



The Carter Doctrine & the Security of the Arabian Gulf

Dr. Abdulhameed A. Al-Musharraf*

Abstract:

US policies in the Middle East rested on a number of basic objectives. These are: i) safeguarding the vast oil resources in the region and strategic access to them, ii) using the strategic location of the area as a buffer zone to contain the advances of the Soviet Union, iii) improving ties with moderate Arab states in the region, iv) maintaining peace and stability in the area, and, v) granting Israel unlimited protection and support. But these goals were often misinterpreted and clashed with the interests of the people involved.

Active US policies in the region began to take shape with the declaration of Truman's Doctrine in 1947, which promised both economic and military aid to Middle Eastern countries to help them resist Soviet pressure after the collapse of the CENTO Pact which was created by the US following the disintegration of the Baghdad Pact. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 and the fall of the Shah in Iran, the Carter Doctrine was declared, and though it was attacked by both US allies and enemies, it came to regard, for the first time, that the protection of the region's oil rich resources in a purely American undertaking, excluding all others.

1 - Background to American Involvement in the Middle East

United States policy in the Middle East has been characterized as involving five dominating and sometimes contradictory concerns since the conclusion of the Second World War. These concerns are summarized in the following:

- Safeguarding the region's vast oil reserves and strategic access to them.
- Using the strategic location of the area as a buffer zone to contain the advances of the Soviet Union.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Social Studies College of Education, King Faisal University Al-Hassa.

- Granting Israel unlimited support and assistance despite its risks and mous disadvantages⁽¹⁾.
- Improving ties with Arab countries that are perceiced moderate in or and policy.
- Promoting peace and stability in the area⁽²⁾.

These goals were often misinterpreted and sometimes clashed with the political, social and human needs of the people involved. It had often treat expansion of Arab nationalism as a communist inspired movement directec ly against the United States and its interests. It also regarded the political lenges to the conservative countries as threats to the region's stabiltiy. The terpretations have given the United States and its role a bad image if not inc dangerous opposition. It may have also helped to drive many nationalist g closer to the Soviet Union despite their enormous differences and hostili ward the Eastern Block and its ideology⁽³⁾.

Therefore, the American policy of containment of Soviet influence : Middle East had been developed in part to respond to the wishes and desi the Middle Eastern people. It was also designed to thwart Soviet attempts a trolling access to oil supplies of the region. This policy which had passed stages over the years, acquired the backing of few strong presidents. The f those who championed its development and its rigorous enforcement was ident Franklin D. Roosevelt. He declared on Feb. 18, 1943 that "the defer Saudi Arabia was vital to that of the United States and thereafter channeled lease funds directly to this country"⁽⁴⁾.

The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union in the M East is a post - World War II development. It began with the declaration : Truman Doctrine in 1947 as a response to the increased Soviet pressure a Greece and Turkey. It brought for the First time American security interest the eastern Mediterranean and opened the door for serious competition be the superpowers in the area ever since⁽⁵⁾.

The Truman Doctrine which represents the American first official policy cerning the Middle East, pledged to "help Greece, Turkey and all free pe threatened by direct or indirect pressure or aggression from outside"⁽⁶⁾.

warning carried by the Truman Doctrine was backed by United States economic and military aid that enabled Greece and Turkey to successfully resist subversion and pressures.

The United States had also supported the formation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 which consisted of Britain, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Like the Truman Doctrine, the Baghdad Pact was founded to contain the spread of communism and Soviet influence. Although the United States did not participate in this pact for fear of offending Egypt and Israel, it promised military and economic aid to its members⁽⁷⁾.

This was followed in 1957 by another major announcement aimed at preventing the Soviet Union from exploiting the increasingly unstable situation in the Middle East. That was the Eisenhower Doctrine which took the form of a joint resolution of both houses of congress. It declared that the United States was ready to support any Middle Eastern nation that requests assistance in thwarting armed intervention by country inspired or controlled by "international communism"⁽⁸⁾.

The next attempt of organizing an anti-communist alliance came in 1959, following the collapse of the Baghdad Pact. It was caused by the downfall of the pro-western monarchy in Iraq and its replacement by a regime favorable to the Soviet Union. The revolutionary government in Iraq withdrew immediately from the American sponsored pact, causing the other members to reorganize their alliance as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), composed of Britain, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. The United States did not only assist in the organization of CENTO, but also made even more direct pledges to the defense of those countries in case of communist aggression. This alliance remained inactive for the duration of its existence until its final collapse in 1979 following the overthrow of the Iranian monarchy and the Pakistani withdrawal⁽⁹⁾.

