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The Quest for Global Security: The Third Phase

I propose to take your time today to talk about the newest -- and one of the most challenging -- aspect of America's 35-year-long quest to advance peace and global stability. I want to discuss the Carter Administration's efforts to develop a framework for regional security in the vital and turbulent Southwest Asian area that encompasses the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.

Those efforts are in their early stages. Yet they are part of an essential and enduring American commitment to promote a climate of stability in the world within which change can work to productive instead of destructive ends.

Rapid and unsettling change is one reality of our age. It is not a condition we can reverse. It can not be explained away by familiar but simplistic theories that perceive all protest as Communist inspired or attribute all upheaval to supposed American weakness or Western disarray.

Political change, by its nature, is diverse in origin and varied in its practical impact on international relations. The changes American power and purpose must address include demographic, economic, social and political ones. They arise, in large part, from the dramatic awakening of peoples who once were passive subjects but are now active and restless participants in a political process that has become global but not yet orderly.

If any single event marks the beginning of this sweeping process of change, it is the end of World War II. The war destroyed not only major European powers but the Eurocentric world order which had provided the framework for both international rivalry and development. Out of its collapse, the United States emerged as the predominant world power, but not the only one.

It confronted, then, as it still does, a rival -- the Soviet Union. And that rival then seemed in a position to gain control over Europe and Asia whose defenses and economies were in ruins.

It was in that context that the United States undertook the challenge of containing Soviet power. Soviet pressure on Berlin aroused American fears of a Communist advance to the Atlantic Ocean. The Red victory in China at the same period posed the prospect of Communist domination even over Japan.

Thus, in response to clearly perceived challenges between 1945 and 1955, America undertook the first major phase in its involvement in the world. We committed ourselves both to restoring and to securing Western Europe. Out of that engagement came the North Atlantic Treaty and the Marshall Plan. Together they made possible the restoration of Europe as a viable force in world affairs.

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Beginning at about the same time, but lasting longer, America launched its second major undertaking: The pursuit of stability in the Far East. Initiated with the Korean War, that pursuit also found expression in the mid-Fifties in the U.S.-Japanese peace treaty and the resulting defense relationship. The effort to create stability in the Far East, however, was more prolonged, more complex.

Later, it involved us in the painful, debilitating Vietnam conflict. Nonetheless, by the late Seventies, with the normalization in American-Chinese relations, it could be said that a viable system of deterrence, involving a security relationship with both Japan and South Korea and a closer understanding with China, emerged; and similarly provided for the deterrence of Soviet ambitions.

International peace and stability thus came to rest on the American commitment to the independence and security of two central strategic zones: Western Europe and the Far East. American interests were seen to be automatically engaged by threats to either of these two central strategic zones. American power was seen ready to meet the threat of either westward or eastward expansionism.

In part to overcome and to outflank these two strategic zones, the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and later under Brezhnev launched a series of maneuvers, primarily in the Third World. The expansion of Soviet influence into Cuba as well as into certain areas of Africa expressed this strategy in part, but Soviet gains were largely peripheral, occasionally reversed, and never sufficient to threaten either of the two central strategic zones.

Although recognized by some much earlier, a third strategic zone assumed in recent years vital importance to the United States and its allies: the region we call Southwest Asia today, including the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. Western Europe and the Far East depend on this region for their economic well-being. Their relationship to it and to its oil resources increasingly defines it as the third central strategic zone, one of vital interest to us as well as to our paramount allies.

For a number of years this region was shielded from Soviet influence by a tier of states, stretching from Turkey across the Caspian Sea and through Afghanistan, which served as a buffer protecting the essentially pro-Western Pakistan. Iran was the pivotal country in the tier. It provided the hinge for a security system sealing the Persian Gulf off from the Soviet Union.

In the second half of the Seventies, this zone has come under increasing external threat. It was to some extent outflanked by the appearance of Soviet military presence in South Yemen and, by proxy, in Ethiopia. The Taraki coup in Afghanistan in March 1978 opened the door to direct Soviet involvement and then to the Soviet military occupation of that country in late 1979 and early 1980.

