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CHAPTER 4: THE US AND GULF SECURITY

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

British Withdrawal from the Gulf

The year 1971 is often used as a convenient date for determining when responsibility for Gulf security shifted from Britain to the US. But in many ways, this is an artificial threshold since the process of "changing the guard" occurred gradually over the course of several decades. British withdrawal from the Gulf was completed, not initiated, in 1971. The process of withdrawal from the Gulf was but one small part of a much more drawn-out withdrawal from the longstanding British position "East-of-Suez." World War II marks the beginning of the decline of British interests in the larger region, with the gradual and cumulative divestiture of interests in India, East Africa and the Middle East. In the Arabian Peninsula, this process had involved the granting of independence to Kuwait under peaceful conditions in 1961 and the more violent departure from Aden in late 1967.

Even as the postwar years witnessed a gradual decline in the British position, the roots of American involvement in the region were being established. Among the early reasons for American concern were the acquisition of oil concessions in the Gulf (of which ARAMCO proved to be the most important), military use of the Peninsula and surrounding areas for the war effort (as described in Chapter 2), and the steady proliferation and deepening of the American position in Iran.¹

Consequently, the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s, represent a long period of transition and overlapping of interests, goals, and responsibilities in the region on the part of the two Western powers. Rather than cooperation, this overlapping more often resulted in serious competition and even open hostility. The first section of this chapter then is concerned with these two simultaneous

¹On the early period of Anglo-American confrontation, see Aaron David Miller, *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Michael b. Stoff, *Oil, War, and American Security: The Search for a National Policy on Foreign Oil, 1941-1947* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Irvine H. Anderson, *Aramco, the United States and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy, 1933-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 173-204.

processes at work: the gradual British relinquishment of its position in the Gulf, and the intensification of US interests there.

It was abundantly clear at the end of World War II that Britain's imperial role was greatly diminished. Indeed, the entry of the US into the war had saved not only Britain from invasion but also its colonial possessions. But in the eyes of many British, the US, through its global participation in the war, had gained a toehold in areas from which it previously had been successfully excluded. One of these areas was the Gulf. Not only had the Gulf been held as an exclusively British "lake" since the early years of the century, but British oil firms controlled the lion's share of the Gulf's oil, long seen as vital not only for use at home but also for supplying the Royal Navy. Consequently, even as it became apparent that Britain must downgrade its East-of-Suez capabilities, attempts continued to try and fend off American penetration of the Gulf.

The first of the American intrusions revolved around oil and penetration of the Gulf fields. By the beginning of the war, American oil interests were represented in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Bahrain. On top of this challenge came American insistence on access to British facilities in the Gulf to prosecute the war effort. One area in which American participation occurred was the Persian Gulf Command, responsible for channelling military assistance to the Soviet Union via the Gulf and Iran. As the focus of the war shifted from the European to the Pacific theater, US forces made greater use of the Persian Gulf and South Arabian air routes. While London recognized the necessity of USAAF use of these routes and airfields, permission was granted only grudgingly for Pan American Airways' use of these routes (fearing the establishment of claims to civilian traffic rights after the war).

British suspicions of American intentions were furthered by American plans, from as early as 1944, to build an air force base at Dhahran in eastern Saudi Arabia. This proposal met repeated British objections, who regarded it – with considerable justification – as a baldfaced attempt to create a political and strategic presence in Saudi Arabia, as well as facilities that would be translated into civilian air use following the war. Nevertheless, Washington's efforts to gain Saudi approval were redoubled and justified to the British on war grounds. The base was constructed in 1946 and occupied by the USAF until turned over to the Saudi government in 1962. Furthermore, Dhahran airfield constituted only one part of a growing American wedge between British-Saudi ties, as the US provided loans and credits to the kingdom, constructed roads there, and eventually supplanted the British military mission. These actions, when combined with the considerable activities of ARAMCO after the war, worked to transfer predominant outside influence in Saudi Arabia from Britain to the United States, which has held it ever since.²

Another instance of American penetration was the establishment of the US Navy's Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR) in the Gulf. Partly because of growing economic interests there and partly because of the Cold War, the Navy decided to deploy two destroyers and a seaplane tender to the Gulf in 1949, acquiring berthing space – later homeporting rights – at the British HMS Jufair

²See James L. Gormly, "Keeping the Door Open in Saudi Arabia: The United States and the Dhahran Airfield, 1945-46," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1980), pp. 189-205; Barry Rubin, "Anglo-American Relations in Saudi Arabia, 1941-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14 (1979), pp. 253-267; and idem, *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1941-1947* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), pp. 34-72.

base on Bahrain. MIDEASTFOR has remained in the Gulf ever since, although after British withdrawal the American use of facilities was downgraded officially at the request of the Bahraini government.³

The smoldering Anglo-American postwar rivalry in the region came to a head of sorts with the Buraimi Oasis crisis of the 1950s. Sovereignty over the oasis had been shared by the Rulers of Abu Dhabi and Muscat but not recognized by the Al Sa'ud, who had controlled the oasis on several previous occasions over the past century-and-a-half. The dispute took a new turn when an armed Saudi detachment occupied the village of al-Hamasa in the oasis in October 1952. Britain, acting on behalf of both Abu Dhabi and Oman, protested this action to Riyadh. The consequence was an agreement to submit the case to a tribunal, with both sides submitting exhaustive memorials justifying their positions. But the tribunal never rendered judgment, as Britain charged Saudi Arabia with obstruction and withdrew. There the matter lay until October 1955, when a unit of the British-officered Trucial Oman Scouts ejected the Saudi detachment from the oasis and Abu Dhabi and Omani control over their respective villages was restored.

The significance of the dispute went beyond questions of borders, however. At the heart of the Saudi action, and the reason for the spirited British objection, was the possibility of oil in the area. ARAMCO held the concession for Saudi Arabia, while the largely British firm, Iraq Petroleum Company, held the concessions in Abu Dhabi and Oman. Consequently, London and Washington found themselves arrayed on opposing sides and American and British individuals prepared the opposing memorials.⁴

The debate over Britain's continued military presence East-of-Suez grew heavier during the 1960s, as discussed in Chapter 3. In large part, of course, the East-of-Suez dilemma was only one part of an even larger concern: was Britain to remain in some small way an imperial or global power, or was it to be reduced to simply one more mid-sized European state. Although the psychological dimensions of this debate were enormous, the battle essentially was fought on financial grounds.

The question of the British military role in the Middle East and the Gulf was then only a marginal concern of the Defence White Paper of 1966. The gradual attrition of Middle East military installations was implicitly acknowledged and more were added to the list of closures.⁵ After the loss of Egypt, Palestine and Iraq, Whitehall announced its intention to withdraw from Aden in either 1967 or 1968. As a result, the shrunken British presence in the Middle East was to rest upon a small

³See Peter W. DeForth, "U.S. Naval Presence in the Persian Gulf: The Mideast Force Since World War II," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1975), pp. 28-38; US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations*; Prepared by the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress (Washington: USGPO, 1979).

⁴For detailed accounts of the Buraimi dispute and the historical factors leading up to it, see J.B. Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964); David Holden, *Farewell to Arabia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 201-213; and Husain Albaharna, *The Arabian Gulf States: Their Legal and Political Status and Their International Problems* (2nd ed.; Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975), pp. 196-238.

⁵For a contemporary view of the value of British bases in the region, see Elizabeth Monroe, "British Bases in the Middle East: Assets or Liabilities?" *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 42, No. 1 (Jan. 1966), pp. 24-34.

increase in the forces stationed at Bahrain and Sharjah. The Middle East drawdown was reconfirmed in the 1967 Defence White Paper, and the intensification of fighting in Aden caused the withdrawal to be pushed up to November 1967.