But Iran was given more than that during the Nixon administration. It was assigned in 1969 the key role of safeguarding and policing the Arabian Gulf. This decision came following the American withdrawal from Southeast Asia and British withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf and Aden. This policy, which came to be known as the Nixon Doctrine, attempted the reliance on regional powers in securing Amer-

ican interests and preserving peace and stability without the direct American military involvement. In exchange for this service, Iran was permitted to purchase most anything in the United States' arsenal short of nuclear weapons. And in 1972, Nixon and Kissinger visited Tehran and signed with the Shah this new American-Iranian understanding which led to their strategic cooperation⁽¹⁰⁾.

II - The Carter Doctrine

1 - The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1980.

For the first time since the end of World War II, the Soviets sent their troops crashing beyond the limits of the Iron curtain to overthrow a regime that supposedly pro-Soviet. It was the government of President Hafiz-ullah Amoghlan of Afghanistan. He was executed along with his wife and four daughters. The Soviets installed in his place another puppet named Babrak Karmal who has been described as tough, pragmatic, and above all a Marxist.

The Soviet Union's lightning invasion of Afghanistan was a clear display of military power and a total disregard for world opinion.

The long Soviet preparation along its southern border with Afghanistan which culminated in their strike into that country, came as a result of many political changes that destroyed the credibility of the Afghan governments. It was also attributed to the failure of the Afghan leaders to put an end to the guerrilla warfare that has been waged by Muslim rebels against the communist regime. The Russians regarded their takeover of Afghanistan as a move designed to secure their political and strategic interests in the country against what they call imperialist attempts at subversion⁽¹¹⁾.

The Red Army's penetration of the snow-Swept mountainous land with its natural resources, has involved an estimated 100,000 troops, supported by tanks and helicopter gunships⁽¹²⁾.

2 - American Response:

The Carter Administration perceived the Soviet incursion into neighboring Afghanistan as "the most serious threat to world peace"⁽¹³⁾ and believed it should not be allowed to pass without major penalty. President Carter went even further

in his condemnation of the Soviet move when he described this action as "a callous violation of International Law and the United Nations charter and a deliberate effort of a powerful atheistic government to subjugate an independent Islamic People"⁽¹⁴⁾. It was a clear signal aimed at the Muslim world to take second look at the Soviet actions and designs on the area. It was also designed to alarm the European allies from possible Soviet control over much of the world oil supplies.

But the potential Advantages which the Soviets were counting on could not be realized easily and quickly owing to world and local resistance. Nevertheless, it became clear that Soviet control of Afghanistan would permit their warplanes stationed there to be within 350 miles from the Arabian Sea, the oil lifeline of the west and Japan.

This proximity would always give Moscow a greater advantage and influence in this vital part of the world.

In addition, the Soviet move into Afghanistan had the potential of becoming a precedent that will make it easier for the Russians to consider the military option in response to future crises. And the ever expanding military of the Soviet Union might make operating away from home not only possible but desirable⁽¹⁵⁾. In view of these real or imaginary threats, president Carter responded with a wide range of retaliatory actions aimed at making Russia pay a high price for its aggression in Afghanistan. These were:

- 1 - A limited embargo on grain shipments to the Soviets which affected the sale of some 17 million metric tons.
- 2 - Soviets fishing privileges in American waters were to be severely limited.
- 3 - All sales of advanced technology and other strategic items were to be banned.
- 4 - The opening of new consular facilities for both countries was canceled.
- 5 - Salt II treaty's ratification shelved.
- 6 - A drive for United Nations condemnation of Soviet aggression was supported.
- 7 - Renewed American interests in the defense of Pakistan was pursued.
- 8 - A decision to revive Central Intelligence Agency covert operations to help the Muslim rebels resist Soviet conquest of Afghanistan.
- 9 - Boycott of Moscow Olympics.
- 10 - Cooperation with China, Soviet archenemy, on defense matters.

11 - Develop and expand American presence in the Middle East and Indian Ocean to counter Soviet activities⁽¹⁶⁾.

