

QUICK By JAN AUSTIN & BANNING GARRETT STRIKE

IN A SECRET FIVE-PAGE ORDER issued last August, President Carter directed the Pentagon to form a rapid reaction mobile force for quick strikes in Third World crisis spots, primarily the Persian Gulf. The order, which sets overall guidelines for U. S. defense policy, is known as Presidential Directive 18. The Pentagon still has not given out any details about the mobile strike force, but from press leaks and interviews with informed military analysts, the following picture emerges: the strike force will consist of about 100,000 troops, including two army airborne divisions and a marine amphibious force. In addition, the Pentagon has been directed to beef up its strategic airlift and sealift capacity so that it can quickly transport these forces to a potential combat zone. The strike force will apparently be backed up by two to four aircraft carrier task forces and by up to three air force air wings, totaling about 200 planes.

American interest in ensuring Western access to Persian Gulf oil is nothing new, but in the 1970s that task has become vastly more complicated and dangerous. Since 1970, U. S. dependence on Gulf oil has increased sharply. At the same time, the 1973 oil embargo and the quadrupling of oil prices have dramatized the vulnerability of Western oil supplies to economic and political decisions of the 13-member Organi-

PRESIDENT CARTER HAS ORDERED THE PENTAGON TO SET UP A THREE- DIVISION, HIGHLY MOBILE FORCE. WHY?

zation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Energy scenarios for the coming decade vary widely, but the Carter administration predicts that there will be an energy crisis in the 1980s, leading to even more acute concern over access to Persian Gulf supplies. One of the chief documents supporting the administration's assessment is a CIA study prepared last year. The study, which energy experts hotly debate, predicts that world energy demand will outstrip supply by 1985. It also assumes that the Soviet Union will become a net oil importer by 1985, joining the world scramble for Persian Gulf supplies. Although this assessment of Soviet demand is widely challenged—reportedly even by Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger himself—it is frequently cited by those who argue that the United States must expect Soviet thrusts in the Persian Gulf and be prepared to counter them.

The Carter administration's new focus on the Persian Gulf and its deci-

sion to prepare a large mobile strike force for possible direct intervention there and elsewhere represent major departures in U. S. planning. But these policies have received virtually no attention or questioning outside military circles. Staff members of key congressional committees say they have received no details of the Pentagon's plans. No congressional hearings have been held on the subject. Yet the administration's plans raise a number of serious and, as yet, unanswered questions.

The most obvious question, but one which the Carter administration has not satisfactorily answered, concerns the targets of American military actions. Against whom is the United States preparing to intervene in the Persian Gulf?

One possibility, widely debated in 1974–1975, is that the United States would seize the Arab oil fields, not from Soviet invaders, but from the conservative producers like Saudi Arabia. After the Arab oil embargo, a spate of articles appeared in the American media discussing—and even advocating—the use of U. S. military force to take over Arab oil fields to prevent further OPEC price increases. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger lent official credibility to the idea when he told *Business Week* in January 1975 that “although it would be considered only in the gravest emergency,” he could not rule out the use of military force against oil producers.

These discussions drew concerned and angry reactions from European nations, especially West Germany, from moderate Arab governments with

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whom the United States was trying to strengthen relations, and even from the American public. A Gallup poll showed that only one American in 10 favored intervention in the Middle East—even in the event of a new Arab oil embargo. Since then, seizing the oil fields from the Arabs has been a less popular topic of public discussion, but it can be reasonably assumed that American planning for intervention in the Persian Gulf still includes this contingency.

TODAY, OFFICIALS POR-tray American military intervention in the Persian Gulf as a necessary option in the event of a direct Soviet threat to the region. The exact nature of that threat is often left vague or presented in simple but graphic images of Soviet seizure of oil fields or a Soviet attack on tankers in the sea lanes leading from the Red Sea or Persian Gulf.

Yet a direct Soviet threat to the oil fields or to the sea lanes seems one of the least likely of all potential conflict scenarios for the Persian Gulf. A Soviet attempt to sever the lifeline of NATO and Japan would be a major act of war—quite possibly the opening shot in

World War III. Alternatively, it could be a secondary action taken in the midst of a world war to deprive the Western allies of energy needed to fuel their forces. But this presumes a drawn-out, World War II-style conflict, which is difficult to imagine in this nuclear age. If the Soviet goal were to acquire Persian Gulf oil for its own needs, destroying the oil fields—or even an action that would risk destroying them—would seem counter-productive.