The 14% devaluation of the pound sterling in 1967 served to accelerate the impetus for abandonment of military commitments in the Indian Ocean basin. Even though the burden of keeping a presence in the Gulf was minimal compared to other obligations farther east (and since various Gulf rulers reportedly offered to underwrite British expenses), withdrawal from the Gulf was announced in January 1968. This decision, like the decision to withdraw from Aden, was the product of a Labour government. The Conservatives in opposition branded this policy irresponsible and the decision to vacate the Gulf as particularly shortsighted. Nevertheless, the announcement, once made, acquired an air of finality and, when the Tories came to power in 1970, the decision was allowed to stand.⁶

Since British forces in the Gulf were miniscule, numbering only 9000 men in 1971, impending withdrawal promised little military change.⁷ The political impact was far more important, particularly since the amirates of the Arab littoral were still bound legally to Britain. A viable formula for their future existence had to be devised. The ideal solution seemed to be federation of all nine mini-states, and the subject was first broached at a meeting of the nine Rulers in February 1968. Even though the idea was carefully and positively considered by all, it soon became apparent that significant differences in the sizes of the states and the varying degree of their modernization, as well as outstanding political rivalries, constituted insurmountable obstacles in the path to federation. Bahrain and Qatar, the two largest amirates, chose to go their own ways as separate independent states. The remaining seven (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, 'Ajman, Ra's al-Khayma, Umm al-Qaywayn, and al-Fujayra), despite considerable outstanding differences, formed the United Arab Emirates (UAE).⁸

⁶On the decision and process of withdrawal, see D.C. Watt, "The Decision to Withdraw from the Gulf," *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (July-Sept. 1968), pp. 310-321; *The Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal* (Washington: Georgetown University, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Feb. 1969, Special Report Series, No. 8); William Luce, "Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and Persian Gulf," *JRUSI*, Vol. 114, No. 653 (Mar. 1969), pp. 4-10; *The Economist*, 6 June 1970, survey on the Gulf; David Holden, "The Persian Gulf: After the British Raj," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July 1971), pp. 721-735; and Elizabeth Monroe, rapporteuse, *The Changing Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf: The Report of an International Seminar at the Center for Mediterranean Studies, Rome* (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1972).

⁷Of this total, 4700 belonged to the army. The RAF contingent included two fighter squadrons and 3400 men, while the Royal Navy maintained three destroyer escorts, with small Royal Marine contingents, and six coastal minesweepers. James H. Noyes, *The Clouded Lens: Persian Gulf Security and U.S. Policy* (2nd ed.; Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), p. 27.

⁸The formation of the UAE was complicated by serious rivalries between the seven amirates and by problems associated with the weighting of representation in the Federal Council and apportionment of federal cabinet portfolios. One consequence was that Ra's al-Khayma refused to join up on independence in December 1971, apparently believing that a major oil strike was imminent. Failing to strike oil then, the amirate belatedly joined the federation in February 1972. On the regional impact of British withdrawal, see John Duke Anthony, *The Arab States of the Lower Gulf* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1975); Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates* (London:

Administratively, the British withdrawal in December 1971 resulted in the abolition of the office of Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, while the subordinate Political Agents in each of the emirates were restyled Ambassadors. In Oman, the ambiguous relationship of the Consul-General to the Resident was terminated and the post upgraded to an embassy. Among the last loose threads to tie up were new treaties: the defense treaty with Kuwait (signed upon that state's independence in 1961) was converted to a treaty of friendship and similar treaties were signed with Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE. Finally, the RAF bases in Bahrain and Sharjah were closed, leaving only the ones in Oman (at Masira and Salala) to uphold the long British military legacy in the Middle East.

America (Re)Discovers Arabia

The gradual British removal from East-of-Suez paralleled the diminution of European control and influence throughout the Middle East in the decades following World War II. Gradually, the British and French hold on their mandates, colonies, and technically independent but tightly supervised states in the region withered away, in conjunction with the worldwide process of decolonization. Simultaneously, the emergence of the East-West Cold War as a global rivalry and the inability of the Washington's European allies, due to their weakened state after the war, to contain the Soviet Union in their former imperial dominions meant that the US took a stronger and more direct interest in Middle Eastern affairs.

Certainly, it is true that the US government and various American individuals and groups had played a role in the Middle East prior to the war and wartime exigencies had produced a temporary American concern with and presence in a number of countries in the region. But the period of the late 1940s and early 1950s was far more central in laying the foundations for a permanent American concern. Among the milestones in this process can be counted the following factors: (1) American concern with Soviet expansion into the area after World War II, particularly evident in the sustained effort to remove Soviet troops from Iran in 1946 and in promulgation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947; (2) the recognition of Israel in 1948, followed by the first of many attempts to ameliorate the Arab-Israeli conflict through the Tripartite Declaration of 1950; (3) the deterioration of relations during the 1950s with the emerging radical Arab states, in particular Nasir's Egypt, caused in part by the superimposition of a Cold War perspective on Arab politics and resulting in the ineffectual Baghdad Pact of 1955 (strongly supported by the US even though it was not a member) and the dispatch of Marines to Lebanon in 1958; and (4) the tremendous postwar growth in Middle Eastern oil production, the majority of which was by then under the control of American corporations.

Underlying this quickening of interest was a long history of connections between the United States and the Arabian Peninsula. Merchant vessels had begun to make frequent calls at such ports as Mocha and Muscat since the end of the eighteenth century.⁹ The first Arab emissary to the US

Macmillan, 1978); and Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London: Longman, 1982).

⁹For an overview of American ties to the Peninsula, see Joseph J. Malone, "America and the Arabian Peninsula: The First Two Hundred Years," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Summer 1976), pp. 406-424.

was sent from the Ruler of Muscat (and Zanzibar) in 1840. In the 1890s, the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church of America began its work in the Gulf, eventually establishing missions and hospitals in Matrah (Oman), Manama (Bahrain), Kuwait, and Basra and al-'Amara (Iraq). In the twentieth century, the spur to the broadening of American interests was the intrusion of American oil companies into what had been a solely British preserve.

The pressure exerted by Washington (at the behest of the American majors) on London for an "open-door" policy in the Gulf produced the Red Line Agreement of 1928, the first step in the American penetration. By the agreement's terms, a "red line" was drawn around Turkey, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula except for Kuwait, within which it was agreed that only the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) would have the right to exploit oil fields. In return, the American companies Standard Oil of New Jersey and Mobil received a share in IPC. Subsequently, Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) and Texaco, operating as CAITEX, acquired the concession for Bahrain, and then SOCAL, later joined by Texaco, Standard of New Jersey, and Mobil, acquired the concession for Saudi Arabia and formed ARAMCO. Finally, Gulf Oil took 50% ownership of Kuwait Oil Company. These prewar gains were supplemented after the war by the gradual penetration of the Gulf by American independents, particularly through successful acquisition of new offshore concessions and rebidding on territory relinquished from existing concessions.

The postwar expansion of oil production was accompanied by a corresponding rise in official US establishment in the region. While consular posts had been established in Muscat and Aden quite early, they had been forgotten outposts (and Muscat was even abandoned in 1915). The "real" permanent presence in the Peninsula appeared only after World War II. Emerging US-Saudi relations, initiated by ARAMCO's presence, prompted the establishment of an embassy in Jidda in 1942 and later a consulate in Dhahran, the center of ARAMCO operations. Since then, the most significant aspects of American involvement in the Peninsula have revolved around Saudi Arabia. The complete absence of any connection less than half a century ago has been completely transformed, building on a combination of the special role played by ARAMCO in Saudi development, the erstwhile American military presence in Dhahran and the burgeoning US arms sales and training teams.¹⁰

The American connection to the smaller states of the Gulf was far later in arriving and has remained in the shadow of US-Saudi relations. A consulate was opened in Kuwait in 1951 and subsequently upgraded to an embassy upon Kuwaiti independence. The American Ambassador to Kuwait also served as non-resident ambassador to the other amirates after 1971, until other ambassadors took up positions in Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman during 1974. The central facet of these relations has been trade, greatly increased after the 1973-1974 oil price revolution, yet ties between the amirates and Britain remain far stronger even today.

¹⁰Comprehensive studies of the American-Saudi relationship are contained in William b. Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security, and Oil* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1981); US Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: The New Context in an Evolving "Special Relationship"*; Report prepared by the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1981); and David Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985).

Nevertheless, there are other facets to American involvement with the smaller states of the Gulf. MIDEASTFOR still makes extensive use of Bahraini facilities, American banks are prominent among Bahrain's offshore banking units, and a large proportion of the oil refined in Bahrain (but actually produced in Saudi Arabia) is purchased for use by the US Seventh Fleet. The US-Omani relationship – oldest among the states in the Arabian Peninsula and yet one of the newest – still has not supplanted the older Anglo-Omani connection. Yet Oman's strategic location on the Strait of Hormuz and its willingness to allow American use of its military facilities in emergency situations has made it of key concern to US policy-makers and has prompted attendant military and economic aid and commercial involvement.¹¹

The record of the past three decades has seen a steady shift in the balance of British and American influence and power in the Gulf. Britain still remains an important commercial and cultural force in the region, but the torch of military and political power on which the Gulf states uncertainly depend for certain aspects of their defense has passed to the United States.

US INTERESTS IN THE 1980s¹²

The United States has two central or strategic interests in the Gulf, preserving access to oil supplies and preventing Soviet expansion there, as shown in [Table 4.1](#).¹³ Underlying these twin interests are a number of tactical objectives, i.e. the means by which the US seeks to preserve or achieve its strategic interests. It is hardly necessary to emphasize the role of Gulf oil in American interests. Even though American dependence on oil imports from the Gulf has declined markedly in the last few years, Western Europe, Japan and Korea remain heavily dependent on that source (as shown in Ch. 7). Furthermore, it should be remembered that nearly 60% of all world oil reserves are contained in the Middle East, with approximately 25% of the global total in Saudi Arabia alone.

