press, 2004, 41

[237] 20 November 1979 Contingency paper on hostage trials, JCPL NLC # 6-30-1-10-0

Iraqis about options in Iran could possibly begin to break down the ideological barriers." However, this estimate makes clear that, concerning relations with the United States, both "Iraq and Syria for the most part see the existing relationship as meeting their current needs, with the result that neither- *barring a continued, serious deterioration of relations between Iran and Iraq* - is likely to respond to US initiatives by seeking significantly closer or more public bilateral ties. [author's emphasis]" It is instructive to note that not only did the president receive and see this assessment, but he noted in the margin "Zbig- Some good ideas and opportunities here. Advise - J."[238] Iraq fit squarely into two parallel lines of thinking that were emerging from the White House in late 1979 and early 1980, countering the Islamist regime in Iran and the Soviets ensconced in Afghanistan. This was evidenced by a correspondence between Brzezinski and Carter in which the president hand-wrote "we should probe for more normal relations among friends of SU [Soviet Union], i.e. Angola, V. Nam, Cuba, Ethiopia, Syria, Iraq, etc. as feasible"[239] as well as by an SCC discussion paper that urged policymakers to "be alert to any opportunities to pursue common interests with Iraq."[240]

By late May 1980, Brzezinski was receiving reports that suggested the tilt toward Iraq was beginning to pay dividends. "Iraqi President Saddam Husayn claimed recently that he expects full diplomatic relations to be reestablished between Iraq and the US in the not-too-distant future," heralded one internal White House report. "While Saddam Husayn is still under some pressure to maintain an anti-American stance, his comments can be viewed as an initial step toward normalizing relations with Washington."[241] Given the Iraqi leader's "pragmatism," as American assessments were now noting, it is not implausible

[238] 07 December 1979 intelligence assessment, "Relations with the Radical Arabs," JCPL NLC # 6-51-7-9-3
[239] 09 January 1980 Brzezinski to Carter re: Long Term Strategy, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Country files, box 1, folder: Afghanistan, 1/9-31/80
[240] 14 January 1980 Thornton to Brzezinski re: Monday SCC meeting (with attached discussion paper), JCPL Brzezinski Subject files, box 31, folder: [Meetings-SCC 250-1/14/80]
[241] 29 May 1980 memo for Brzezinski, Additional Information Items, JCPL NLC # 1-15-5-17-1

that "talking frankly with the Iraqis about options in Iran"[242] had begun in earnest by late May 1980.

The possibility of a renewal of American relations with Baghdad remained on a fast track following the commencement of hostilities between Iraq and Iran. In mid-October, NSC staffer Gary Sick attempted to justify future military sales to Iraq by noting that "we have been getting better diplomatic treatment in Baghdad recently than any time in living memory," attributing that to the fact that "the Iraqis are looking for an alternative to the Soviets and because they see us as active in the region."[243] Closer ties with Iraq would effectively negate one of Washington's obstacles to establishing greater access to the region: concern that the radical Arab states of the Mediterranean littoral "would attempt to marshal regional opposition to what they would see as an increased likelihood of US moves against Persian Gulf oilfields."[244] Thus, normalizing relations with Iraq was critical to US objectives in the region.

The Arab Arms Network

Though Saudi Arabian cooperation with the United States had increased steadily, albeit quietly, since the fall of the Shah, there remained a discernable skepticism in the minds of the moderate Arab states toward the Americans; in large part due to the crises of 1979, many Arab leaders perceived a disconcerting weakness on the part of the US, illustrated most clearly by American inability to defend the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Arab monarchies were thus left questioning the power, indeed the will, of the United States to

[242] 07 December 1979 intelligence memorandum, "Relations with the Radical Arabs," JCPL NLC # 6-51-7-9-3
[243] 15 October 1980 Sick to Brzezinski re: PRC on Iran and Iraq, JCPL Brzezinski Subject files, box 25, folder: Meetings-PRC 153, 10/16/80
[244] 10 July 1980 "Reactions to a Possible Shift of US Forces to the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean Area," JCPL NLC # 12-45-5-11-2

back them with actions rather than words.[245] Regaining lost credibility and enhancing American stature in the Persian Gulf region was a paramount concern for the Carter Administration by 1979-80. The Saudis, with their close ties to both moderate and radical Arab states, proved to be in the ideal position to facilitate that reversal.

Despite their differences on the Camp David Accords, the Saudis consistently refused to take a hard-line stance against Cairo, preferring instead to offer occasional public rebukes of Sadat. Considering both nations' close relations with the United States, it should have come as little surprise when Sadat acknowledged in early 1981 that the Egyptians and Saudis were working together in supplying arms to the Afghan insurgents on behalf of Washington.[246] What remained unsaid, and is only now beginning to emerge from the archives, is that evidence strongly suggests that the same kinds of Soviet weaponry supplied to Afghanistan were also critical to maintaining Iraqi superiority in the early stages of the Iran-Iraq war. Further, these weapons and materiel were not merely stocks remaining from Egypt's days as a Soviet client but instead copies being manufactured in Egypt under the supervision of the United States.

Alexander Cockburn has written that "Egyptian armaments plants were working overtime to produce munitions for the Iraqis- with, according to one former US military official who dealt with the Egyptian arms industry, the express permission of the US government." Cockburn continues quoting the unnamed former official: "They were producing 130-mm and other artillery based on Soviet designs. The Egyptians sold them to the Iraqis. It was one way of getting money for the Egyptians and lowering the amount it cost us to keep their economy going."[247] The fact that this aid was coming from Sadat seemed to be of little

[245] 10 October 1979, cable re: Meeting with Crown Prince Fahd-October 2, DNSA #IR03247
[246] 31 March 1981 cable re: Sadat Confirms Egyptian arms supply to Iraq, DNSA # IG00043
[247] Cockburn, 323

consequence to Iraq, which, according to American officials, "appear[ed] to be maintaining a strict separation between political issues and practical considerations in its dealings with Egypt."[248] Though hard evidence of American involvement remains elusive, some commentators have suggested that American-made arms were shipped to Iraq via Egypt and Saudi Arabia in violation of the Arms Control Export Act while others have maintained that the United States simply turned a blind eye to Egypt's dealings with Iraq after September 1980.[249] The truth may lie somewhere in between.

In early November 1979, nearly two months prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Brzezinski informed Carter that "we are working with the Egyptians to build up their indigenous arms production" as part of an overall military/economic package for Egypt.[250] In May 1980, US Ambassador to Egypt Alfred Atherton sent an urgent cable to Vance, Brown, Brzezinski, and Turner seeking advice on the lack of action on US promises made in July 1979 to Sadat on the "refurbishment of [the Egyptian Soviet-made] SA-6 missile system." Among the American commitments made to the Egyptians were provisions of "spare parts, technical advice, and some test equipment to assist them to maintain their SA-6 missile inventory." According to Atherton, this agreement "was coordinated at a high, high level in Washington and with me."[251] This is solid evidence that high-level administration officials were not only aware of Defense and CIA collusion with the Egyptians in establishing a network of Soviet-origin (or replica) arms production and procurement, but actively involved in its creation.