It may well be that American military planners do not really anticipate a direct Soviet attack and are more concerned that failing to counter Soviet capabilities would be perceived by friend and foe alike as a sign of U. S. weakness. According to this analysis, a perception of American weakness would lead Persian Gulf countries to be more accommodating to Soviet energy needs, if indeed Moscow were to require large amounts of Persian Gulf oil in the coming decade. In this analysis, the Soviet threat is political, not military, and is a challenge to the West's special access to Persian Gulf oil. American planners may believe that creating a mobile strike force will enhance U. S. credibility and deter both the Soviets and the major producing states from entering

into a special political and security relationship such as the United States now enjoys with Saudi Arabia.

Far more likely than either of these scenarios would be United States intervention in the Persian Gulf to protect a key ally, like the shah of Iran or the Saudi royal family, from a radical internal or external threat. Such a radical challenge might well have the backing of the Soviets—either directly or indirectly through a Soviet ally in the region. The success of Cuban forces and Soviet aid in assuring the MPLA's victory over pro-Western factions in Angola and Ethiopia's victory in the Ogaden desert have heightened fears in Washington of a similar situation in the Persian Gulf.

The United States has no formal defense treaty with Iran. However, in a toast during the shah's visit to Washington last November, President Carter assured the visiting monarch that "our military alliance is unshakeable. . . . We look upon Iran's strength as an extension of our own strength and Iran looks upon our strength as an extension of theirs." The exact scope and nature of this commitment is unclear. American officials have stated that Washington has a "tacit obligation" to come to the aid of Iran if it is attacked by the



Soviet Union. But is the United States committed to defend the shah if he should intervene against a radical neighbor like Iraq or attempt to prevent a radical triumph in a country like Kuwait? A Senate report, issued by Senator Henry Jackson's (D-Wash.) Energy and Natural Resources Committee last December, hints at such an obligation: "If Iran is called upon to intervene in the internal affairs of any Gulf state," it says, "it must be recognized in advance by the United States that this is the role for which Iran is being primed and blame cannot be assigned for Iran's carrying out an implied assignment." It is also uncertain whether the United States has committed itself to defending the shah against his internal opponents. Although the shah seems firmly entrenched in power, his dictatorial rule has recently been challenged by radical leftists, conservative Moslems, and non-Persian minorities. Would the United States intervene to protect the shah against his own people?

Whether American leaders have obligated themselves to come to the shah's aid, the fact that the United States is supplying Iran with sophisticated weapons systems could automatically involve Washington in any serious Iranian military adventure. A major congressional study on U. S. military sales to Iran, published in July 1976, concluded that it is unlikely that Iran could go to war in the next 5 to 10 years, using its sophisticated arms, "without U. S. support on a day-to-day basis." The study also noted that for political reasons it would be extremely difficult for the United States to cut off military support to the shah in the midst of a crisis.

The royal family of Saudi Arabia also looks directly to the United States to guarantee its security. Its dependence on American military power is increased by its own unwillingness to create a strong Saudi military force for fear that it might ultimately threaten the regime. It has been suggested that the primary reason for Saudi Arabia's large purchases of American arms is a desire to involve the United States heavily in Saudi military planning and guarantee that it will come to the regime's defense. The American commitment to defend Saudi Arabia—which is nowhere written down—is the bedrock upon which the two nations have built their relationship.

In the years since the Arab oil embargo, Saudi Arabia has assumed an

increasingly important place in the policy calculations of American leaders. Saudi Arabia is the largest foreign supplier of oil to the United States. It has played a decisive role in moderating OPEC price decisions. Its investments here are estimated at more than \$40 billion. The staunchly anti-Communist Saudi monarchy has also used its oil revenues to support its foreign policy goals—shared by American policymakers—in the Horn of Africa and Zaire. And perhaps most important, Saudi Arabia, with a quarter of the world's known oil reserves, is the only producer capable of expanding production to meet projected Western demand in the coming decade.