¹¹For more on this connection, see J.E. Peterson, "American Policy in the Gulf and the Sultanate of Oman," *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 8 (Summer 1984), pp. 117-130.

¹²The subject of US security interests in the Gulf has been treated by: Harold Brown, *U.S. Security Policy in Southwest Asia: A Case Study in Complexity* (Washington: Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute, 1981; Occasional Paper); Shahram Chubin, "U.S. Security Interests in the Persian Gulf in the 1980s," *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 4 (1980), pp. 31-65; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984); Geoffrey Kemp, "Strategic Problems in the Persian Gulf Region," in George S. Wise and Charles Issawi, eds., *Middle East Perspectives: The Next Twenty Years* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1981), pp. 71-79; Emile A. Nakhleh, *The Persian Gulf and American Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

¹³In addition to the sources listed in the previous note, Congressional prints on US security interests in the Gulf include the reports done for the House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The United States and the Persian Gulf* (Washington: USGPO, 1972) and *U.S. Security Interests in the Persian Gulf* (Washington: USGPO, 1981); the hearings before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, published as *U.S. Interests in, and Policies Toward, the Persian Gulf, 1980* (Washington: USGPO, 1980) and (with the Joint Economic Committee) *U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf* (Washington: USGPO, 1983); and the hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Security Interests and Policies in Southwest Asia* (Washington: USGPO, 1980).

Despite the present oil glut and the travails of OPEC, the world's reliance upon Gulf oil is likely to continue for decades to come.

But even if the Gulf held no oil, it is probable that its position as a superpower would require the US to seek to prevent Soviet acquisition of such a geopolitically important asset. The Gulf can serve as a key "land-bridge" between the Soviet Union and the Middle East, South Asia, East Africa, as well as a window on the Indian Ocean. Add to this the presence of oil in the region, and it is possible – if not probable under peacetime conditions – that Soviet regional goals include denial of Gulf oil to the West and/or the control of the Gulf's oil for Soviet consumption. The first is an unambiguous threat requiring an American counter. The second assumption may not occur if, as is likely, Soviet import needs in the future can be met by the cheaper and more practical means of simply purchasing Gulf oil or acquiring it by barter.

It should be stressed that securing the two central strategic US interests requires employment of a complex, multi-layered strategy, involving all the tactical objectives listed in [Table 4.1](#). This is partly true because threats to these interests may arise from an unknown number of sources, either individually or in combination, and also because a single tool cannot achieve both strategic objectives (or perhaps even one of them alone). Furthermore, while there is a considerable degree of overlap between tactical objectives, some may be contradictory, thus requiring a subtle, multi-faceted policy mix. As will be emphasized again, US military activities form only one part of US tactical objectives in the Gulf. Indeed, military force can be of only limited utility to the US, and is almost entirely restricted to the context of a direct Soviet assault (a relatively unlikely contingency). Most of the other objectives listed are far more important and occur in many more likely circumstances.

THREATS TO GULF SECURITY: THE PARADIGM

A composite paradigm of threats to Gulf security is presented in [Table 4.2](#). It should be noted that this paradigm represents the perceptions of the United States (and its Western allies) and the six GCC states. Naturally, it does not consider the interests of the Soviet Union or Iran. Iraq's inclusion is somewhat problematic but its interests increasingly parallel those of the GCC states, particularly since the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, and thus its perceptions are uncertainly represented in the paradigm as well. As a composite, the paradigm obviously can not fairly represent the views of each actor. Not all the categories of threats presented in the paradigm are perceived as such by all the actors, nor are all mutually perceived threats seen with the same degree of potentiality or danger. Furthermore, the efforts of one actor to preserve its conception of Gulf security may be directly regarded as a threat by another.¹⁴

¹⁴There is a growing body of literature on the topic of threats to Gulf security. A few of the more pertinent sources are: Hermann F. Eilts, "Security Conditions in the Persian Gulf," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1980), pp. 79-113; Hossein Amirsadeghi, ed., *The Security of the Persian Gulf* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Abdel Majid Farid, ed., *Oil and Security in the Arabian Gulf* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); J.E. Peterson, ed., *The Politics of Middle Eastern Oil* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1983); A.Z. Rubin, ed., *The Great Game: Rivalry in the Persian Gulf and South Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Z. Michael Szaz, ed., *The Impact of the Iranian Events Upon Persian*

As an example of the last point, "United States Policies" (category I.D.) of course do not constitute a threat in American perception but may constitute one in the opinion of the GCC states under certain circumstances. Category III.C. (Policy Changes in Existing Governments) may be regarded in the same manner. Likewise, the inclusion of Israel (I.C.) reflects a difference of opinion. Certainly, some Israeli policies are regarded as definite threats by the GCC states, but are not likely to be seen as such by US administrations. Furthermore, GCC attempts to enhance their defenses against this particular "threat" will receive little help from Washington.

It may be difficult in practice to distinguish between a regional threat of subversion (II.B.) and internally generated dissidence (III.B.). While dissidence may be generated solely by internal causes, the dissidents may soon appeal for or rely upon outside support. Similarly, a state may attempt to sow opposition within its neighbor solely for its own purposes and create dissident groups out of nothing. The difference between categories III.A. (replacement of existing governments) and III.B. (opposition to existing governments) is simply one of degree of success: in the case of A, there is a change of government and/or leaders, while B represents the existence of attempts to carry out this change without success.

As a final note on the paradigm, these categories represent types of potential threats, not actual ones. In any neutral assessment of this paradigm (i.e. not from the point of view of any specific actor), some potential threats must be seen as far more likely than others. In addition, the resolution of contradictory "threats" can be accomplished only by the growth of converging national interests on the part of the West and the GCC states. This said, an evaluation of the relative imminence of the threat categories listed here constitutes a necessary first step before considering the manner and means by which the threats can be countered.

EVALUATING EXTERNAL THREATS

Of the four categories of external threats described in the paradigm, only two (the direct and indirect Soviet threats) will be discussed here. Discussion of how US policies may contribute to a threat scenario is better left to the next chapter. While the connection of Israel to Gulf security is very real and can not be ignored, its removal as a "threat" to Gulf security can be accomplished only by a permanent resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute, a complex subject which cannot be treated adequately here.

To a far greater degree than is the case with the US and other Western countries, the intentions and motivations of the Soviet Union can only be guessed at. Even the extent of deliberate Soviet activities in various areas of the world is a matter of serious contention among Western observers, let alone the causes behind their moves. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the Soviet Union has long expressed a close interest in Gulf affairs, if only as a mirror of Western concern with that area.

Western observers have postulated a number of possible Soviet goals in Southwest Asia and the Gulf.¹⁵ At least six discrete goals have been advanced in recent years:

- ✓ To protect its vulnerable southern borders.
 - ✓ Southwest Asia is the only major area (apart from Finland) where the Soviet Union adjoins the non-Communist world.
 - ✓ Unrest in Southwest Asia has the potential to spill over into the Muslim Soviet republics in Central Asia.
- ✓ The geographic importance of the region provides a geopolitical imperative.
 - ✓ Control of the Gulf would give direct access to the Indian Ocean.¹⁶
 - ✓ Southwest Asia can be seen as a "land bridge" to the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, or generally the Indian Ocean basin.
- ✓ To reduce Western influence in the region (through propaganda and other destabilization measures), contain Chinese influence, and expand Soviet influence (through the cultivation of existing states, acquisition of client states, and general support for revolutionary movements).
- ✓ To prevent Western access to oil (presumably direct action would be under wartime conditions only).¹⁷
- ✓ To acquire Gulf oil for domestic use.¹⁸
- ✓ To gain acceptance as an equal, a superpower with legitimate interests in the Gulf and Middle East, as elsewhere in the world.

Most of these goals can be seen as having anti-status-quo implications. This is not surprising since the US, in the Gulf as elsewhere in the world, is generally the defender of the status quo. In

¹⁵Some recent recapitulations include the Carnegie Panel on U.S. Security and the Future of Arms Control, *Challenges for U.S. National Security*, "The Military Balance in the Persian Gulf," pp. 149-194 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment, 1981); Dennis Ross, "Considering Soviet Threats to the Persian Gulf," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1981), pp. 159-180; idem, "The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 615-635; Keith A. Dunn, "Constraints on the USSR in Southwest Asia," *Orbis*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall 1981), pp. 607-629; Shahram Chubin, "Gains for Soviet Policy in the Middle East," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1982), pp. 122-152; George Lenczowski, "The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf," *International Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (1982), pp. 307-327; and Michael Dixon, "Soviet Policy in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of Defense and Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Feb. 1985), pp. 23-27.