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[248] 11 October 1979, Vance cable to INTSUM Collective, DNSA # AF00694
[249] See Unger, Craig, House of Bush, House of Saud: The Secret Relationship Between the World's Two Most Powerful Dynasties. New York: Simon and Schuster Trade, 2004, 63; Timmerman, 42, 86, 120-21, 131, 166, 192 for these specific accounts
[250] 27 May 1980 cable from Atherton re: Egyptian SA-6 refurbishment, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Tab 6, box 19, folder: Egypt, 5/80
[251] 27 May 1980 cable from Atherton re: Egyptian SA-6 refurbishment, JCPL NSA-Brzezinski Tab 6, box 19, folder: Egypt, 5/80

In a White House SCC Intelligence Operations meeting on August 6th, it was announced that the CIA was signaling "success in getting 60 SA-7s and 20 launchers for immediate use" and that "DOD reported good progress in discussions with the Egyptians on the SA-7 production program endorsed by the group on July 28, 1980."[252] On July 24th, a cable to the JCS from Kabul described a US operative's conversation with a member of the Afghan insurgency who attributed Soviet air losses, including massive MI-24 Hind gunship attack helicopters, to a combination of Soviet-type SA-7 and SA-9 anti-aircraft missiles, provided by Egypt.[253] The implication is that the United States was overseeing the manufacture of not only munitions and perhaps small arms, as Cockburn and Bernstein suggest, but much more lethal weapons such as the SA-7 shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missile systems for covert shipment to Afghanistan. This would implicate the United States in a much more aggressive proxy effort against the Soviets, at this early date, than has heretofore been acknowledged; moreover, if these weapons were also being provided to Baghdad, it raises serious questions concerning American neutrality in the Iran-Iraq conflict prior to 1982.

In late March 1981, Ambassador Atherton sent a cable to new Secretary of State Alexander Haig informing him that Sadat had confirmed the sale of "important" Egyptian weapons to Iraq, at the behest of an unnamed "third party."[254] Two days after Sadat's announcement, Haig cabled the Egyptian, Saudi, Jordanian, and Israeli ambassadors to outline the official American response. Given Egyptian jurisdiction over the arms manufacturing operation, the Secretary was able to carefully state, "Egypt has not sold or transferred any arms or ammunition subject to US control. The sale of any other military equipment is,

[252] 06 August 1980 SCC meeting minutes, JCPL, NSA Staff material Horn/special, Chron file 5/80 through Evening reports file 11/77-1/78, box 5, folder 8-9/80
[253] 24 July 1980 cable from US Embassy, Kabul (Office of Defense Attache) to JCS message center, Anti-Aircraft Missiles Reported Provided to Afghan National Islamic Insurgents, DNSA # AF01004
[254] 31 March 1981 cable re: Sadat Confirms Egyptian arms supply to Iraq, DNSA # IG00043

of course, a decision for Egypt to make."[255] The secretary, though all evidence suggests more substantial arms transfers, titled his cable "Egypt sales of *ammunition* to Iraq." Confirmation of the weapons pipeline flowing from Cairo to Baghdad came on April 20th in a cable from James Placke at the US consulate in Jidda, Saudi Arabia. In this cable, Placke outlined for Haig the details of the arrangement by which Iraq purchased Soviet arms from Egypt. According to Placke's source, Saddam Hussein himself had negotiated the deal during the Islamic Conference held in Saudi Arabia in late January 1981, with the arms to be delivered from Egypt through Oman.[256] Given the evidence of American complicity in the manufacturing and distribution of Soviet-type arms from Egypt to Afghanistan during this same period, it is certainly plausible that there was an American link to the arms destined for Iraq. If this was indeed the case, it would clearly contradict the official position of American neutrality in the Iran/Iraq war prior to 1983.

The 1980 Presidential election

In his race against Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter was painted into a corner. Though the policies his administration had set into motion in the Persian Gulf region were aggressive and would have momentous historical import, the larger US national interest dictated that they could scarcely be acknowledged. Therefore, the president consistently appeared reactive rather than proactive, exemplified by his dispatch of AWACS to Saudi Arabia upon their urgent request. Ever mindful of the impending presidential election, throughout 1980 Brzezinski encouraged Carter to seize upon any available opportunity to show strength, particularly in the troublesome Southwest Asian region. While cautiously advising Carter "not to initiate some move in the Middle East or regarding the Soviets that will appear contrived," Brzezinski made several suggestions for

[255] 02 April 1981 Haig cable re: Egypt sales of ammunition to Iraq, DNSA # IG00044
[256] 20 April 1981 Placke to Haig re: Egyptian Supply of Russian Arms to Iraq, DNSA # IG00048

Presidential action in the three months prior to the presidential election. Though the primary suggestion, "quiet consultation" with the Soviets to encourage a withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan "just prior to the elections," never bore fruit, another suggestion offered hope that Carter could gain a modicum of positive momentum prior to November. The suggestion Brzezinski made in August 1980, to shift available aircraft carriers from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea, paid dividends when the Iran-Iraq war commenced. [257] As the National Security Adviser noted in a memo to Carter on October 8, 1980,

> We have been able to deal … with the dangers to the Strait of Hormuz quickly and effectively largely because of what has been accomplished over the past nine months. Your 'presence' decision on our military forces in the region allowed us to have the largest US naval force ever near the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz as the Iraq-Iran hostilities started. Without moving any forces, we are positioned to act to ensure shipping. F-14s on the carriers give us rapidly available air defense capabilities. The AWACS earlier deployed to Saudi Arabia provided a backdrop making the latest deployment less provocative and more acceptable. You need to take credit for this.

Carter, recognizing the need for a political revival in the face of sagging poll numbers, noted in the margin, "Zbig- Good idea- speech for me week of 10/19."[258]

The First Test

Of all the potential benefits to be derived from giving the green light to Iraq's assault on Iran, none was as critical to Carter's long-term vision as the greater access to Saudi facilities that he believed would occur in the war's wake.