WOULD THE UNITED STATES DEFEND THE SHAH AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE?

As the Saudi leaders frequently point out, however, Saudi Arabia bases its production decisions on political as well as economic considerations. Saudi oil minister Ahmed Zaki Yamani insists that his government needs to pump only 5.5 million barrels of oil per day to satisfy its domestic and international commitments—compared to the 8.5 million barrels per day it currently produces. The decision to produce more is tied to the royal family's foreign policy goals: preserving economic and military relations with the United States, strengthening the non-Communist industrial economies as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, and generating funds for use in fighting Communist influence in the Gulf and nearby areas like the Horn of Africa.

A more radical or even a more narrowly nationalistic regime might well decide not to expand production. A more radical Saudi government might support higher oil prices. It might also be more willing to use oil as a political weapon to isolate Israel. Not only would this threaten current Western economic plans, but to the extent that it lessened U. S. influence over Persian Gulf oil production, it could be seen as an important reduction in American global power.

THUS IT APPEARS likely that the Carter administration's quick strike force is intended as a tool that can be used to preserve the status quo in the Persian Gulf. Whether the United States could successfully carry out the

kind of intervention it contemplates is less certain. This is a crucial issue. If the United States has made political commitments that are beyond its military capabilities, there is a danger that, in a time of crisis, American leaders might resort to extreme measures to preserve U. S. credibility.

It is clear that the entire "rapid reaction strike force" would not be capable of a "quick hit in remote places," as one official described its mission. Although initial units could be on the ground in a Persian Gulf nation within hours after they received orders, publicly available studies and assessments by military analysts familiar with the problem suggest that it would take up to a month or more to get two of the three divisions to the area, and up to 60 days to deploy the entire strike force. The speed of deployment would depend on many factors, including the availability of nearby bases as staging areas and whether troops had to be parachuted into the battle scene or could be landed at friendly bases. More important, rapid deployment of 100,000 troops would require a large, concentrated airlift and sealift which is beyond present U. S. capabilities. The necessary sealift ships are, in the words of one analyst, "scattered from the Mediterranean to Manila." A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study on U. S. projection forces, released in April, concludes that "the U. S. simply does not have the capability at present to move more than two divisions to [the Gulf] by air and sea in much less than a month." If a crisis in the Persian Gulf should also lead to or occur simultaneously with a full war in Europe, the strike force might never be completely deployed.

Despite President Carter's order to create a three-division mobile strike force, the administration seems to have no concrete plans to improve significantly the ability of the United States to get these troops to a trouble spot. Richard Cronin of the Congressional Research Service, an expert on the defense budget, says he has seen nothing in the fiscal year 1979 budget that appears related specifically to the mobile strike forces, although he says some

items in research and development and some new weapons being procured could be relevant. The Pentagon is also planning to buy 20 Advanced Tanker-Cargo Aircraft by 1981 to modestly increase strategic airlift capacity. But there does not appear to be any procurement planned for a major increase in U. S. airlift and sealift capacity. And according to one well-informed source, a "consolidated guidance" memo, issued by Defense Secretary Brown in January to guide plans for the fiscal year 1980 budget, also calls for no major, new expenditures for the rapid reaction force.

Even the three-division strike force being planned by the Pentagon could end up being insufficient should American troops get bogged down or have to face Soviet forces. The April CBO study says that under "worst case assumptions"—the scenario suggested by the study is a combined Iraqi and Soviet confrontation with Iran—the Pentagon would need four divisions and two aircraft carrier air wings. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are apparently even more cautious in their estimates, reportedly recommending contingency planning for seven army divisions, instead of two, and an unspecified number of carriers and B-52 bombers. The Joint Chiefs are also said to estimate that it would take up to nine months to complete the deployment of this force. It should be recognized, of course, that the Joint Chiefs plan for the worst possible case and, as a congressional analyst put it, "exaggerate estimates of Soviet capabilities and downplay the constraints on Soviet intervention." The Joint Chiefs are also reluctant to engage in another limited war without having sufficient forces to win it.