¹⁶This is often mentioned as a continuation of the drive for a warm water port dating from Tsarist times, represented by the long standing interest and interference in Iran's internal affairs and efforts to penetrate the Gulf.

¹⁷The argument has been made that Soviet influence among the states of the region may lead to Soviet leverage over oil exports, thereby eroding the Western alliance by threatening supplies to highly dependent Western Europe and Japan and making these states more responsive to Soviet interests.

¹⁸The prospect of the Soviet Union becoming a net importer of oil in the near future remains a clouded and controversial subject. While some alarmists suggest that Soviet oil requirements will at some point drive Moscow to seek to control directly oil-producing states in the Gulf, others point out that it is cheaper and far less risky to purchase oil imports than to invade the region. It is more difficult to dismiss the rejoinder that Soviet moves on the periphery of the Gulf in recent years have been directed at the gradual insertion of Moscow as an ally of regional states in a long-term strategy to gain control of oil resources. This point is discussed below.

any objective assessment of the two superpowers' relative position in the Gulf, the US enjoys a far more secure position at present. In order to redress this imbalance, the Soviet Union needs to encourage and even direct political change, if not actually support military action. But even assuming the above goals are accurate, the question arises of the degree of importance that the Kremlin ascribes to them. In other words, how intently are the Soviets likely to pursue any or all of these goals, and what means are they likely to use to achieve them?

A wide spectrum of opinion exists on Soviet strategy in the Gulf, Southwest Asia, and the entire northwestern quadrant of the Indian Ocean. At the one extreme, Soviet behavior is said to be directed by a "grand design," with each action constituting a step in a plan aimed at gradually achieving total control of the entire Gulf. The other extreme postulates that all recent changes in the region are the sole consequence of internal developments. Among those writers holding views nearer the first extreme are Robert W. Tucker, Albert Wohlstetter, W. Scott Thompson, and George Lenczowski.¹⁹

In general, the "grand design" viewpoint and its variants hold that the Soviets have instigated the recent changes in this area and, where they have not been responsible for instigation, they have benefitted from these changes. The Soviets have manipulated their forces and clients on the periphery of the Gulf in a predetermined "pincer movement" on the Gulf itself. In addition, it frequently is alleged that Soviet advances have been made possible by a lack of American will or by its unwillingness to defend its vital national interests, around the world as well as in the Gulf.²⁰

On the opposing side, various authors challenge the view of omniscient Soviet calculation and execution. They tend to see the primary causes of change as being internal in origin and hold that the Soviets essentially have reacted to favorable developments in the region. In A.Z. Rubinstein's words, "Opportunism, not ideology, impels Soviet policy, which has taken advantage of, but not determined, the setbacks to Western interests."²¹ Fred Halliday asserts that, insofar as change in the region has been due to external causes, the US has been more responsible for any adverse shift in the balance of influence than the Soviet Union, and cites the nature of the American

¹⁹See Albert Wohlstetter, "Meeting the Threat in the Persian Gulf," *Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 1980), pp. 128-188; Robert W. Tucker, *The Purposes of American Power: An Essay on National Security* (New York: Praeger, 1981); W. Scott Thompson, "The Persian Gulf and the Correlation of Forces," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1982), pp. 157-180; and George Lenczowski, "The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf." See also Edward Luttwak, "Cubans in Arabia? Or, the Meaning of Strategy," *Commentary*, Vol. 68, No. 6 (Dec. 1979), pp. 62-66; and David Lynn Price, "Moscow and the Persian Gulf," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Mar.-Apr. 1979), pp. 1-13. The following discussion of where the opposing camps stand relies heavily on Fred Halliday, *Threat From the East? Soviet Policy From Afghanistan and Iran to the Horn of Africa* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1982).

²⁰In his book, J.B. Kelly holds that this lack of resolve, or even "appeasement," is a legacy of British policy (both Labour and Conservative) in the region since World War II, as well as American "perfidy." *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West: A Critical View of the Arabs and Their Oil Policy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson; New York: Basic Books, 1980).

²¹"The Soviet Union and the Arabian Peninsula," *The World Today*, Vol. 35, No. 11 (Nov. 1979), p. 442. See also his "Soviet Persian Gulf Policy," *Middle East Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter 1977-1978), pp. 47-55.

relationship with Pahlavi Iran among other examples.²² He also points out that the Soviets have shown no more ability to "control" their clients in the periphery of the Gulf than they displayed in their previous thirty years of relations with "client states" in the Arab world.

The above debate has risen to the fore as a result of a series of developments in the region over the last decade or so, and particularly those taking place during the tenure of the Carter Administration, which gave rise in the West to an immediate sense of urgency about the future of the Gulf. The first worrying development was the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia, resulting in the replacement of the Haile Selassie monarchy by a Marxist republic. This was followed several years later by, in close order, the Somali invasion of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, the ouster of the Soviets from Somalia and their entrenchment in Ethiopia, and the subsequent dispatch of Cuban troops to defend the Ogaden and later fight against the Eritreans. Even though Somalia, pushed back from the Ogaden, turned to the West for assistance and alliance, the net outcome of events in the Horn of Africa appeared to have worked to Soviet advantage.

The next significant change occurred on the other side of the Red Sea. In June 1978, the president of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) was assassinated by an agent from South Yemen. Two days later, the president of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) was also dead, and his replacement appeared to be considerably more pro-Soviet. Less than a year later, North and South Yemen fought a brief border war, during which the South advanced deep into North Yemeni territory. In reaction to this fighting, the Carter Administration agreed to supply a number of arms to the YAR government, with payment provided by Saudi Arabia, and stationed a carrier task force off the South Yemen coast.²³

A major reason why Washington acted with such alacrity on being faced with what must be seen as a relatively minor disruption seems to have been due to events in Iran immediately previous to this. Midway through 1978, it became obvious that Muhammad Reza Shah's regime was in serious trouble. Despite American efforts to ameliorate the tension, which probably could have had only marginal effect in any case, the Shah left the country in early 1979. Soon after, the monarchy was dissolved and the Islamic Republic of Iran proclaimed. Accusations were freely thrown at that time of who was responsible for "losing" Iran, and fears were widespread that the upheaval in that country easily could spread to its neighbors. The fall of the Shah's regime, the emergence of a new government deeply hostile to the US, and the episode of the American hostages all contributed in no small way to the declining fortunes of the Carter presidency.

²²*Threat from the East?*

²³It is highly dubious that South Yemen deliberately instigated this war; instead, it seems to have been an unintended escalation of recurrent border clashes between the two countries that had occurred at various intervals since the early 1970s. Furthermore, the events of June 1978 have been subject to considerable misinterpretation. While it is undeniable that the YAR president was killed by a faction of South Yemen's political elite, the president in the South was not assassinated in a coup but executed by the state after being tried hurriedly for treason, the outcome of a lengthy power struggle based on many factors besides ideology and personal rivalries. See J.E. Peterson, *Conflict in the Yemens and Superpower Involvement* (Washington: Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Occasional Paper, 1981).

The fourth major development, coming on the heels of the last two, was the Soviet move into Afghanistan at the end of 1979. While the Soviet takeover was far from complete, as widespread and persistent resistance sprang up, and although the action was roundly condemned by most states, it was seen by many in the West as one more successful step in a strategy of encirclement. This Soviet action, coming on top of other disappointing turns in Soviet-American relations, finally drove Carter to charge Moscow with betrayal.

The combination of these developments was interpreted widely as either parts of the "grand design" or as symptoms of a chronic instability in the region by which the Soviet Union had a means of entry. The area seemed to fit the description of "arc of crisis," as coined by Zbigniew Brzezinski, or "crescent of instability." The administration's growing conviction that, at the very least, the Soviet Union easily could exploit these upheavals, and probably had a hand in their development, led to promulgation of the Carter Doctrine, as announced in Carter's State of the Union Address of 23 January 1980:

Any attempt by any outside forces to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.²⁴

In practical terms, this policy hurried the creation of a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), as well as emphasized increased reliance on military cooperation with and arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The Reagan Administration upheld the thrust of the Carter Doctrine, building up RDF capabilities even as it expanded the American warning to Moscow to expect counterattack for any Gulf invasion at a time, place, and manner of American choosing.