But the most serious response was yet to come. On January 23, 1980, President Carter delivered his State of the Union Address in which he enunciated what came to be known as the Carter Doctrine. In it he declared that "An attempt by an outside force to gain control of the 'Persian' Arabian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. It will be repelled by use of any means necessary, including military force"⁽¹⁷⁾. This unilateral declaration of placing the Arabian Gulf security on the same footing as western Europe's was a bold move aimed at shoring up confidence among friendly nations of the area, and drawing the line against further Soviet adventurism⁽¹⁸⁾. It was also been clear to the Soviets that this kind of action is going to be met by a swift and protracted response so that such blunders would not happen in the future. President Carter's willingness to back his new course with military force represented a total reversal of United States foreign policy that had been followed for three years. This policy, which had been championed by the president himself, was dependent on accommodating the Soviets and downgrading the importance of American military power.

The underlying priority was in preventing the Russians from extending their influence and aggression beyond Afghanistan and especially into Pakistan. The United States had warned against any designs by the Soviets on Pakistan. American commitment to Pakistan was further emphasized by a military and economic aid package totaling 400 million dollars. In addition, there were continuing plans for a quick American response to shore up Pakistan's defenses in case of further Soviet aggression⁽²⁰⁾.

But the differences between the United States and its allies over the scale of the danger of the Soviet's designs constituted an alarming threat to the NATO alliance. While a few of the allies came to agree with the president's worst-case scenario of a possible Soviet invasion of the oil fields of the Arabian Gulf, many came to believe that such possibility was remote and far-fetched. Nevertheless, when it came to backing up the president's desire to punish the Soviets, they agreed to support him "with their own ban on grain sales, a review of other food staples like petroleum

pork and butter, a tighter lid on strategic exports, a squeeze on export credits, and a study on the propriety of holding the Olympics in Moscow⁽²¹⁾. Among the United States allies in Europe, only Britain offered a concrete and an immediate support for president Carter's policy. West German and French officials expressed their displeasure and disapproval with Carter's warning which they described as weak and misleading. They believe that it might risk inviting the Soviet influence into the area, especially, if not followed up by an American show of power⁽²²⁾.

That may have been at least in the short run, a disturbing deficiency in Carter's commitment. The United States armed forces do not have the huge cargo planes that could transfer American troops and their equipment to a battle zone. The sea transport is also in short supply. Added to the 150,000 man Rapid Deployment Force and the new 50 CX cargo planes needed to handle them were expected to be battle ready not sooner than 1983⁽²³⁾. But the United States had, at the time of the crisis, an imposing naval force around the Arabian sea that the Soviet leaders had to reckon with. The American naval task force consisted of 21 warships, including two aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean. And their planes could have delivered damaging blows on any invading force⁽²⁴⁾.

In the Indian Ocean, American B-52 bombers suddenly appeared thousands of miles from the nearest U.S. air base and flew over Soviet ships - a reminder that American power indeed reach that out - of - the way region⁽²⁵⁾. But the most important development resulting from the Soviet invasion, was the creation of the American Rapid Deployment Force. The new strategy was designed to make it costly for any power that has the capability of delivering massive and lightning strikes, from gaining cheap victories, like the one perpetuated on Afghanistan which might harm the United States or the Far East, but would be ready for quick airlift anywhere. "Except for small arms and air support, their supplies and equipment - from tanks to food - would already be on - station aboard especially designed roll-on/roll-off ships, deployed near potential trouble spots"⁽²⁶⁾.

According to President Carter, the Soviet Union had to pay a concrete price and that "its decision to use military force in Afghanistan will be costly to every political and economic relationship it values"⁽²⁷⁾. This conviction was supported, despite some kneejerking from European allies, by the foreign ministers repre-

senting the 45 members of the Islamic conference, meeting in Islamabad capital of Pakistan. The delegates who included such traditional allies of the U.S. as Algeria, Libya and the Palestine Liberation Organization, did not condemn the Soviet invasion as a flagrant violation of international law, but demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghan territory. The conference had also suspended Afghanistan's membership in the International Islamic Organization. The resolution of February was the most serious attack on Soviet policy and by far the most damaging to U.S. credibility among its friends in the region. The Kremlin propaganda machine denounced the conference's decision and accused the U. S. of engineering it.⁽²⁸⁾ The second positive development that supported Carter's desire to punish the Soviets came from the Afghans themselves. Their rebel groups began forming a unified command that pressed their warfare against the Soviet occupation forces. The insurgents stepped up their attacks, ambushes, and sniping that halted Soviet troops at every encounter. All this boosted American officials' confidence in Carter's effort to gather support for his campaign to draw the line on Soviet adventurism⁽²⁹⁾. Nevertheless, Carter's effort to construct a new security argument to protect the oil-rich Arabian Gulf region against future Soviet encroachment came under heavy criticism from practically all sides. Several political figures in Washington indicated their uneasiness toward the President's strong warning and deliberate imprecision concerning the area that the United States vowed to defend⁽³⁰⁾. George F. Kennan, the renowned historian and diplomat, has criticized the official response with what he termed as disquieting lack of balance. He went further in stating that the administration has distorted the assessment of the Soviet motives, which in turn had affected the American view from recognizing other factors in the Middle Eastern situation. But the most serious criticism in Carter's reaction to the Soviets, according to Professor Kennan, was the unnecessary and hasty expenditure of all the important nonmilitary options that the United States was holding. "Barring a resort to war, declared Mr. Kennan, the Soviet Government has already absorbed the worst of what we have to offer. It has nothing further to fear from us"⁽³¹⁾. On the other hand, European allies, especially France and West Germany did not only stay aloof from taking countermeasures against Russia, but they actually attacked President Carter's effort