[257] 07 August 1980 Brzezinski to Carter, NSC Weekly Report #149, DDRS # CK3100148758
[258] 08 October 1980 Brzezinski to Carter, Security Framework for the Persian Gulf, JCPL Brzezinski Geography file, box 16, folder: SW Asia/Persian Gulf 10/16/80-10/31/80

Carter's goal was to establish the United States as protector of the world's energy resources. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had combined with the revolution in Iran to push Saudi Arabia into a more visible relationship with the US; the Saudis appreciated the "toughening of America's position" after the embassy takeover.[259] The closer relationship enabled the kingdom to solicit aid for the North Yemeni cause when its Marxist southern neighbor, the PDRY, threatened it and, ostensibly, Saudi Arabia itself. By March 1979, American AWACS aircraft had been deployed to the kingdom and were being used to gather intelligence on PDRY internal activities.[260]

The Americans and Saudis had joined forces in Afghanistan during this period, yet full cooperation remained elusive. Though the Saudis approved of the "over the horizon" presence implied by the Carter Doctrine, they remained conspicuously silent when it was announced. A seemingly important breakthrough came in meetings between Brzezinski and several high-ranking Saudi officials in February 1980. Citing the increasingly dangers in the Gulf region, the Saudi officials intimated that they were willing to consider "on a quiet basis" a greater US/Saudi strategic relationship, with reports suggesting that Fahd supported a regional US military presence and tacitly authorized American use of Saudi bases in emergency situations.[261] However, after a spring which saw a failed American rescue attempt into Tehran, in which the Saudis were indirectly implicated by allowing overflight rights,[262] the United States found that the Saudi disposition to cooperate had "cooled a great deal."[263] The summer was

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[259] Safran, 318, 316
[260] 17 March 1979 memcon, meeting with Crown Prince Fahd, JCPL Brzezinski Subject file, box 36, folder: Serial Xs [4/79]; August 1979 Brzezinski to Carter, "US Capabilities to Respond to Limited Contingencies," JCPL, Brzezinski Donated Materials, Geographic File, Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf [2/79-12/79] through Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf [5/80], Box 15, Folder: Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf [2/79-12/79]; Cordesman, 256; Long, 62
[261] Long, 63-4; Safran, 359, 407
[262] Kyle, Col. James H. The Guts to Try. New York: Ballantine, 1995, 60-1, 160, 168-9, 203-4, 206 for the planning details involving the use of Saudi airspace for night two of the operation.
[263] Safran, 360

quiet, with Carter continuing his 'Rose Garden' presidential campaign, all the while working to free the hostages and fend off Republican attacks. The public relations front between the US and Saudi Arabia remained quiet as well. Until September.

It was the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq that broke the impasse. According to Prince Bandar, within days of the September 22, 1980 Iraqi invasion, he called Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff David Jones urgently to Saudi Arabia, where he told the Chairman: "We want AWACS immediately."[264] This request, made within twenty-four hours of the United States declaring its neutrality, was made by the Saudis in order to protect its - and America's - vital interest: oil. Seen by contemporary observers as "a major shift" from the earlier wariness of direct military cooperation,[265] the decision made by the Saudi government to make the request and the rapidity with which the US granted it in September 1980 suggests that it was a significant step toward establishing a major military relationship.

In December of 1979, as the unveiling of a new Persian Gulf framework drew near, Brzezinski reiterated to the president the "desirability" of "closer military cooperation" with the Saudis within the context of a Carter Doctrine, "explicitly committing US military power to the defense of countries in the region that are of vital importance to us." The caveat, noted Brzezinski, was that "tangible military steps that generate greater confidence in the US" must precede any such cooperation.[266] By October 1980, the United States was actively, albeit quietly, pursuing those steps to regain the credibility to which Brzezinski referred. The assistance to Yemeni and Afghan fighters battling pro-Soviet forces as well as increased American interest in Pakistan were important boosts to US

[264] Simpson, 64-5
[265] El Azhary, 610-11
[266] 03 December 1979 Brzezinski to Carter re: NSC Agenda, December 4, 1979, National Security Archive, Incoming FOIAs, Box 1

military credibility, particularly where the Saudis were concerned.[267] Prior to September 1980, however, the public displays of strength had been limited to the failed April rescue attempt. What is less widely known is that, despite the failure of the initial rescue operation, operational planning continued for a second attempt. Though clearly it would have been in American interest to continue with contingency planning for a second effort regardless of whether or not another mission was under serious consideration, the evidence suggests that the activity went far beyond mere contingency planning.

A Second Rescue Attempt

Brzezinski would recall in Power and Principle that, following the failure of the mission at Desert One,

> on the morning of April 26, I convened a meeting in my office, on the instructions of the President, to plan another rescue mission. While not knowing at this stage what precisely had gone wrong - beyond the fact that three helicopters had allegedly failed - we decided to undertake the next time a simpler mission, based on the injection of a larger force right into Tehran, combined with the seizure of a nearby airfield.[268]

Though Brzezinski is extremely cryptic in his description of where this planning for a second mission ultimately led, scholars seem to have made the assumption of a cessation of these efforts in favor of diplomatic entreaties. James Bill, who makes no attempt to hide his disdain for Brzezinski, calling his memoirs "obviously self-serving" and part of "an elaborate screen of interpretive underbrush,"[269] nonetheless appears to take the National Security Adviser's

[267] See Thornton.
[268] Brzezinski, 499
[269] Bill, 243

inferences at face value.[270] Recently released documents suggest otherwise; far from a second mission being "off the table," as Kenneth Pollack described it,[271] there is evidence that active planning for another attempt continued well into the summer and fall of 1980.

By mid-June, ground intelligence assets for an ongoing program to gain the release of the hostages, Operation SNOWBIRD, had diminished to the point that only overhead photography remained a viable option for planning. This led the leadership of the Joint Task Force (JTF) to begin seeking alternative means of gaining useful intelligence.[272] Planning for a possible second attempt centered on the use of existing Iranian runways rather than the desert floor, which reduced the potential for a replay of the April disaster. As such, a primary intelligence need of the JTF focused on the location and condition of these existing airstrips. JTF officials considered "utilizing SR-71 High Resolution Radar (HRR) to detect obstructions during hours of darkness on Iranian runways.'[273] Tests were performed at White Sands, New Mexico on June 27-30 to assess the ability of the SR-71 (which had also been used to collect intelligence during the Mecca siege)[274] to detect these obstructions; the recommendation sent to the JCS on July 9th stated that that the SR-71 HRR "only be used if no other systems are available/capable" for detecting runway obstructions.[275]

In his memoirs, Brzezinski recalled that he received word from the Situation Room at the White House late in the evening on Friday, September 26th "that the Saudis had just urgently asked for the deployment of American AWACS, enhanced air defense, and greater intelligence support."[276] There is some

[270] Bill, 301-2
[271] Pollack, 169
[272] 20 June 1980, SNOWBIRD intelligence, DNSA # EP00840
[273] June-July 1980, SR-71 High Resolution Radar, DNSA # EP00842
[274] Trofimov, 146
[275] 09 July 1980, SR-71 HRR Test, DNSA # EP00841
[276] Brzezinski, 452

discrepancy with regard to the date of the request; Bandar's biographer notes that Bandar's personal request to Jones was made on the 28th. According to Brzezinski, however, the request was largely finalized by this later date, as he detailed the various meetings held on the 27th to discuss the Saudi request, culminating in the president's approval "to proceed with the movement of AWACS toward Saudi Arabia" that Sunday morning. On Monday, September 29th, Carter returned to Washington from Camp David and formally authorized the deployment of four American E-3A AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia, "which in any case was already underway," noted Brzezinski.[277] Though the justification was said to be to provide security for Saudi oil facilities, evidence suggests several other, less apparent, reasons for the deployment.