The debate over whether the Soviet role in recent developments around the Gulf's periphery was causal or simply exploitive remains unsettled. But it can be said that even if Moscow has attempted to pursue a "grand design" aiming at control of Gulf oilfields, it has yet to bear much fruit in the Arabian Peninsula. The Soviet Union maintains diplomatic relations with only three of the eight states of the Peninsula (compared to seven of the eight for the US).²⁵ Relations with Iraq have cooled considerably in recent years (although the level of arms sales went up as the Iran-Iraq war sputtered on) and the Iranian revolution has not provided Moscow with a secure toehold in that country either. As Karen Dawisha notes, "The presence of troops in Afghanistan may have put the

²⁴Gary Sick, a National Security Council staff member at the time, points out that the doctrine's primary drafter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, made a December 1979 speech in Montreal, in which he outlined the framework of the doctrine and described the Gulf as a "third strategic zone ... of vital importance to the United States and its allies..." (in addition to Western Europe and the Far East). Gary Sick, "The Evolution of U.S. Strategy Toward the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf Regions," in A.Z. Rubinstein, ed., *The Great Game: Rivalry in the Persian Gulf and South Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 74.

²⁵It was announced in September 1985 that the Soviet Union and Oman had agreed to establish diplomatic relations. Oman would be the fourth Peninsula state to have relations with Moscow.

Soviets so near to the Gulf in geographic terms, yet not for many years had Moscow been so far from influencing events in that region."²⁶

South Yemen is the only Peninsula state clearly falling into a Soviet sphere of influence. Yet, even there, changes since 1980 indicate that the degree of Soviet control remains especially limited.²⁷ The Soviet Union continues to provide economic and military assistance to North Yemen but this represents less of a subservience on the part of Sanaa than a continuation of a relationship extending back thirty years and a check on external pressures exerted on North Yemen by its neighbors, Saudi Arabia and South Yemen. The third state with which Moscow enjoyed official relations up to mid-1985 is Kuwait, one of the conservative, Western-oriented emirates of the Gulf. Once again, the existence of diplomatic relations is less an indicator of common outlook than an expression of Kuwait's desire to appear neutral or nonaligned in East-West matters and as a possible check on Iraq in earlier years when Soviet-Iraqi relations were better and Iraq still held its claim to sovereignty over Kuwait.

Elsewhere the Soviet record remains embarrassing. Despite periodic rumors of the possible assumption of official relations with Saudi Arabia (and occasionally with the UAE), this has yet to come to pass nor is it likely to in the foreseeable future. The one surprising breakthrough was the decision in September 1985 by Oman to establish relations with Moscow. The Omani government is, however, only slightly less anti-communist than Saudi Arabia and is the GCC state most militarily cooperative with the US; establishment of official (non-resident) ties may be related to the normalization of relations with South Yemen. Leftist underground movements in the Peninsula apparently have lost much of what little steam they had and, in any case, were far more amenable to guidance from Baghdad (which periodically has purged its own Communists) than from Moscow.

In conclusion, few if any developments in the Arabian Peninsula in recent years which might be interpreted as worrisome for Gulf security appear to have been instigated by the Soviets, nor have they produced any unambiguously advantageous results for Moscow. The record of Soviet involvement in the Arabian Peninsula over the past two decades or more indicates that any possible benefits to the USSR have remained minimal and static. There have been no dramatic breakthroughs in the reduction of American or Western influence since the British departure from Aden (hardly

²⁶"Moscow's Moves in the Direction of the Gulf – So Near and Yet So Far," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (1980-1981), p. 219. The same or similar points have been raised in her "Soviet Decision-Making and the Middle East: The 1973 October War and the 1980 Gulf War," *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 57, No. 1 (1980-1981), pp. 43-59; Francis Fukuyama, *The Soviet Threat to the Persian Gulf* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, March 1981); Michael Collins Dunn, "Soviet Interests in the Arabian Peninsula: The Aden Pact and Other Paper Tigers," *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 8 (Spring 1984), pp. 92-98; Stephen Page, "Soviet Policy Toward the Arabian Peninsula," in Philip H. Stoddard, ed., *The Middle East in the 1980s: Problems and Prospects* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1983), pp. 88-98; and idem, "Moscow and the Arabian Peninsula," *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 8 (Spring 1984), pp. 83-91.

²⁷In May 1980, 'Abd al-Fattah Isma'īl, the pro-Soviet PDRY president since 1978 was forced to resign and subsequent left for exile in Moscow. His successor, 'Ali Nasir Muhammad, always has been seen as a relative "moderate" or pragmatist, rather than a rigid ideologue, and has shifted the country's foreign policy toward rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and its bitter enemy of Oman, as well as ordering the departure of most East German and many Cuban "advisors." For a thorough discussion of Moscow's relations with North and South Yemen, see Stephen Page, *The Soviet Union and the Yemens: Influence in Asymmetrical Relationships* (New York: Praeger, 1985).

engineered by Moscow). No new Soviet client states have emerged since South Yemen became independent in 1967. Moscow has succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with only one Peninsula state since Aden's independence – and a staunchly Western-allied state at that – thereby belatedly achieving equality with archrival China. Finally, for well into the foreseeable future, if the Soviet Union wants Gulf oil, it looks as though it will have to resign itself to buying it just as the rest of the world does.

EVALUATING REGIONAL THREATS

The outbreak and continuing, seemingly inexhaustible, nature of the Iran-Iraq war illustrates the all-too-present danger of regional threats to Gulf security. As the paradigm demonstrates, there are several different kinds of regional tensions. Conflict over borders has been a recurrent theme in the recent history of the Peninsula, particularly as modern nation-states have emerged there and oil deposits have made delineation of precise boundaries crucial. Notable examples of this kind of dispute in recent decades would include: (1) the Saudi incursion into the Buraimi Oasis in the early 1950s; (2) Iraqi claims on Kuwait; (3) the controversy concerning sovereignty over the Shatt al-'Arab; (4) the Saudi-Kuwaiti dispute over ownership of the tiny islands of Qaru and Umm al-Maradim (an unresolved leftover from the division of their Neutral Zone); (5) the Bahraini-Qatar dispute over ownership of the Hawar Islands; and (6) near-clashes over the Oman-Fujayra boundary (as well as the numerous disputes among the members of the UAE).

The Iran-Iraq war, of course, represents a major step beyond border clashes. A complex mix of factors contributed to the outbreak of full-scale hostilities between Iran and Iraq in September 1980. In part, a contributing climate of antagonism may have stemmed from the longstanding rivalry between the two "great powers" of the Gulf for dominance in the region. Ancient mutual suspicions between Arabs and Persians (as illustrated in recent years by the bitter contest over whether the Gulf should be known as Persian or Arabian) constitutes an overlay on this geopolitical competition, as does the Sunni-Shi'i schism to some degree (although nationalism appears to engender stronger claims on political loyalties).²⁸

The question of rights in the jointly shared Shatt al-'Arab waterway provides one of the more immediate causes of the war. A 1937 treaty giving Iraq (a British client state at the time) control over the entire water channel, except in a few locations, was sorely remembered by Iran. The Shah unilaterally abrogated the treaty in 1969 and asserted Iranian claims to an equal division of the main channel by threats of force. This situation was formally recognized by Baghdad through the 1975

²⁸The most thorough treatment of the background to Iranian-Iraqi relations is contained in Jasim M. Abdulghani, *Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis* (London: Croom Helm; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). Other sources discussing the causes of the war include: Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War: Islam Embattled* (New York: Praeger, 1982; Washington Papers, No. 92); Tareq Y. Ismael, ed., *Iraq and Iran: Roots of Conflict* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, eds., *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts* (New York: Praeger, 1983); and M.S. El Azhary, ed., *The Iran-Iraq War: An Historical, Economic and Political Analysis* (London: Croom Helm; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

Algiers accord and a subsequent treaty between the two countries, in return for which Iran ceased its support of Kurdish dissidence within Iraq.

The final and most important factor was the Iranian revolution, which added a new ideological dimension to all the existing forms of competition. In some ways, it resembled the impact of the Iraqi revolution, which first disturbed the quiet, conservative waters of the Gulf in 1958. That revolution had introduced unwelcome pressures and the threat of subversion against the other states of the Gulf with the goal of overthrowing them all. Then in 1979, a new ideological threat appeared. Its goal was and remains the complete socio-political transformation of all the Gulf states, and the attempted subversion of its neighbors was prominent among its early methods.

The initial Iraqi attack on Iran seems to have been predicated both on defensive grounds and on pure opportunism. Iraq was legitimately provoked by Iran's broadcasts of anti-regime propaganda into Iraq and its considerable support for Iraqi dissidents. The two countries had been engaged in an irregular campaign of border skirmishes and cross-frontier shelling for nearly a year. In Iraqi eyes, the surprise and shock of a successful attack would cause the collapse of the fragile revolutionary regime in Tehran and thus topple Khomeini and his supporters. Such a strategy promised to eliminate a serious threat from a hostile neighbor, to cut the ground out from under internal Iraqi dissidents, to enhance Iraqi President Saddam Husayn's standing among the Gulf's rulers and in the Arab world, and to solve the border problem by simply occupying the disputed territory. That the initial drive into Iran failed to accomplish either the political goal of bringing down the Iranian regime or the military objective of crushing the Iranian army was thus both a political miscalculation and a military failure.