forge a united front and curtail Soviet aggressiveness. In addition to that, they described his response as naive "down right dumb". The European view was expressed more clearly by the West German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Gensher, who declared after several meetings with his European counterparts, that any escalation in tension between the superpowers would make any political solution to the problem impossible and destroy detente⁽³²⁾. They also regard American foreign policy under President Carter as dangerously inconsistent partly because he, according to their opinion, lacked a world vision and was subject to emotional outbursts and partly because they suspect him of exaggerating and exploiting international crisis for domestic political benefit. Most fundamental of all, perhaps they question his simple competence⁽³³⁾.

But in reality, West Germans and for that matter, the rest of European countries, feared serious damage to their international trade if they followed Carter's instructions on commercial dealings with Soviet Union⁽³⁴⁾.

For the Arab world and especially the Arabian Gulf States have viewed President Carter's call for a Middle Eastern security arrangement with strong suspicion. Its constant conflict with Israel has made it difficult to be seen involved in cooperative effort with the Jewish State's main supporter. The Carter Doctrine could be moved from its present slogan to practical security framework without the tacit support of the Saudi Government for its considerable influence on other Arab nations. The Saudi Arab reluctance was attributed to the slow progress of the Palestinian issue⁽³⁵⁾. However, the Soviet occupation of the small Muslim state of Afghanistan changed this attitude and made Saudi contribution urgent and significant.

But the most serious assault on President Carter came from the Soviet Union who adopted the time - proven tactic that the best defense is a strong and sustained offense. The communist nonstop propaganda campaign had been engineered to lessen the impact of the widening resentment between the peoples of the United States, western Europe, and the Muslim world, toward the Soviet invasion and conquest of neighboring Afghanistan. The main thrust of the Kremlin drive was designed to put the blame on president Carter and his national security advisor, Brezinski, for "having long planned a return to the cold war and a policy of brinkmanship"⁽³⁶⁾. The Soviet press has cited that the two men have not only rejected the SALT II treaty and went ahead with the modernization of NATO's

nuclear capability, but they unjustifiably refused to recognize Soviet "legitimate" interests in Afghanistan. This White House rejection had, according to the Soviets, created an anti-Soviet hysteria that had virtually engulfed the entire world. They contribute to the United States economic and political blackmail of the Soviet Union and to Carter's desperate quest for reelection⁽³⁷⁾.

Whatever the truth might be, president Carter was in fact in a very difficult situation due to his repeated political, diplomatic and economic setbacks.

Conclusion:

There were many unfortunate encounters that president Carter had to face in his last year in office, which contributed to his early departure. Those included the continuing saga of the American diplomats held hostage for 444 days by the Iranian Government and his utter failure to punish those who were responsible. This unacceptable humiliation to a superpower would not happen and should not be allowed to happen if president Carter had only acted sooner.

There was also the big embarrassment in the United Nations created by the Carter Administration termed as miscommunication between the President and his Secretary of State. The mishap came as a result of an American approval of a United Nations resolution condemning Israel's policy of establishing Jewish settlements on Arab lands occupied by Israel in 1967. It did not stop at that, later the administration reversed its decision and vetoed the resolution, placing the blame on Cyrus Vance for not interpreting the president's orders, forcing him to resign. What this in fact meant was that even if the president of the United States had taken action against Israel and therefore forgetting the Jewish world, the senior officials would not be expected to go along with that decision. But a fatal mistake came when he single-handedly launched his doctrine without prior consultation with his European and Middle Eastern allies. This decision came despite his own conviction that the task of protecting the Arabian region could not be accomplished without the "aid of allies and the local states that have been threatened"⁽³⁸⁾. It is only fair to say that president Carter had done his best to come in grip with Soviet imperial system but he failed not because he did not try but because he tried too late.