THE ONLY PUBLICLY available, detailed study of the feasibility of American military intervention in the Persian Gulf was prepared for Congress in 1975 by two specialists at the Congressional Research Service. The study, "Oilfields as Military Objectives," was written by John Collins, a senior defense specialist, and Clyde Mark, a Middle East analyst. Both men say they still stand by their study; to their surprise, says Mark, their results have never been seriously challenged. The 1975 study is extremely skeptical about the feasibility of U. S. military action to

seize oil fields in the Gulf against the wishes of the local government. Collins and Mark ruled out the possibility that the United States could seize enough oil fields to serve both the United States and its Western European and Japanese allies in the event of a total OPEC embargo.

Even an operation aimed at securing oil for the United States would be extremely demanding. To be successful, they say, a military operation of this kind would have to accomplish all of the following: "seize required oil installations intact; secure them for weeks, months, or years; restore wrecked assets rapidly; operate all installations without the owners' assist-

IT IS NOT AXIOMATIC THAT A RADICAL REGIME WOULD CUT OFF OIL TO THE WEST.

ance; and guarantee safe overseas passage for supplies and petroleum products." Collins and Mark also note that oil fields could be sabotaged before U. S. troops arrived, since the chances of achieving surprise are "close to zero."

The initial airborne forces would have to both seize and protect the key facilities while also grabbing and holding airfields for landing reinforcements and equipment. Collins and Mark calculated that it would take about two weeks to finish transporting the first airborne division to the target area, and another 30 days to move in a second army division. Complete deployment of a marine division would take up to two months. Even if the initial U. S. invasion were successful, they say that some 600 installations in a 10,000 square mile area would have to be safeguarded from guerrilla attacks. "Covering all wells and other key installations could easily swallow three divisions, plus a fourth in reserve," they concluded.

Under less demanding conditions, the United States could perhaps intervene with greater initial success. Yet small-scale intervention might also serve to expand what was originally a limited conflict, drawing the United States into greater involvement.

Beyond the issue of feasibility, there are also serious questions to be asked about President Carter's order that the U. S. strike force be able to reach a crisis spot before the Soviets do. This "quick hit" requirement reflects the thinking of National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who recently told Elizabeth Drew of the *New Yorker* that "we ought to contemplate getting there first—or we will have to get there second and become first." He said the current situation bears out his thesis that in the post-Vietnam era, the United States and the Soviet Union would clash in the Third World. "This is going to put a premium on pre-emption," he told Drew, "because who gets there first has command of the situation." But if the United States arrives first, how are we to know that the Soviets were really intending to get there at all? If there is a "premium on pre-emption," how much time will the President or Congress have to consider whether to intervene at all in a brewing crisis? And once the mobile strike force is created, would the administration not be tempted to order its instant deployment to any spot on the globe where it perceives U. S. interests to be threatened?

So far, the administration has not satisfactorily addressed itself to these issues. Nor has Congress, which has shown surprisingly little interest in the administration's strike force plans, even though they presage a dangerous and costly U. S. military commitment in the Persian Gulf—a commitment made by executive fiat, without congressional approval. In its rush to beef up America's mobile strike capacity, the administration has not transcended the "inordinate fear of Communism," as Carter proclaimed last year, but has followed the Cold War thinking of the past and has neglected noninterventionist policy alternatives. For example, it is not axiomatic that even a radical, pro-Soviet regime in the Persian Gulf would decide to cut off oil exports to the West or drastically raise the price of petroleum. Such a government would still need dollars to finance its development plans, and the Soviet Union could not replace the West as either a purchaser of oil or a source of industrial or development goods. Before Congress gives the President a free hand to create a mobile strike force, it should explore policy alternatives less fraught with danger and less likely to lead to the kind of disaster the United States so recently suffered in Vietnam. □

SALT: THE DANGEROUS ILLUSION

By **BARTON J. BERNSTEIN**

RECENTLY, WHEN A GROUP GATHERED outside the White House to protest the arms race and the Carter administration's build-up of nuclear weapons, a presidential aide left the sanctuary of his office to speak to the demonstrators. "You have a right to be disappointed," he told them. President Carter, the aide admitted, had violated his campaign and inaugural pledges ("ridding the earth of nuclear weapons") by increasing the arms budget, adding greatly to American megatonnage, and dallying on the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). But the presidential assistant held out to the demonstrators the hope of a new SALT agreement. He, like many of the protesters, assumed that SALT would stop the arms race.