Clearly, the Iraqi attack launched on 23 September 1980 was intended to be of a limited military nature. Rather than gathering maximum force in one place and launching a sustained drive across the strategically key province of Khuzestan toward Iran's oilfields, Iraqi forces simultaneously attacked at a variety of points along the length of the border. The Iraqis failed to knock out the principal military installations in Khuzestan, nor was there any serious attempt to take or destroy the oilfields. It was conceived as essentially a land-based campaign and Iraq made little attempt to carry the fighting to the air or sea. As a consequence, once the initial objectives were attained, Iraqi forces lost their momentum and the advance ground to an inconclusive halt.²⁹

The key Khuzestani city of Khorramshahr fell only after prolonged hand-to-hand combat in its streets and the oil and industrial center of Abadan was never captured. The Iraqi failure to interdict Iranian supply lines to Abadan and to knock out the Iranian air force when it had the advantage of surprise proved to be nearly fatal. By mid-November 1980, the war had deteriorated into stalemate, with neither side able to advance its positions. The Iraqis seemed content to dig in where they were and wait out the winter; the Iranians were still too disorganized to establish an effective counter-offensive.

²⁹Principal sources on the military aspects of the war include Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War*; William O. Staudenmaier, "A Strategic Analysis," in Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, *The Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 27-50; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), esp. chs. 16 and 17; and the annual *Strategic Surveys* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies), from 1980-81 through 1984-85. The accounts of Staudenmaier and Cordesman, slightly altered, also appeared in *Parameters* and *Armed Forces Journal* respectively.

Eventually, however, the momentum shifted from Iraq to Iran. The first thrusts in the long-awaited Iranian counteroffensive took place in 1981 but the major campaign which drove the Iraqis into retreat did not unfold until early 1982. By its end, the Abadan siege had been lifted, Iraqis pushed out of their positions in northern Khuzestan, and Khorramshahr recaptured. By the end of May 1982, the Iranian offensive had achieved a clear victory and most of the territory lost to Iraq in the initial attack of 1980 had been regained. The looming question for Iran was whether to pressure Iraq to sue for peace or to invade.

While the Iranian counterattack had succeeded in liberating most of Khuzestan from Iraqi occupation, it did not bring peace. Partially, this was because enclaves of Iranian territory still remained under Iraq's control. Furthermore, the pre-war boundary questions over the Shatt al-'Arab and elsewhere were still unsettled. While the Iraqi leadership, reeling from its reverses on the battlefield, was willing to withdraw from all occupied territory and accept the principle of war reparations (which would have to be paid by the Gulf monarchies in any case), the inflexible Iranian demand for the ouster of Saddam Husayn (and even the entire Ba'thi leadership of Iraq) virtually prevented any negotiations. This hardline stance seemed to be dictated by the prevailing insecurity and competition within Iranian domestic politics, along with Ayatollah Khomeini's strong enmity directed toward Saddam Husayn personally.

At the end of the May 1982 offensive, the position of the Iraqi government was perilous, both economically and militarily. Saddam Husayn had no choice but to withdraw all his troops from Iranian territory, announce a unilateral cease-fire, and hope that Iran would agree to negotiations. Iran, however, was unwilling to negotiate a settlement to the war, particularly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 raised Iranian revolutionary spirit to a fever pitch. The inflexibility and vindictiveness displayed by the Tehran regime, its pan-Islamic revolutionary ideology, and the belief that it had broken the back of the Iraqi military machine all contributed to the decision to invade Iraq. The result was a miscalculation rivalling Baghdad's earlier decision to launch the war.

In mid-July and early August 1982, Iran launched a number of "human wave" offensives at Iraqi territory with only minimal success and at a tremendous cost in human life. Instead of a series of quick victories as occurred in the 1982 fighting, Iran found itself bogged down in a static war along the border, short of necessary equipment and trained troops, and reduced to sending thousands of its young men to near-certain death in attacks against well-emplaced Iraqi defenses. Some bits of territory had been gained but the effort to stretch Iraqi forces out along nearly 400 miles of fighting had produced no significant benefits. In addition, attempts to raise a Shi'i fifth column in Iraq were no more successful than Iraq had been in gaining the support of the predominantly Arab population of Khuzestan. After two years of fighting, the war had reached a permanent stage of stalemate. Rough parity emerged between the two combatants, whose capabilities were offset by balancing disadvantages. Iran's so-called "final offensives" in 1983 further confirmed the inability of either side to gain the upper hand in the war.

The continuing stalemate on the battlefield was repeatedly confirmed through 1984 and 1985. Given the military parity between the two combatants and Iran's intransigence regarding negotiations, except with conditions impossible for Iraq to accept, the war simply lumbered on. The next phase was one of "trench warfare" along the two countries' borders and successive Iraqi attempts to raise the stakes and thereby force Iran toward the negotiating table. This has been a risky

game which has not had the results Iraq intended. Instead, Iraqi actions have prompted Iranian counter-escalation, threatening to expand the area of war to the Arab littoral of the Gulf and to possibly hinder traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. And so the war grinds on, adding to its terrible toll in human life and wasted opportunities.³⁰

It may well be that this particular war, with the stubborn refusal of one of the combatants to enter negotiations or even agree to a cease-fire, its trench warfare, and its repeated inconclusive offensives, is very atypical of war scenarios in the Gulf – as well as the Third World in general.³¹ The very size of the two warring states and their military establishments indicates that such a war could not occur between other countries of the Gulf littoral (as evidenced by the Yemens' periodic bouts). Nevertheless, this does not mean that this stalemated war is not without wider ramifications. Indeed, periodically it has threatened to expand and draw in other participants. One scenario posits an Iraqi collapse, with the installation of an Iranian puppet regime in Baghdad, followed by a drive on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and with Iranian "volunteers" perhaps Marching across the Nafud Desert to Syria and Lebanon.

Considerable excitement was generated in the fall of 1983 and again in early 1984 by Iraq's acquisition of French-supplied Super Etendard aircraft, equipped with Exocet missiles, and its threat to attack the Iranian oil terminal on Kharg Island. This was matched by Iranian threats, if the former were carried out, to close off the Strait of Hormuz. Such an attempt undoubtedly would cause the US and other Western powers to deploy forces or take other action in the strait to prevent its closure. It does seem, though, that Iran's execution of this threat would be only as a desperate last resort, since it would mean economic suicide for that country as well as for the Arab producers in the Gulf.

The "tanker war" of spring and summer 1984, when Iraq for the first time began to employ the Super Etendards and Exocets against shipping bound to and from Kharg Island, also threatened to entangle the other Gulf states in active hostilities. While the US made a point of warning Iran on several occasions against interference with shipping and publicly sought to persuade Saudi Arabia and the UAE to allow it to station USAF fighters in GCC airfields, the GCC states played it very cautiously, directing tanker traffic to new channels close by the Arab littoral. Predictably, the American actions provoked angry words and additional threats from Tehran, without effecting the denouement of this twist in the war. By mid-summer, it appeared that Saudi cautiousness and

³⁰More recent accounts of the war include: Richard Cottam, "The Iran-Iraq War," *Current History*, Vol. 83, No. 4898 (Jan. 1984), pp. 9-12, 40-41; Edmund Ghareeb, "The Forgotten War," *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 5 (Summer 1983), pp. 59-75; Godfrey Jansen, "The Gulf War: The Contest Continues," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (Oct. 1984), pp. 950-962; Thomas McNaughter and William Quandt, *Oil and the Outcome of the Iran-Iraq War* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Energy Research Associates, 1984); and Michael Sterner, "The Iran-Iraq War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 128-143. See also the articles in *MERIP Reports*, No. 125-126 (July-Sept. 1984); *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 9 (Summer 1984); and *Orbis*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Fall 1984).