A September 1980 intelligence report illuminates one of these reasons. Military officials participating in the SNOWBIRD rescue operation planning concluded that "AWACS should support probable SNOWBIRD options and would be integrated into SNOWBIRD planning." By the time this report was submitted, officials had not only ascertained the viability of the system for their purposes, but they had also "determined the intelligence support that could be provided by AWACS systems and analyzed the physical arrangement of the aircraft interior to estimate how [the JTF] could arrange its operations" and also had established the mission of the crew.[278] Given the earliest version of the events leading to Carter's authorization to grant the Saudi AWACS request occurred on the 29th of September, it appears likely from this evidence that there was advance preparation made for the use of American AWACS in the region prior to the date the Saudis officially requested the air defense assistance.

One of the most important capabilities of the AWACS system was its ability to track enemy aircraft in a timely manner, allowing friendly air defense

[277] Brzezinski, 453
[278] September 1980, "E3-A (AWACS) Intelligence Support," DNSA # EP00870

teams time to react to incoming threats. The intelligence personnel that would join the AWACS crew as part of the SNOWBIRD operation were not officially part of the flight team; they were expected "to determine when enemy aircraft launch from bases." This information was to be gathered in-flight and was not being recorded into intelligence databases; it was instead considered '"battlefield information,' immediately applicable to the on-going combat operations ... Of particular interest is the need to know immediately when an Iranian fighter prepares for take-off."[279] While information such as that being gathered by the JTF intelligence personnel could have been utilized for a number of purposes related exclusively to the hostage rescue planning, it appears unlikely that the planners of the rescue operation would consider landing an extraction team anywhere near an area populated by military personnel, as any airfield equipped with Iranian fighters would likely be. Additionally, the only "on-going combat operations" in the Persian Gulf region in September 1980 were those involving Iran and Iraq. This would seem to correspond with the accounts of officials who stated that the United States was giving AWACS intelligence to the Iraqis during the conflict. It also lends credibility to the notion that assistance began almost immediately after the commencement of fighting, which in turn raises the likelihood that there was prior knowledge of, if not an agreement on, new AWACS deployments that facilitated the integration of specialized intelligence personnel into the AWACS crews. The outbreak of the conflict between Iran and Iraq did not, however, put an end to planning for this second mission; as late as 03 November 1980, requests for SR-71 reconnaissance flights were being requested "to assist in selection of low level air penetration routes" over the Persian Gulf through December 1980.[280]

[279] September 1980, "E3-A (AWACS) Intelligence Support," DNSA # ES00870
[280] 03 November 1980, "SR-71 Mission Request, JCS", DNSA # EP00844

Chapter Five
The Dirty Work

"The war has won us ten years."

Unidentified Saudi prince, *The London Observer*, 01 February 1981

Though the outbreak of hostilities between Iran and Iraq in 1980 appeared to be detrimental to Saudi interests (and indeed to the stability of the Kingdom itself) due to the regional instability it engendered, there is ample evidence to suggest that the calculation of Saudi interest was complex. Certainly, the specter of war in the Gulf posed dangers to all of the countries in the region, perhaps none more than Saudi Arabia. It threatened the very lifeline of the Middle East, the shipment of oil through the Strait of Hormuz. However, as this chapter illustrates, there were tangible benefits to be gained by Saudi Arabia from the conflict.

Of these, few were more important than the acquisition of greater Saudi power and prestige in the region. Though the 1970s had brought the kingdom an abundance of economic power, the Saudis had not been able to effectively translate their oil wealth into regional political power. This was due in part to a dramatic increase in radicalism flooding the region in the wake of the 1973

war;[281] there were simply too many disparate forces at play for any Arab state to lead in the development of a cohesive regional power structure, even one as oil-rich as Saudi Arabia. Aside from the threat posed by Iranian-styled Islamic fundamentalism, the greatest obstacle to Saudi regional preeminence in 1979-80 was Iraq. The Iraqis had maintained a vocal public opposition to superpower involvement in the Persian Gulf, and were quick to publicly condemn the Saudis for the tightening of their relations with the United States. As one of what Washington referred to as the "radical Arab states," Iraq had the power and influence to stir up a regional hornet's nest. This had led the Saudis to seek a closer relationship with the Iraqis, while also encouraging the US to repair its relations with Baghdad. After the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran, the United States, as has been shown, became much more open to rapprochement with Iraq.

Evident from their relationship with Syria, the Saudis were adept at building ties that were seemingly at odds with their interests yet understandable within the often-contradictory realities of the Arab political world. Riyadh had, throughout the 1970s, provided massive amounts of economic aid to Damascus in an effort to inoculate the Saudi royal family from the radicalism emanating from the Assad regime; this example illustrates a point made by Anthony Cordesman that, overall, "Arab diplomacy is tailored to their vulnerabilities."[282] The neutralization of the Syrian threat was a model for the larger patterns in Saudi diplomatic actions during this period. The Saudis gained tremendous political benefit from Iraq's preoccupation during its conflict with Iran.

While the appearance of a closer Saudi relationship with the United States had prompted a great deal of criticism from the other Arab capitals,[283] few were

[281] Westad, 250
[282] Cordesman, The Gulf and the West, 34
[283] Lesch, 360

as publicly vociferous in 1979-1980 as Baghdad. Saddam Hussein had led calls for non-alignment of the Arab states by attacking the Saudi regime for its acquiescence to encroaching American influence. These condemnations put the Saudi leadership in a dilemma; on one hand it recognized that the protection of its oil interests ultimately rested in the promise of American military power, while on the other, it had to maintain political credibility in the Arab world. Iraq's invasion of Iran made the balancing act much easier.

Militant Islam Emerges

Crown Prince Abdullah's pronouncement that Iran's "new regime was preferable to the old"[284] notwithstanding, other influential members of the Saudi ruling circle saw the Islamic revolution as an imminent threat to Saudi Arabia's security. As author Steven Schwartz notes, the rise of Khomeini and his movement "represented a diametrical opposite to the Wahhabi-Saudi axis ruling Arabia, combining all the things about Islamic civilization, Sunni as well as Shi'a, that the Wahhabis hated most." He goes on to note that "nothing could more shock the holders of Wahhabi-Saudi power in Arabia more than the spectre of an Islamic revolution led by Shi'as, whom they had sought to wipe off the face of the earth."[285] American efforts early in the hostage crisis to massage the provisional Iranian government into stability in order to restore it as an effective bulwark against the Soviet threat conflicted with the predominant Wahhabist consideration, particularly after the debacle at Mecca, which was more focused on the neutralization of the Iranian Shi'a threat than on the Soviets.[286]

The peril seen by the Saudi royal family to be emanating from Iran was in large part due to the rapidity with which the revolutionary movement took

[284] Safran, 354
[285] Schwartz, Stephen, The Two Faces of Islam. New York: Random House, Inc., 2002, 157-8
[286] El Azhary, 615

control combined with Khomeini's claims to Iranian, and thus Shi'a, religious preeminence for the Muslim world. Both developments were ominous. Though most native Saudis are of the Wahhabist sect within Sunni Islam, the shortage of labor in the kingdom had required it to import much of its workforce, most from Islamic countries but many of them Shiite Muslims**.** This was cause for great concern among the Saudi leadership, who recognized that much of the labor for their oil industry in particular was Shi'a. This led to fears of internal disruptions by revolutionary sympathizers, whose virulent fundamentalism was seen to pose a mortal threat to the Saudi monarchy's position as the de facto "protector of Islam." In response to the growing concern that the Saudi monarchy had allowed the kingdom to become too Westernized and had lost touch with its Islamic roots, much of what the House of Saud sought to accomplish both domestically and regionally, therefore, was done with one eye toward Tehran.