At the same time, the countries of the region exemplify the reality of change which I discussed earlier. Those countries face an increasing threat from within -- the fragility of local regimes under the pressures of modernization and under the stimulus of an Islamic renaissance. The fall of the Shah is the most evident example. The Iran-Iraq war, which started last month, has further contributed to the possibility of regional turmoil which could spill over into a number of states on the Persian Gulf littoral and thereby shut off a fourth of the world's production of oil. And, of course, in this unstable setting, new openings are created for Soviet political and military intrusion.

It was in response to this strategic reality that President Carter proclaimed as early as January 1980 what has come to be called the Carter Doctrine: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." The net result of this statement was a new and historically important commitment of the United States, one which has long-term implications for the decade of 1980. It reflects the recognition that the central challenge of this decade is likely to be as massive and enduring as that confronted by American leadership in the first post-World War II decades.

At that time we had to safeguard and reconstruct Western Europe while deterring Soviet aggression. Today we have to find the right mix of military and diplomatic initiatives to secure a region which is absolutely vital to us, but in which we cannot mechanically duplicate the lessons derived from the shaping of the Atlantic Alliance.

We will need to deter Soviet expansionism; we will need to create a security framework; we will need quietly to help find solutions for regional disputes; and we will need to develop a variety of formal and informal relationships in a region sensitive to any foreign presence, where proud and suspicious nations have only recently freed themselves from colonial influence.

Accordingly, we cannot build a replica of NATO in the Persian Gulf region. The political and economic conditions of the region do not permit it. The values and cultures there would not tolerate it. The need to foster positive change instead of rebuilding security inside a familiar pattern makes repetition of old formulas irrelevant.

Nor can we build a security framework there by ourselves. Others must help, not only friendly states within the region but our European and Asian Allies as well. Their vital interests are even more immediately engaged than ours. We must take the lead, however, because a potential Soviet threat can only be met effectively if we lead the response.

A security framework for the region cannot be only or primarily a military structure, although the military component is critical. It must also represent diplomatic and economic components. Over the past nine months the Carter Administration has taken a number of initiatives and steps which lay the foundation for an emerging structure to shore up both the region's independence and prospects for peace. It is a beginning, but our progress is encouraging, and I want to report to you on what has been accomplished.

On the military side, we have proceeded with two major, complementary efforts.

First -- in order to have the capability to present the Soviet Union with a credible deterrent and to reassure our Allies in the area -- we must be able to project U.S. forces into the region. I emphasize the projection of U.S. forces, because it is not our intention to station U.S. ground forces there or to build large U.S. bases. We must, however, be able to come to the aid of our friends if they are threatened and when they seek our help.

Because doubt has been publicly expressed about the seriousness of our efforts in this regard, let me provide some concrete details. The President has convened the National Security Council itself several times over the past nine months to pursue this effort and the Council's Special Coordination Committee, which I chair, has held 18 sessions to consider our programs and their progress in developing the concept of the regional security framework and in enhancing our ability to deploy our forces rapidly if needed.

To date, we have accomplished the following:

- A Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force has been established. Its command is located at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida.
- Forces have been identified to train for deployment contingencies. They include two and one-third Army divisions, a Marine division plus more than four wings of ground-based fighter aircraft, and three aircraft carrier battle groups.
- Seven pre-positioning ships with mechanized equipment, ammunition, fuel and other supplies have been deployed in the Indian Ocean. They allow us to put a mechanized brigade of 12,000 troops on the ground in the region on very short notice, a few days.
- Three hundred jet transports and 500 turboprop transports are available for airlift.
- The Congress is reviewing an Administration request to purchase eight fast roll-on, roll-off, freight and troop carriers which could reach the Suez Canal from the East Coast in 11-12 days. These ships could be in use within weeks once they are authorized by the Congress.
- Three exercises of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force in the United States have been conducted.
- Exercise deployments of small parts of the force to the region are scheduled for this fall.
- Deployment times have been reduced significantly. Tactical air forces can be in the region within hours, a battalion within 48 hours, and a division within two weeks.
- Finally, we have made arrangements with four countries in the region for the use of facilities to support an American presence.

I believe this list demonstrates that, since last December, when the President decided to seek facilities in the area, we have indeed taken a number of important steps to enhance the security of the region. We have moved, in short, to acquire the ability to project U.S. forces rapidly if the region is threatened.