³¹See Shahram Chubin, "La guerre irano-irakienne: Paradoxes et particularites," *Politique Etrangère*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (June 1982), pp. 381-394.

minimal response to Iranian provocations had paid off: rather than escalating, attacks on tankers eased off, notwithstanding the downing of an Iranian F-4 Phantom by Saudi fighters.³²

Over 80 ships were attacked between January 1984 and mid-1985. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the tanker war was negligible, however, as it prompted no change in either belligerent's policy and oil importers' attention tended to wander during the continuing oil glut. Similarly, the outbreak of a series of bombing attacks on each side's major cities in early 1985 died out after a few weeks and a new round of escalation in the summer, involving a series of Iraqi attacks on the oil facilities of Kharg Island itself, had little permanent impact. A major Iranian offensive in March 1985, which had temporarily reached the Tigris River and momentarily breached Iraq's strategic Basra-Baghdad highway, failed for lack of logistical support and tactical mistakes. New Iraqi pipelines, scheduled to open in the mid-1980s, threatened to erode Iran's economic advantage and to move the belligerents closer to parity. The apt comparison has been often made with World War I, where the fighting settled down into years of bloody trench warfare. In the Iran-Iraq war, however, there seems little likelihood of breaking out of the trenches.

The notion of ideological differences, as raised in inter-Yemeni relations and the Iran-Iraq war, points to the possibility of ideological subversion, sponsored and/or supported by one state against its neighbor(s). There are a number of examples of this sort: (1) the rebellion in Oman's southern province of Dhufar, where logistical assistance and refuge was provided by neighboring South Yemen; (2) the activities of the National Democratic Front in North Yemen, aided by South Yemen, as well as the opposition groups operating from North Yemen against Aden; (3) the 1981 attempted *coup d'État* in Bahrain, apparently organized and supplied by Iran; (4) Iraqi support in years past of movements seeking to overthrow the governments of various GCC states as well as the PDRY (to which may be added Libyan intrigues against some of these same states); and (5) Saudi intrigue in both Yemens. The first two examples reflect Marxist-Leninist goals, the third a radical Islamic orientation, the fourth pan-Arab socialist outlooks, and the fifth a conservative/traditionalist motivation.

Existing ethnic, sectarian, and other divisions hold the potential for future conflict between states, or may create a temptation to interfere in a state weakened by the ravages of such cleavages. The types of schisms listed in the paradigm seem self-explanatory. Iraqi allusions to the ancient battle of al-Qadisiya provide a clear indication of the continued importance of Arab-Persian hostility as well as deep socio-religious animosities between Sunnis and Shi'is (see [Table 4.3](#)). It should be kept in mind, as well, that the Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shi'i schisms are only the principal ones in the Gulf, and that important disaffected ethnic minorities include the Kurds, Baluch, South Asians, Palestinians, and others.

³²Both Iraq and Iran apparently saw the tanker war as a way to increase pressure on the other side without risking uncontrollable escalation of hostilities. The GCC states were caught in the middle, undoubtedly as both Baghdad and Tehran wished. It seems safe to assume that the decline in Iraqi attacks on Kharg-bound tankers – and consequently in Iranian counterstrikes on Arab shipping – owed much to GCC self-interested persuasion, as well as to the ineffectiveness of the Iraqi attacks in deterring international shipping to Kharg. On this episode of the war, see U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *War in the Gulf*; a Staff Report, August 1984 (Washington: USGPO, 1984); and Frederick W. Axelgard, "The 'Tanker War' in the Gulf: Background and Repercussions," *Middle East Insight*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (1984), pp. 26-33.

EVALUATING INTERNAL THREATS

On the surface, at least, an internal threat to Gulf security – i.e. political change within one of the states of the region – may be as likely to appear as a regional threat. Yet it is far more difficult to predict and undoubtedly even more problematic for outsiders to deal with. The development of the revolution in Iran led many observers in the West to voice their fears that Saudi Arabia and the smaller states of the Gulf might be next. In support of this contention, they cited such factors as:

- ✓ the influx of uncontrolled wealth into these countries;
- ✓ the impact of rapid socioeconomic change;
- ✓ the existence of fragile, "anachronistic," monarchical forms of government, based on ruling families and lacking political participation; and
- ✓ growing social and ethnic schisms.

In particular, opponents of the F-15 and AWACS sales to Saudi Arabia brought up these arguments, along with reference to political unrest in that country's Eastern Province and the takeover of the Great Mosque in Mecca. The inherent instability of Saudi Arabia was implicitly confirmed by the Reagan "codicil" to the Carter Doctrine, which held that the US would never allow Saudi Arabia to become another Iran.

But this pessimism over the future of the Arab states of the Gulf, where not motivated by simple hostility, ignores a number of fundamental differences between Saudi Arabia (and the other GCC states) and Iran. These include:

- ✓ *The nature of leadership:* Iran demonstrated rigid, one-man rule under the Shah while Saudi Arabia is ruled by a large ruling family, which in turn is based on principles of consensual tribal leadership. The manner in which the regimes came to power: Reza Shah originally usurped power through the use of force and both he and his son ultimately retained power through repression, while modern Saudi Arabia was created partly through military unification but even more by the skillful building of alliances by King 'Abd al-'Aziz.
- ✓ *Differences in political participation:* Muhammad Reza Shah ruled in an imperially aloof manner and rejected any advice outside his immediate family, while major decisions within the Al Sa'ud must represent consensus on the part of a fairly large inner circle and general approval by the rest of the family and even to some extent the general body of Saudi citizens.³³
- ✓ *Different attitudes to religion:* the Shah sought to downplay Islam, reaching to Iran's pre-Islamic past for nationalist symbols, and adopted a antagonistic policy toward Iran's

³³As John A. Shaw and David E. Long have written, "Saudi decision making in general is based on two traditional concepts: *shura*, or consultation, and *ijma'*, or consensus. The role of the king, in this context, is to guide the consultation to a favorable consensus on which to base decisions." *Saudi Arabian Modernization: The Impact of Change on Stability* (New York: Praeger, 1982; The Washington Papers, No. 89), p. 60. The *majlis* constitutes another traditional form of participation, by which the Saudi king, crown prince, governors, and other officials hold regular audiences open to all Saudis where opinions and grievances may be expressed freely and petitions presented for direct action.

religious leaders; on the other hand, the impetus for the creation of the modern Saudi state derives from the eighteenth-century alliance between the Al Sa'ud and the religious reformer Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, and the present state acts as guardian of Islam.

- ✓ *Differences in population size:* Saudi Arabia's far smaller population has allowed it to provide for universal employment and equitable distribution of oil income more easily than Iran.
- ✓ *Opposite experiences in political attitudes of the population:* the Shah's policies eventually resulted in the alienation of nearly every class, which in turn fed growing repression, while Saudi Arabia has been able both to maintain tribal alliances and to co-opt the emerging "middle classes" into supporting the regime by offering limited direct participation in the formulation of policies from within the government.

This is not to say that significant opposition to the present Saudi regime, or the regimes of the other GCC states, is impossible. Even though it appears that these governments have been very capable in adapting to rapidly changing requirements and expectations in the last several decades, the changes required in the future will be even greater and there is no certainty that present political systems will be able to continue to adapt successfully.

One postulation of the paradigm, "Threats to Gulf Security," is concerned with the possible replacement of existing governments (III.A.). At the present time, the likelihood of an extraconstitutional change in a GCC government being initiated by a member of the ruling family seems relatively remote. The last attempts in this manner were made in Qatar and Sharjah in 1972.³⁴ While a greater possibility of a coup from within the power-holding elite holds true for Iraq, under present circumstances such a coordinated effort seems likely only in the event of a military collapse. Even then, a successful coup would very likely involve Ba'athist military officers acting solely to remove Saddam Husayn and probably not in order to change Iraq's basic political orientation.

The Yemens present a different case. The poverty of the YAR, the ruggedness of the countryside, and the strength of the tribes all combine to make the authority of the central government particularly tenuous. In addition, historical factors work against the legitimacy of the political system. Military *coups d'État* have been a prominent feature of YAR political life, and the present regime is as vulnerable to being overthrown as its predecessors. Political leadership in the PDRY also has been difficult to maintain for any length of time, with forced changes of the men at the top occurring in 1969, 1971, 1978, and 1980. All of these changes, however, occurred within the elite framework of the National Liberation Front (the nucleus of the present ruling Yemeni Socialist Party) and have tended to tighten the ideological orientation of the elite and therefore the state.

The possibility of the emergence of opposition to existing governments occurring within the GCC (III.B. of the paradigm) seems remote. As noted earlier, repression is minimal within these political systems, as it is in the YAR (there largely because the state has little capacity to carry out such policies). The YAR until recently has seen widespread dissidence orchestrated by the rebel National Democratic Front, based on such causes as ideological differences with the Sanaa

³⁴The assassination of King Faysal of Saudi Arabia in 1975 was the act of a single individual who, even though a member of the Al Sa'ud, appeared to be motivated by personal and not political reasons.

government, more personal opposition to present leaders, and the resentment by the Shafi'i (Sunni) half of the population of Zaydi domination. The longevity of the 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih regime in the YAR speaks for a certain amount of emerging stability. There was some active in-country opposition to the PDRY regime following the execution of the president in 1978, but this appears to have withered away. In many respects, the potential foundations of opposition to the singularly narrow ideological focus of the Aden government were eliminated during the 1963-1967 struggle for independence.