They were wrong. SALT actually legitimizes the continuing American and Soviet nuclear build-up. At best, SALT II—the current round of talks—*may* keep the arms race from *accelerating*. Most Americans fail to understand how little SALT II is likely to accomplish. The proposed treaty will slightly cut back the number of delivery systems (from 2400 to 2160–2250); maintain the present limit of 1320 on the number of missiles with multiple warheads (MIRV) and planes with air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM); hold the number of land-based missiles with MIRVs to 800–850; allow 308 "heavy" missiles; restrict the range of the air-launched cruise missile to 1500 miles and the submarine-launched cruise missile to 300 miles; and possibly limit production of the Soviet "Backfire" bomber. The proposed agreement does not deny either the United States or the Soviet Union any major weapons system that their leaders desire.

The United States now has about 2150 strategic missiles and bombers, so there would be no reduction in the size of the American arsenal, and the Soviets would have to cut back about 150 to 250 launchers. The permitted emphasis on land-based and "heavy" missiles is a concession to the Soviets, who recently invested substantially in ICBMs with multiple warheads. (The Soviets are still behind in MIRV technology, and cannot shift—as the United States has—to more reliance on submarine-launched ballistic missiles—SLBMs—with multiple warheads. The Soviets are just beginning to install such missiles on their submarines.) The allowance of a 1500-mile and 300-mile range on the cruise missiles—where the Americans hold a large technological lead—is a concession to the United States. The Soviets may also agree to restrict production of the "Backfire" bomber, which American negotiators contend is a strategic weapon,

but which the Soviets argue is for defense in Europe and, by implication, against China.

Unfortunately, public dialogue on the meaning of the SALT II pact has been polluted by the Committee on the Present Danger, spearheaded by Cold Warrior Paul Nitze, which accuses the administration of "selling out" to the Soviets. America will soon be in peril, the committee charges, because America's land-based missiles can be destroyed by a Soviet first strike. That alarmist charge overlooks two important facts: the Soviets lack the accuracy to be able to destroy all (or even 90 percent) of American ICBMs; and these missiles are becoming less important as Carter shifts about one-third of the arsenal to SLBMs, which are virtually invulnerable. Only a suicidal Soviet Union—and it is not suicidal—would launch a first strike against America's triad while knowing that 420 American bombers and 656 SLBMs (450 with MIRVs) could destroy the Soviet Union.

Contrary to the warnings by Nitze's committee, the real danger of SALT II is quite different: It allows continued escalation of the arms race. There will be no limit to the total throw-weight, the number of warheads on a MIRV, the number of bombs in a bomber, or the number of cruise missiles on a plane or sub. Under SALT II, as a result, the American strategic arsenal will grow about 35 percent, from 9000 warheads and bombs to about 12,000 (including 2000 cruise missiles), and the number of Soviet weapons will double from about 4000 to 8000. In the deceptive guise of achieving arms control, the two great powers are speeding ahead in the race.

Some defenders of the Carter administration argue that it sought last year to halt—even reverse—the race, and that the Soviets rebuffed this effort. Such is the frequent interpretation of the so-called "deep-cut" proposal that Secretary of State Cyrus Vance presented in Moscow in March 1977. America called for a mutual cutback to 1800–2000 delivery systems, 550 land-based MIRVs (exactly the American number), and 150 "heavy" missiles (half the Soviet total), thus requiring more emphasis on SLBMs with multiple warheads (the Americans had about 300 and the Soviets none). The administration was not sincere in offering this proposal. Carter, Vance, and their advisers knew that it was unfair and would injure the Soviets. The "deep-cut" recommendations would have legitimized the arsenal that America had developed, while asking the Soviets to dismantle critical parts of their arsenal (158 of 308 "heavy" missiles), to give up the effort to use greater megatonnage as a substitute for missile accuracy (where the United States was far ahead) and to rely on expensive SLBM technology, where the Soviets were far behind. Put bluntly, the proposal would have established Soviet inferiority and destabilized the mutual balance of terror—what the strategists call "mutual assured destruc-

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