Means to an End

In January 1980, the Saudis called for a conference of regional Muslim states, in the hope that they could regain some of their lost prestige. The conference was a success, as the kingdom was able to revitalize its Muslim credentials by virtue of its fierce denunciation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, while convincing their neighbor and former Soviet client, Iraq, to do the same. Though largely unknown at the time, the Saudis, along with the United States, Egypt, Pakistan, and China, were actually at the forefront of resistance to the Soviets in Afghanistan. This is an intriguing case of disparate interests leading to a commonality of result. In this instance, each country involved sought to discredit the Soviets, but for dramatically different reasons. The Chinese sought to usurp Soviet power, particularly so close to the Asian subcontinent; the Egyptians sought to prove themselves and their anti-Soviet credentials to the United States and the Saudis (while simultaneously aiding their economy by selling the Afghan rebels and Baghdad copies of Soviet weaponry);

and the Pakistanis sought to protect their frontier as well as enhance their own regional status.[287] The United States had entered the fray by March 1979 in order to lure their rival superpower into a "bear trap" that would prove to be "the Soviet Vietnam." The Saudis' ambitions were, however, very different from those of the Americans, the Egyptians, the Pakistanis, or the Chinese.

The Saudis poured weapons, cash, and men into Afghanistan throughout 1979, claiming they were fighting the 'atheistic' Communist threat. Historian Rachel Bronson has stated that Fahd had a duality of interests in unleashing the ultra-fundamentalist Wahhabists "for political ends": in addition to sending religious fighters to Afghanistan to fight the 'godless' Soviets, Bronson notes that he also sent them to support the "most radical Sunni groups" among the rebel forces in Afghanistan in order to halt the Iranian influence from spreading beyond its borders.[288]

Saudi Insecurities, Saudi Confidence

By mid-1980, the fear of an imminent Iranian threat to Saudi Arabia had diminished to the point that, according to Nadav Safran, former director of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, by August 1980, Saudi Arabia "was engaging in a number of moves that Iran would have likely considered confrontational."[289] Additionally, notes Safran, the Iranian government had a tremendous incentive to avoid provoking the Saudis: any act of aggression toward the kingdom would have halted the secret negotiations with Washington regarding an exchange of the hostages for military equipment.[290] Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence that Saudi leadership recognized the diminution of the threat posed by Iran by mid-1980 comes from a recollection by

[287] See Thornton.
[288] Bronson, 170
[289] Safran, 361
[290] Safran, 370

Prince Bandar bin Sultan. In issuing an explicit denial of a Fahd/Carter 'green light' to Saddam in August of that year, Bandar paraphrases a conversation Prince Fahd had with the Iraqi leader at that meeting. During the conversation, Fahd was said to have warned Saddam,

> Iran is in chaos after the revolution- leave them alone. They are busy fighting each other. Let them. Let's see how it settles out in the end and then we can deal with whoever wins that fight. They will be so busy with their own problems that, yes- *there will be a lot of rhetoric, but they are not going to bother us …* [author's emphasis] Right now they are in chaos, their army is in chaos, and their politics is in chaos.[291]

The warning against Iraqi interference in Iran, tepid as it was, was closely in line with the American assessment of the situation, namely that the Iranian armed forces and government were in dire straits by the summer of 1980. Such a conversation could well have been, whether that was the intent or not, the confirmation that Saddam Hussein, who knew that the Saudis were getting their intelligence directly from Washington, needed to put his long-held ambitions of regaining the Shatt al-Arab into action.

Despite Fahd's purported warning to Saddam Hussein, when hostilities commenced, Saudi Arabia took a leading role in assisting its fellow Arabs against Iran. This assistance came in many forms, but included allowing Iraqi aircraft and ships use of Saudi airbases and ports, the construction of an oil pipeline designed to circumvent blockaded Iraqi ports, use of Arabian Red Sea ports for Iraqi civilian and military imports, and an estimated $10 billion in economic aid to Baghdad by the end of 1981.[292] This support, particularly permitting Iraqi fighter jets to take off and land on Saudi territory, made the kingdom a potential target

[291] Simpson, 174
[292] Furtig, 64-5; Safran, 366-9; see also 30 December 1980 cable Muskie to US Embassy, Jidda re: Military Supplies for Iraq Transiting Saudi Arabia, JCPL NLC # 6-68-10-22-6

for Iranian retaliation. It was ostensibly this threat that had prompted the urgent request by the Saudi government for American air defense support in the days immediately after the outbreak of the war. However, a cable sent to Secretary of State Muskie on October 1 noted that there was "no danger of imminent air attack on Saudi Arabia"[293] and less than three weeks later the *New York Times* was reporting that, despite the diminution of a major threat to the Saudis, "other air defense equipment [supplemental to the AWACS] has been sent as a sign of support for Saudi Arabia." The *Times* article noted that the assistance was calculated "to encourage the Saudis, over the long run, to enter into a closer military relationship with the US."[294]

Fulfilling the Carter Doctrine

This entrée into the region was what Washington had been seeking since Carter had taken office and had gained urgency in the wake of the Iranian and Afghan crises. It coincided with the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine nine months earlier and also drew the United States more firmly into the Arab camp, a development that pleased the Saudis. The Carter administration's shift toward recognition of the critical importance of improved relations with the Arab states was initially illustrated by the president's openness toward Egyptian positions during the Geneva and later Camp David talks. It had been further built upon by the joint American/Saudi military assistance efforts for North Yemen, and was solidified by the rekindling of diplomatic talks with the Iraqis in 1980. The American desire for greater involvement in regional, specifically Saudi Arabian, security coincided with an increased Saudi interest in American weaponry. What began as a contentious sale of F-15s in 1978 led to the introduction of AWACS aircraft and a "visit" of American F-15s to the kingdom in 1979; this was a

[293] 01 October 1980 cable US Embassy, Tokyo to Muskie re: E-3A AWACS Support for Saudi Arabia, DDRS # CK3100524702
[294] Bernard Gwertzman, "Muskie Assures Iran on US Role," *The New York Times,* 20 October 1980

prelude to the deployment of four more AWACS (along with the major US naval deployment to the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea area) at the time of the outbreak of war in September 1980. The interest in procurement of American arms culminated with the 1981 sale of five AWACS, state-of-the-art air defense radar equipment, and a series of enhancements for the Saudi F-15s, as well as tacit agreement on what would become a massive program of overbuilding of the kingdom's basing and port facilities for use by American forces in the event of a crisis.