Notes

- 1 - American Friends Service Committee, *A Compassionate Peace*, (Hill and Wang, NY 1982) p. 167.
- 2 - Philip L. Groisser, *The United States and the Middle East*, (State University of New York, 1982) p. 170.
- 3 - Seth P. Tillman, *The United States in the Middle East*, (Indiana University Press 1982) p. 265.
- 4 - A. P. Thornton, *Imperialism in the Twentieth Century*, (The University of Minnesota, 1977) p. 253.
- 5 - Richard Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History*, (Vintage Book, New-York, 1969)p. 385.
- 6 - Philip L. Groisser, op. cit. p. 174-175.
- 7 - Richard Allen, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Fertile Crescent*, (Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 382.
- 9 - Philip L. Groisser, op. cit, p. 177-178.
- 10 - *Midstream*, January 1980, Vol. XXVI, p. 3-4.
- 11 - *Newsweek*, January 7, 1980, p. 16-17.
- 12 - *Time*, January 14, 1980, p. 10-11.
- 13 - *Newsweek*, January 14, 1980, p. 24.
- 14 - *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 15 - *Ibid*, p. 25.
- 16 - *U. S. & World Report*, June 14, 1980, p. 19-20.
- 17 - *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1980, p. 12A.
- 18 - *The Washington Post*, January 27, 1980, pp. 7b.
- 19 - *Time*, January 20, 1980 p. 9.
- 20 - *U. S. News & World Report*, January 28, 1980, pp. 21-23.
- 21 - *Newsweek*, January 28, 1980, p. 19.
- 22 - *Time*, February 4, 1980, p. 15.
- 23 - *U. S. News & World Report*, Feb. 4, 1980, p. 16-18.
- 24 - *Time*, February 4, 1980, p. 15.

- 25 - *U. S. News & World Report*, Feb. 4, 1980, p. 18.
- 26 - *Newsweek*, February 4, 1980, p. 24.
- 27 - *Newsweek*, February 4, 1980, p. 24.
- 28 - *Time*, February 11, 1980, p. 36-38.
- 29 - *U. S. News & World Report*, Feb. 11, 1980, p. 14-16.
- 30 - *The Washington Post*, Jan. 29, 1980, p. A3.
- 31 - *The New York Times*, February 1, 1980, p. A2.
- 32 - *Time*, March 3, 1980, p. 37.
- 33 - *The Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 13, 1980, p. 26.
- 34 - *Time*, Mar. 3, 1980, p. 37.
- 35 - *The Washington Post*, Jan. 25, 1980, p. A22.
- 36 - *Time*, Feb. 11, 1980, p. 27.
- 37 - *Newsweek*, Feb. 4, 1980, p. 27.
- 38 - *The Washington Post*, January 31, 1980, p. A7.

Bibliography

I - Government Documents:

Public Papers of the President of the United States:

Jimmy Carter 1980 - 1980.

United States Government Printing Office.

Washington, 1980.

Book III - Sept. 29, 1980 - Jun. 20, 1981.

II - Reports:

A Compassionate Peace: A Future for the Middle East.

A Report Prepared for the American Friends Service Committee. (Hill and Wang, New York 1982).

III - Books:

- Allen, Richard, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Fertile Cresecent*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1974).
- Buheiry, Marwan. *U. S. Threats of Intervention Against Arab Oil: 1973 - 1979*. (Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, Lebanon, 1980).
- Groisser, Philip L. *The United States and the Middle East*. (State University of New York press, Albany, 1982).
- Hofstadter, Richard, *Great Issues in American History*, (Vintage Book, New-York, 1969).
- Novik, Nimrod; Starr, Joyce, *Challenges in the Middle East*. (Praeger, N, NY., 1981).
- Polk, William R., *The United States and the Arab World*, (Harvard University Press, 1975).
- Thornton, A. P. *Imperialism in the Twentieth Century*, (The University of Minnesota, 1977).

IV - Newspapers:

- The New York Times.
- The Wall Street Journal.
- The Washington Post.

V - Magazines:

- Newsweek.
- Time.
- U. S. News & World Report.

VI - Quarterly Publications:

- *Midstream*, January 1980, Vol. XXVI, No. 1.
- *Orbis*, Winter 1981, Vol. 24, No. 4.
- *The World Today*, May 1980.