At the same time, however, it has to be emphasized again that the political circumstances of the region are very different from those of Europe. We must be continually mindful of the national and political sensitivities of the countries concerned. But taking these important realities into account, it is evident that in the last nine months we have made genuine progress in developing a U.S. force projection capability for the region.

All of this, I hasten to add, is but the beginning. The region involved is beset by profound conflicts. These conflicts are mostly indigenous in character, but they can be exploited by an external adversary to his own ends. We have to be alert to that reality, and we have to recognize that there will be no quick or easy fix. It will take many years and a sustained effort, political as well as military, to create the needed stability, so that southward pushes, threatening to our national security, are contained. We are engaged in that effort, in all seriousness, realizing the importance of the stakes involved and realizing that this is not a matter for partisan politics, but a matter of genuine national security.

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As a parallel part of our military effort, we have been willing to assist in improving the defense capabilities of countries in the region. We continue our long-standing support for Israel's security. In fact, our total economic and military aid to Israel in the last four years amounts to almost half of all U.S. aid to Israel since its creation. Additionally, we have provided arms to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and North Yemen. We are providing training to military personnel from several states in the region. To the extent possible, we prefer to help states in the region defend themselves. That is their preference as well, and we encourage it.

Both of these military efforts affect our NATO capabilities. We have therefore begun working out a formula for a rough division of labor with our NATO allies to lessen the competition for scarce military resources.

In the economic component of our security framework, oil is key. Our policy at home and with our allies has reduced consumption, slowed the price rise, and built up stocks. That is why, even with Iran and Iraq out of the production picture, we are confident that we face no immediate supply crisis.

We have also encouraged the wealthier states in the region to provide poorer states with both economic and military assistance to help them resist external efforts at political destabilization. We have asked our allies in Europe to provide economic assistance to these same states. Germany, for example, has assumed a significant role in providing such help to both Turkey and Pakistan.

Thus energy conservation and enhanced energy production, economic assistance to regional states by regional states, and Western economic assistance combine to form a three-point economic strategy for the security framework.

The work that has been done this year to develop a credible structure for regional security in Southwest Asia has an importance that extends beyond the region. At that level, of course, it reflects a major American commitment -- one we can expect to prove as enduring as did those to Europe and to the Far East. But beyond the region, the pursuit of security remains a global engagement.

By moving as we have to contain a possible Soviet push into Southwest Asia, we also position ourselves to work for a more constructive and positive relationship with the Soviet Union itself. It was Western, and especially American, resolve in Europe and in the Far East which built the basis from which detente began. Similarly, our ability to deter Soviet pressure against this third area of vital Western interest provides us, as well, with the foundation for a stable dialogue with Moscow.

We do not seek to rekindle the Cold War by moving the contest to a new region. We seek a genuine relaxation of tension based on reciprocity and mutual restraint.

We do not seek an arms race in Southwest Asia any more than we seek one in the field of strategic arms. To the contrary, in both cases, our purpose and our goal remain genuine arms control. The President is determined to pursue ratification of the SALT II Treaty.

To some extent, indeed, the election campaign has become a referendum on that policy and on the Administration's firm belief that strategic arms control serves the country's national security interests. SALT II, once ratified, provides the groundwork for the challenging task of further quantitative and qualitative limitations in strategic weapons -- the agenda for SALT III.

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Our larger purpose, in brief and in conclusion, is to create a stable framework of deterrence, so that peace can not only be preserved but can be transformed into active cooperation between the major powers of the world. Within that framework, we can accommodate the changes that are inevitable.

We can help guide the process of global change toward institutional arrangements we can now only dimly perceive and only imperfectly imagine. We can use the balance of power to help rectify the imbalances -- of wealth, of technology, of literacy, of health -- which will otherwise threaten our way of life and our survival.

But we can only move constructively on that set of challenges if we move resolutely and effectively to address the challenge in Southwest Asia. Should we fail there, the balance of power from which we must build stability could be irretrievably lost.

The dependence of both Western Europe and the Far East on the Persian Gulf area is such that we cannot afford to fail. The third central strategic zone is critical to the survival of the other two and thus to our own ability to preserve global peace.

That's what is at stake. That is why I have taken your time to explain our efforts at this early stage in their development. That is why I believe your understanding of them is vital to our success in this new engagement.

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