The strengthening of US-Saudi bilateral ties in September 1980 was but one facet of the multi-pronged effort by Washington to gain influence in the Arab Middle East. The second major aspect of the policy involved placing the Saudis in the center of a regional defense organization, one that would serve as a first line of defense against both internal and external threats.[295] This policy would not come to fruition until mid-1981, and the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] would eventually be plagued by a lack of technological integration and the inability of the member states to come to agreement on the priority of threats to the region. In 1980, however, it was seen not only as a defense against Soviet adventurism and nascent Iranian action; it was also envisioned as a bulwark against the looming Iraqi power as well as a force for containment of radical Islam, a Western attempt to contain the threatening countries.[296] Though Undersecretary of State David Newsom would later refer to efforts to form such a regional defense coalition as outdated and unrealistic,[297] an April 1981 article in the *Washington Post* suggested that it was having an effect; as a result of the aid Saudi Arabia was providing to Baghdad, "Iraqis are better off today in terms of food supplies and available consumer goods than before the war ... [while] Saddam's dependence on assistance from the conservative kingdoms and

[295] Aburish, Said K., Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite. New York: St. Martins Press, 1998, 88
[296] Furtig, 72; Aburish, 246
[297] Newsom, 31

sheikdoms of the gulf is also having political repercussions. The aid has allowed the donor nations to proceed with plans for their own council on economic and military cooperation with no opposition from socialist Iraq, the main Arab military power in the region."[298]

Despite the fact that one of the unstated goals of the GCC was "resistance to the superpower rivalry that was emerging in the Gulf," the weakness of its members made them increasingly dependent upon the Saudis, and thus the United States.[299] Though its defense umbrella never fully materialized, the forming of the GCC is nonetheless considered "one of Saudi Arabia's greatest foreign policy successes."[300] For the House of Saud, this effort was successful because it placed the Saudis at the crux of an Arab coalition that was not beholden to Iraqi influence; further, it relieved the kingdom of the immediate threats that either Iran or Iraq might pose and would conceivably give Saudi Arabia the opportunity to "mediate a settlement ... which would weaken the parties while enhancing the prestige of Saudi Arabia."[301] Though "Saudi Arabia needed - and still needs - the muscle of Iraq to roll back the subversive tide of Shi'a revolution emanating from Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran," stated the London *Observer* following the January 1981 Islamic conference at which the formation of the GCC was decided upon, "Iraq is doing the dirty work in the muddy plains of Khuzestan, while Saudi Arabia reaps the political glory of hosting the greatest gathering of Islamic leaders the modern world has ever seen." One Saudi prince noted privately, "The war has won us 10 years."[302]

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[298] David B. Ottaway, "Arab Loans Helping Iraq Stay at War," *Washington Post* , 23 April 1981
[299] Furtig, 73; Aburish, 246
[300] Furtig, 77-8
[301] Safran, 364; see also Safran, 368, 373
[302] 01 February 1981 London *Observer*

Chapter Six
A Period of Confrontation

In this business of diplomacy, I am often struck by what is sometimes called the law of unintended consequences. Individual decisions and actions taken for good and just causes in one narrow context sometimes produce undesired results in a broader system, decisions which come back to damage even the original limited concern.

Former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Richard W. Murphy, 06 March 1986

The comments made by Ambassador Murphy in 1986 resonate in the wake of the rise in global terrorism, punctuated by the 9/11 attacks and the 2003 Iraq war. Hindsight is always 20/20, as the adage goes. Few decisions, however, have been so vital to the American way of life (or left so much death in their wake) as have been those made since 1979 concerning US policy in the Persian Gulf region. As Barry Rubin notes, "Obviously, the United States, like all countries, seeks to make a foreign policy in accord with its interests. The important question," he continues, "is how US policymakers interpret those interests."[303] Rubin's statement calls to mind the sentiment voiced by Brzezinski when he dismissed the importance of 'a few stirred-up Moslems' in Afghanistan compared to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[303] Barry Rubin, "The Truth about US Middle East Policy," in Rubin, Barry and Judith Colp Rubin, Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East: A Documentary Reader. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 81

The foreign policy decisions Carter made during this period appeared at the time to be reactions to events swirling out of control. They are now discernable as part of a larger plan to extend US control over the Middle East, arguably America's most critical interest in 1979-80. The increased militarism that proved to be the hallmark of American policy during this period (and beyond) raised a chorus of concerns internationally, particularly in the Persian Gulf region. As Nadav Safran notes, the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine in 1980 led some Arab states, particularly Syria, to believe that the United States intended to exploit the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan "to further its own anti-Soviet and hegemonic designs."[304] This concern resonated most clearly among the Arabs that had not embraced the increasingly-dire American assessments of the Soviet threat; indeed, many were inclined to fear that the United States was positioning itself to facilitate a takeover of Arab oilfields, as had been implicitly threatened during the 1973 embargo.[305]

It was not only the Arab Middle East that was concerned with the new American policies. The Soviets saw Carter as seeking "a return to the Cold War," leading Anatoly Dobrynin to describe the latter half of the Carter presidency as ripe with "nationalist, ultra-conservative, and extremist views, concepts, and recipes."[306] He cites the Carter years as the final turning point in US/Soviet relations, leading as it did to the "sharp right turn" of the Reagan presidency.[307] While Dobrynin acknowledged that the Kremlin pursued "a sometimes bizarre policy in the Third World,"[308] he emphatically denied that the intervention in Afghanistan was due to adventurism on Moscow's part. Nevertheless, he lamented, the intervention gave the American political right, and increasingly

[304] Safran, 319; see also Walter J. Levy, "Oil and the Decline of the West," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.58, Issue 5 (Summer 1980), 1011
[305] Newsom, 20; M.O. Johnson 54
[306] Dobrynin, 420
[307] Dobrynin, 449
[308] Dobrynin, 409

Carter as well, the opportunity to declare the correctness of the thesis that the Soviet Union posed a global threat.[309]

One result of this progressively more militarist policy was that it placed American soldiers and equipment on the frontline of a new battlefield in the Middle East. The Rapid Deployment Force moved rapidly from the planning to the operational stages after 1980.[310] These forces would join a growing number of American troops already stationed in the Persian Gulf region. There were hundreds of US soldiers already in Saudi Arabia as part of the AWACS deployments of 1979-80 and the hostage rescue preparations that continued through the November 1980 presidential election. To this were added thousands more Americans working quietly to establish the network of facilities in the kingdom that, US officials hoped, would eventually provide the point of entry for any necessary American defense of the oilfields.

Olav Njolstad recounts numerous obstacles faced by US policymakers in trying to persuade the Arabs to allow Washington access to bases in the Gulf region. According to Njolstad, the December 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan proved critical to these negotiations;

> whereas the initial effort pre-dated the invasion by as much as six months, the invasion made it easier for the USA to pursue its goals and aspirations in an area where the American presence had always been looked upon with mixed feelings. The end result was impressive and far-reaching in its strategic implications.[311]

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[309] Dobrynin, 449

[310] Odom, 73-5; in establishing his thesis of a shift in American priorities during the Carter administration from Western Europe to the Persian Gulf region, Olav Njolstad offers a detailed description of the larger policy discussions of which the formation of the RDF was central. See Njolstad, "Shifting Priorities."