In Iraq, however, conditions seem to be much more fertile for organized and troublesome opposition to the Baghdad government. Partly, this is due to the existing sectarian and ethnic divisions within the country. The Shi'a of Iraq comprise approximately 60% of the total population yet receive less than their proportional share of political and economic benefits. Iran has had some success in stirring up Shi'i discontent through the Da'wa party and its offshoots. The Kurds of the north have long sought the establishment of an independent state and, while quiescent at the present, Kurdish resistance to the Iraqi government may reappear at any time in the near future. Furthermore, strictly ideological opposition, particularly from the Iraqi Communist Party, has been prevalent in the past and eliminated only through draconian measures. It too may resurface again.

As already mentioned in the case of Iraq, it should be noted that ethnic and sectarian schisms exist within many of these countries, as well as between them. While Iraq represents the most extreme case of fragmentation among the Arab states of the Gulf, significant divisions are also present in Saudi Arabia (with a sizeable Shi'i minority in the Eastern Province, and strong geographical identities present in the Hijaz, Jabal Shammar and 'Asir regions); Kuwait (a sizeable Shi'i minority, many of whom are also Persian – which has contributed to recent tensions); Bahrain (70% Shi'a, who generally are poorer off than the Sunni population, which also dominates in politics); the UAE (with a large number of minorities, including both Arab and Persian Shi'a, as well as armed forces composed in the majority of Omanis); Oman (with a nearly equal division between adherents of the Sunni and Ibadi sects, a substantial minority of Baluch, and an important split between coast and interior); and the YAR (also with a nearly equal division between Zaydis and Sunnis, which has far more important political implications than the sectarian schism of Oman). So far, none of these schisms has demonstrated any real likelihood of moving beyond simmering grievances to open rebellion. This is true even of the Shi'a of Iraq, despite direct provocation from Iran.³⁵

The category of policy changes within existing governments (III.C.) is the obverse of the paradigm's US policies (I.D.). That is to say, this category represents a threat to Gulf security according to US perceptions. Such perceptions would derive from an adverse reaction to policy shifts on the part of one or more littoral states because of a threat to Gulf security in the latter's perception. Presumably, such a US-perceived threat would have to be of considerable provocation and duration to force Washington to take hostile action and initiate use of military force to secure control of the oilfields, since both military and political risks undoubtedly will be very high.

³⁵The 1981 *coup* attempt in Bahrain was thwarted at an early stage, yet there is no evidence to support a contention that the plotters represented the views of a large section of Bahraini Shi'a.

It seems unlikely that such a provocation will be presented through issues of oil pricing or production levels. First, the ability to alter radically either price or production has been severely reduced by the circumstances of global "oil glut," which is likely to continue well into the 1990s. Second, the GCC states are the least likely members of OPEC to act rashly, since they have especially strong ties to the US and the West (and have invested heavily there, which would be put at risk) and because they are mostly capital-surplus states and have less need to act as price hawks.

The "oil weapon" (IILC.2.) presumably would be activated only under conditions of a new, full-scale, Arab-Israeli war. But even then, a genuine, concerted effort at embargo or production cutbacks is not guaranteed. The GCC states were extremely reluctant to take action during the 1973 war (and in fact may have allowed as much oil to be lifted during the embargo as before); in 1985 or in the future, they have even more to lose economically and politically by such an action. In addition, assuming that there would still be an oil glut if and when another Arab-Israeli war occurs, use of the "oil weapon" would be far less effective than in 1973-1974, whether in practical terms or psychologically.

Still, assuming that the use of the oil weapon is a possibility, an American political or diplomatic response would be far more effective, working to bring an end to Arab-Israeli conflict if it has already broken out or to prevent its occurrence by seeking a permanent peaceful resolution. While the possible American invasion of Arab oilfields excites imaginations in the Arab world and among an American fringe, such an action is considered infeasible under all but the most extreme circumstances because of its exorbitant political costs and considerable military difficulties.

Table 4.1. US Interests in the Gulf in the 1980s

Strategic Interests

- I. Guarantee continued access to Gulf oil
- II. Resist Soviet expansionism in the Gulf

Tactical Objectives

1. Develop the capability for military intervention in the Gulf, through:
 - a. Creating a viable military force for use in the Gulf
 - b. Continuing naval deployments in the Gulf and northern Arabian Sea
 - c. Continuing efforts to gain contingency access to regional military facilities
2. Deter Soviet military attack and contain Soviet political influence in the Gulf, through:
 - a. Stressing US resolve to defend region through use of military force, if necessary
 - b. Preventing Soviet penetration of Iran
 - c. Limiting Soviet influence in region to existing clients in the PDRY, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan
 - d. Encouraging Iraqi and North Yemeni movement toward the West
3. Support the status quo in friendly states of the region, through:
 - a. Continuing supportive relationship with Saudi Arabia, including:
 - i. strong economic ties
 - ii. US participation in Saudi development efforts
 - iii. enhanced US military presence in and ties to Saudi Arabia
 - b. Continued cooperation on policies regarding the Middle East, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict
 - c. Continuing supportive relationship with the other GCC states, especially in economic field and continued minor arms sales
4. Promote stability in the region through:
 - a. Continuing efforts for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict
 - b. Supporting peaceful resolution of the Iran-Iraq war while providing low-profile security assistance to GCC states

Table 4.2. Threats to Gulf Security

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| <p>I. EXTERNAL THREATS (Arising from factors external to the immediate Gulf littoral)</p> <p>A. Direct Soviet Assault on the Gulf and Approaches</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Invasion through Iran to Khuzistan2. Aerial attack on oil installations (fields, pipelines, terminals)3. Air and/or sea attack on sea lines of communication (e.g. on Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandab, or Cape Route) <p>B. Indirect Soviet Attack on Gulf through Manipulation of Regional Clients</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pressure from Afghanistan on Iran and/or Pakistan2. PDRY attack on Oman, YAR, or Saudi Arabia3. Ethiopian attack on Somalia, Djibouti, or Sudan <p>C. Israel</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. New Arab-Israeli war2. Israeli moves perceived as "provocations" (e.g. action on West Bank, new offensive in Lebanon, aerial raids on Arab territory, aerial or naval confrontation with Saudi Arabia) <p>D. United States Policies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Unilateral military deployment to secure oilfields (direct invasion)2. Unilateral military action against a Gulf state or states (similar to Iranian hostage rescue attempt)3. Collaborative relationship with Israel (perception of US approval of and even participation in Israeli actions)4. Economic actions (e.g. import/export or investment restrictions) <p>II. REGIONAL THREATS (Arising from the interaction of two or more Gulf states)</p> <p>A. Armed Conflict</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Border tension and clashes2. Full-scale war <p>B. Subversion Directed By One State Against Another or Others</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Radical Islamic movements2. Marxist-Leninist movements3. Pan-Arab socialist movements4. Conservative/tribal opposition |
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C. Exacerbation of Existing Ethnic, Religious, and/or Social Divisions

1. Arab-Iranian
2. Sunni-Shi'I
3. Ethnic irredentist/separatist movements (e.g. Kurds or Baluch)
4. Yemeni-Saudi tensions

III. **INTERNAL THREATS** (Arising from Factors Within a Single Gulf State)

A. Replacement of Existing Governments

1. Change of government within existing ruling family or power-holding elite
2. Coup by secular left
3. Coup by Islamic radicals

B. Opposition to Existing Governments (deterioration of authority)

1. Tensions due to political repression
2. Isolated attacks on government (sabotage or terrorism)
3. Insurrection (due to ethnic, sectarian, or ideological divisions)
4. Civil war or other absence of effective state authority or control

C. Policy Changes in Existing Governments (conflicting with US policy or interests)

1. Economic issues of oil pricing and production levels
2. "Oil weapon" (the political use of oil supplies to influence or change US policy)

Table 4.3 Shi'a Population in the Gulf

<i>(in thousands)</i>	Total Population	Citizen Population	Number of Shi'a	Percentage of Shi'a Citizens
Qatar	255	70	11	16
Oman	950	700	28	4
UAE	1,100	250	45	18
Kuwait	1,370	570	137	24
Bahrain	360	240	168	70
Saudi Arabia	8,500	5,500	440	8
Iraq	14,400	13,500	8,100	60
Iran	42,000	40,000	36,800	92
Totals	68,935	60,830	45,729	75

Source: James A. Bill, "Resurgent Islam in the Persian Gulf," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Fall 1984), p. 120.