[311] Njolstad, 38, 42

One of the most impressive results of this coalescing of interests between the US and Saudi Arabia, though Njolstad does not mention it explicitly, was the public revelation in November 1981, only days after the passage of the Saudi AWACS sale through Congress, of the existence of a vast network of military facilities being constructed in the Saudi desert. Designed to American defense specifications and built under the watchful eyes of the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency, construction of what would become the King Khalid Military City had begun in 1976. The facility was designed to hold up to 70,000 troops, far more than the 25,000 soldiers enlisted in the Saudi Army at the time.[312]

According to former *Washington Post* investigative reporter (and later co-founder of the National Security Archive) Scott Armstrong, who broke the initial story in November 1981 and followed it up in the wake of the Persian Gulf War of 1991, the Carter administration had improved upon the Ford-era facilities construction by initiating what would become the most massive military infrastructure project ever implemented by working "quietly with the royal family to design a series of gradual weapons purchases, supported by large investments in airfields and ports."[313] Carter's defeat in the 1980 presidential election could have signaled the death knell for the US/Saudi joint program; instead, the incoming Reagan administration eagerly embraced it. Given cover by the sale of five AWACS to the kingdom in 1981, a sale that had been initiated in the last year of the Carter presidency, the effort would total an estimated $200 billion in construction and equipment.[314] Consisting of one master base, five secondary bases (each with nuclear-proof bunkers and capable of taking over command functions), nine ports, and dozens of airfields with jet fuel manufacturing

[312] Mackey, 324-7; "Arming of Saudi Arabia" transcript, PBS Frontline, 4-5
[313] Scott Armstrong,"Eye of the Storm," *Mother Jones*, Nov/Dec 1991, Issue 6
[314] "Arming of Saudi Arabia," PBS Frontline transcript, 5

facilities, the projects were funded entirely by the Saudis.[315] The AWACS aircraft sold to Saudi Arabia in 1981 were the linchpin of these plans for an "over-the-horizon" defense infrastructure. By 1991, when the new Saudi facilities housed over 500,000 US troops during the Desert Storm campaign, it was "just like being at home."[316]

The military relationship blooming in the Saudi desert during the early 1980s was only one example of a US/Saudi "ultimate government off the books."[317] Throughout the 1980s, the Saudi government financed "all sorts of operations all over the world," including, according to Rachel Bronson, in Nicaragua, Angola, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, "and elsewhere" in support of Reagan administration anti-Communist efforts.[318] The CIA, under William Casey, was the chief organizer of many of these activities and was more than willing to receive Saudi funding for them.[319] It provided a way to bypass the constraints of Congressional oversight - this made the Saudis the 'go-to' partner for the intelligence agencies when Congress balked at funding for a given project.[320] This circumvention of Congress in pursuit of foreign policy aims, while most apparent in the mid-1980s during the Iran-contra scandal, was nevertheless seen during the later years of the Carter presidency as well. The available evidence certainly suggests that Congressional oversight was bypassed with regard to the production and distribution of arms from Egyptian factories under direct American supervision. While the economic assistance provided to Egypt as a result of the arms sales was itself legal, unlike the aid to Nicaraguan contra rebels specifically restricted in 1983 by Congress, the balancing of aid packages to Egypt and Israel after the Camp David Accords had been upset by

[315] Brown, Anthony Cave. Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999, 343; PBS "Arming" transcript, 3, 5
[316] Bronson, 195
[317] PBS "Arming" transcript, 1
[318] Bronson, 168
[319] Bronson, 173
[320] Woodward, 352

any additional requests for Cairo alone. That Egypt's economy was much more fragile in 1979 than was Israel's was not the primary factor for Congressmen considering aid for the two nations; an increasingly vocal pro-Israel lobby was. To facilitate these covert assistance efforts, an ever-closer US/Saudi collaboration evolved. Thus, what emerged, largely as a result of the groundwork laid during the last two years of the Carter administration and honed during the early Reagan years, was that US policymakers "figured out how to integrate Saudi Arabian global concerns and surplus cash into American foreign policy:"[321] in what Bronson succinctly noted was a "neat division of labor … America attacked communism and Saudi Arabia attacked godlessness."[322] The results were significant. Prince Bandar would later confidently state that "if you knew what we were really doing for America, you wouldn't just give us AWACS, you would give us nuclear weapons."[323]

While the Saudi kingdom did not receive nuclear weapons from the United States, it did receive a series of benefits from its collaboration with Washington. In addition to the enhanced Islamic credibility it gained stemming from the aid to the Muslim insurgency in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia's stature in the region grew considerably as a result of its leadership in establishing the Gulf Cooperative Council. The 1981 creation of the GCC was made much easier by the diminution of the threats to the kingdom from both Iran and Iraq as a result of the September 1980 outbreak of conflict between the two states. Further, the pro-Western alignment of the GCC gave the Saudis cover for an American "over the horizon" defense of the critical priority of both Riyadh and Washington: oil fields.

It is clear that the last two years of the Carter presidency saw a dramatic shift from cautious optimism to one of fear and uncertainty, reflecting "a return

[321] Rachel Bronson, 'The US-Saudi Love Affair Predates Bush,' *Los Angeles Times*, 09 July 2004
[322] Bronson, 'The US-Saudi Love Affair,' 09 July 2004
[323] Bronson, 'The US-Saudi Love Affair,' 09 July 2004

to preoccupation with the Soviet competition and a concern that the future was by no means assured."[324] While the external situations in Iran and Afghanistan forced the American policymakers to reassess their strategies after 1979, there were other, more internal, dynamics at play during this period as well. Whereas Cyrus Vance had advocated "continuity" and "steady, quiet diplomacy" in US/Soviet relations during his tenure as Secretary of State, the adviser for National Security Affairs Zbigniew Brzezinski was obsessively opposed to the Communist system. The debacle of the Soviet brigade in Cuba during the spring of 1979 proved to be of great benefit to Brzezinski in helping to "consolidate his ascendancy over Vance and the State Department while turning the President toward a harder line."[325] This consolidation occurred simultaneous to the first detailed discussions regarding assistance to the Afghan rebels in March 1979. By December 1979, when the first Soviet tanks crossed the border into Afghanistan, Brzezinski's efforts to convert the president to a more hard-line position on the Soviets were nearly complete. Just over a week later, Carter scrapped the SALT II ratification effort and, with the 1980 State of the Union address later that month, signaled "his full conversion to military strength as the nation's highest priority and resistance to the Soviet Union as the dominant objective."[326] In Killing Détente, Anne Hessing Cahn, former Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency staffer, succinctly illustrates the dramatic militarization of American politics during this period:

[324] Thornton, 959
[325] Smith, Gaddis. Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986, 215
[326] Smith, 228

> By the 1980 presidential election, the choice in foreign and defense policy was between the Carter administration, which favored the MX missile, the Trident submarine, a Rapid Deployment Force, a 'stealth' bomber, cruise missiles, counterforce targeting leading to a first-strike capability, and a 5 percent increase in defense spending, and that of the Republicans under Ronald Reagan, who favored all of these plus the neutron bomb, antiballistic missiles, the B-1 bomber, civil defense, and an 8 percent increase in defense spending.[327]

This call to arms was presented as a counter to the growing Soviet threat, particularly in the Persian Gulf region. The threat, as increasingly described by Brzezinski and Carter as well as Ronald Reagan, bore little semblance, however, to the realities on the ground. In retrospect, it is easy to see the lack of Soviet power projection capabilities during the period; historian Christopher Andrew notes that the Soviets, because of massive obligations in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, never were able to muster more than one hundred thousand troops in Afghanistan. This paucity of manpower left the Soviets unable to perform even the most fundamental of tasks, such as sealing the borders with Pakistan and Iran or mounting a full occupation of the country; it should be seen as definitive proof of the inability of the Soviets to effectively project power into the Gulf region, even if Moscow had had those ambitions.[328] Furthermore, there were a number of other reasons to question the Soviet threat to the Middle East during this period; the diminution and restricting of Communist parties in many of the Arab states, the fact that oil wealth had led to stronger ties with the West, the resurgence of Islam and its resistance to Communism, the lack of ties with Israel that marginalized Moscow from the ongoing Arab/Israeli negotiations, and the increasingly active US role in the region all served to diminish the Soviet role

[327] Cahn, 49
[328] Andrew, 411

there.[329] Despite a continued willingness on the part of Saudi officials to (perhaps self-servingly) accuse the Soviets of adventurism in the region,[330] even neoconservative supporters of the more aggressive stance like Francis Fukuyama were forced to concede by the mid-1980s that "the Soviets have not fulfilled all the worst fears of Western statesmen and specialists" and that, unlike the United States, "Moscow has not changed its level of commitment [in the Middle East] qualitatively from that established by the early 1970s, and it has not been particularly active in seeking an expanded role for its own military forces."[331] This did not, however, stop the United States from continuing the massive defense buildup of the Reagan era.

It was this perception of a Soviet threat that masked the most pragmatic of the driving forces behind American Middle East policy during this period: oil. As CIA director Stansfield Turner testified before Congress only a week after the April 1980 hostage rescue mission, "the cardinal issue is how vicious the struggle for energy supplies will become."[332] While the ultimate motivations behind the anti-Communist sentiment among American policymakers and political figures of the period remain subject to debate, the protection of energy sources was of at least equal importance to the direction of US Middle East policy as any perception of Soviet threat. The 1982 edition of the Defense Guidance report, generally considered a highly reliable indicator of the direction of American military policy, indicates the priorities of policymakers by this time; only peripherally oriented toward the Soviet threat, the report defines the primary aim of American defense policy in the Persian Gulf region as the continued access to

[329] Newsom, 18-20; Olson, 45
[330] Trofimov, 231
[331] Francis Fukuyama in Spiegel, Steven L., Mark A. Heller and Jacob Goldberg. The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East. Lexington MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1988, 160, 170
[332] Yergin, 705

oil.[333] This was a point of emphasis reiterated by Lieutenant General Robert Kingston, the first US Persian Gulf commander, who noted that his primary responsibility was not to protect against a Soviet threat to the region, but instead "to assure the unimpeded flow of oil from the Arabian Gulf."[334] Explicit acknowledgment of this attempt at mastery of the resources of the Persian Gulf region, however, would have punctured an all-important myth of American exceptionalism, that notion of the United States as "anything but agents of empire, of America being empire's antithesis."[335] It may have been, in part, the protection of this critical national identity that led US policymakers to highlight instead the dangers of "the devil we knew," the Soviet Union.

Secretary of State Vance confided to the Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, that a second Carter term would be a "period of confrontation."[336] His vision of turbulence between the superpowers was prescient. Vance saw an increasingly unbending and militaristic regime taking hold in Washington. Carter's policies entrenched the United States ever more deeply in the desert sands of the Arabian Peninsula; the rise to militarism in US Middle East policy in the years 1979-80 is the foundation for much of what was to come. By 1986, the United States was funneling illicit weapons to Tehran as part of an arms-for-hostages deal that would become the Iran/Contra scandal. Five years later, the military infrastructure constructed in the Saudi desert became the launching point for a half million American soldiers who reversed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In 2003, the Bush administration cited Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" as a

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[333] Peterson, 167; Martha Wenger, "The Central Command: Getting to the War on Time," *MERIP Reports*, No.128 The Deadly Connection: Reagan and the Middle East (November 1984), p.19-23, 20

[334] Bacevich, 182

[335] Vitalis, America's Kingdom, xiv. Vitalis offers a definition: 'American exceptionalism assumes the deep structural autonomy of that experience [the American experience], that American history is unlike and unconnected with all others. Exceptionalism grounds, shapes, frames, all the varieties of accounts purporting to prove America's enterprise to be anything but agents of empire, of America being empire's antithesis, about the United States acquiring an empire late, or in a fit of absentmindedness, 'learning early' to be good citizens, and the like.'

[336] Dobrynin, 455

justification for the war; quietly included in the inventories were stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons sold to Iraq under US Commerce Department licenses through the 1980s.[337] The rhetoric employed after 1991 and certainly in the run-up to the 2003 campaign bore little resemblance to the optimistic assessments concerning reestablishment of relations with Baghdad in 1979-1980.

The assistance to the anti-Soviet Afghan rebels had similar repercussions. Following the exit of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, former Mujahideen took control of the country and established a sanctuary for radical Islamists under the auspices of the Taliban government. Through the 1990s, this group coalesced around a charismatic Saudi jihadi named Usama bin Laden; the network he created led a series of attacks against Western interests, including the 1993 attack on New York's World Trade Center and the 1999 attack on the USS Cole. These "stirred-up Moslems," as Brzezinski referred to them in 1997, continued to grow stronger and more determined; on 11 September 2001, these extremists, known now as al Qaeda, killed nearly three thousand Americans in the worst terrorist attack ever on US soil.

A more pronounced move toward a militarist foreign policy during the second half of the Carter presidency is now becoming clear; while this research is not intended to prompt a paradigm shift in the way Carter's term is viewed, it should initiate a reconsideration of the importance of the years 1979-1980 in understanding the position we find ourselves in the world today. Far from being a period in which policy decisions were dictated almost exclusively by external events, I believe this research makes clear that deliberate US policies, made within selective interpretations of 'the national interest,' instead provided the impetus for many of these critical external events.

[337] Michael Dobbs, "US Had Key Role in Iraq Buildup," *Washington Post*, 30 December 2002

It is often too easy to paint presidencies with a broad brush; Jimmy Carter, perhaps in part because of his instrumental role as peacemaker in the Camp David talks, has gained a historical reputation as weak and ineffectual. These portrayals are, as I believe in the case of Carter, often less than accurate. Instead, the evidence suggests a far more active and hawkish president, willing to take risks based on his and his advisers' perceptions of "the national interest." It is my hope that research such as this will lend itself to future reassessments of the Carter presidency, providing a more balanced picture of his term while also promoting a deeper understanding of American diplomacy toward the Middle East more generally.

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