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# U.S. National Interests in the Middle East: Is the Persian Gulf a “Bridge Too Far”?

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Donald E. Nuechterlein

**A**fter George Bush enters the White House in January 1989, he will move quickly to review American foreign and national security policy in many parts of the world. One area requiring urgent attention is what scholars and diplomats loosely call the Middle East—a geographical designation that does not easily lend itself to analysis or policy formulation because the states and issues involved display significant differences. For example, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran-Iraq war, and civil war in Afghanistan occurred within the Middle East area; yet, they are viewed differently in terms of U.S. national interests and policy responses.

This article compares U.S. national interests in three sectors of the Middle East and discusses the appropriateness of the policies which Washington has pursued since 1978. These are the Eastern Mediterranean, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf. Focusing the discussion on U.S. national interests will lead, I believe, to clearer thinking and wiser strategy than concentrating on the plethora of crises that have long dominated relations among most Middle Eastern states. This approach also places in clearer perspective alternative U.S. responses to Soviet interests and policies in the Middle East.

In basing U.S. foreign and international security policy on an assessment of our national interests, it is essential to distinguish among four fundamental American interests which undergird all U.S. policies abroad. It is also important to consider different degrees or intensities of interest which

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condition a policymaker's calculations. The national interest matrix shown in table 1 is useful in assessing the degree of importance which a specific foreign policy/international security issue holds for the United States in a given time frame.<sup>1</sup>

**National Interest Matrix**

Basic National Interests	Intensity of Interests			
	Survival (critical)	Vital (dangerous)	Major (serious)	Peripheral (bothersome)
Defense of Homeland				
Economic Well-being				
Favorable World Order				
Promotion of Values				

**Table 1**

Defense-of-homeland and economic well-being of the United States have been fundamental interests of this country for two hundred years, and they need little elaboration except to underline that we are concerned here with the United States itself, and usually Canada, not with Europe and other areas lying outside North America. Favorable world order (international security) is a recent preoccupation of U.S. policymakers—primarily in the 44 years since World War II. Promotion of American values abroad has long been a part of U.S. foreign policy, but this basic interest assumed a significant role in policymaking during the past fifteen years because of an insistence by Congress and interest groups reflecting a new public mood after the Vietnam war.

Of the four degrees (intensities) of interest shown in table 1, the survival (critical) level does not concern this discussion because no U.S. interest in the Middle East can reasonably be judged to threaten the continuation of the United States as an independent state. At the opposite end of the scale, there are issues and some countries which are of peripheral importance to the United States. The crucial problem for policymakers and for the President, therefore, is to clearly differentiate between those Middle East countries and issues which are truly "vital" to U.S. defense, economic well-being, sense of world order and democratic values, and issues which are of "major" interest to us—important but not crucial to our future. The utility of distinguishing between these major and vital national interests is that vital ones imply that the United States ultimately must be willing to

engage in armed conflict to protect its interest if other policy tools fail to convince an adversary to alter course. If the issue at stake is judged to be a "major" U.S. interest, a President is justified in using political, economic and covert measures, and even a military show of force; but the actual use of forces in combat should flow from a Presidential decision that the issues at stake are so important to one or more of our basic interests that the United States will not compromise and is willing to engage in armed combat.<sup>2</sup>

With the interest matrix as a guide, let us look at three areas of the Middle East in which the United States concludes that it has major or vital interests, and the reasons for those assessments.

**Eastern Mediterranean.** The countries which are important to the United States in this arc-shaped area are Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, even though the latter is located some distance to the west. The U.S. interest in Greece and Turkey dates from President Truman's decision in March 1947 to ask Congress to provide them with economic and military assistance in order to prevent an expansion of Soviet influence into the strategic straits lying between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In 1952, Congress agreed to extend the U.S. NATO commitment to Greece and Turkey, and this act signified that they had become vital interests of the United States. The basic interest here was favorable world order, not defense of the United States, U.S. economic well-being or the promotion of democratic government, even though the latter was a secondary factor in Greece's case. Turkey and Greece were needed as allies in order to assist NATO in containing the Soviet Union's expansionist policies—a world order interest. When Cyprus became independent in 1960, it adopted a policy of non-alignment. However, Cyprus remains a member of the Commonwealth and Great Britain maintains several military facilities there. Since 1974, Turkish troops have occupied the northern sector of the island in order to protect the Turkish minority population against the Greek majority. United Nations peacekeeping forces have been stationed in Cyprus since then. Neither Turkey nor the United States would look favorably on Cyprus being taken over by an outside political power, including Greece. Indeed, Turkey's intervention in 1974 was precipitated by a Cypriot effort to join Cyprus with Greece, which Turkey saw as a threat to its vital interests.<sup>3</sup>

Israel has been an important U.S. interest since 1948 when President Truman pledged to support that country's independence. This commitment was reiterated by each succeeding U.S. President, and Congress has voted substantial economic and military aid to Israel over the past twenty years. As a result of President Nixon's decision in October 1973 to airlift military equipment to Israel during the Yom Kippur war, the Israeli state has been viewed as a vital U.S. interest even though the United States has no formal alliance with it. Like Greece and Turkey, Israel's value to the United States

is in the world-order category, not defense-of-homeland or economic well-being. Nevertheless, the United States has a strong promotion-of-values reason for supporting Israel, stemming from a Judeo-Christian heritage shared by our peoples and the U.S. belief that the Jewish people are entitled to a homeland.

Egypt was viewed by the United States as an antagonist state while it was led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, who formed a defense relationship with the U.S.S.R. in 1955, seized the Suez Canal from Britain in 1956, and attempted to unite the Arab world against the West. In June 1967, Nasser precipitated a crisis which led to the disastrous Six-Day War with Israel. As a result, Israel occupied the Sinai, West Bank and Gaza, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. Suddenly, Israel was the preeminent military power in the area. Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser in 1971 and reoriented Egypt's policy away from Moscow. Following the 1973 October War, Sadat moved toward accommodation with Israel and the United States, concluding peace with Israel in 1979. Washington then granted substantial economic and military aid to Cairo, and a defense relationship has resulted. As with Israel, the United States has no formal defense treaty with Egypt—leading some to question whether Egypt should be considered a vital interest. However, its strategic position, including possession of the Suez Canal, and Egypt's strong military forces, make this country a key U.S. partner in the Middle East and a vital world-order interest.

Lebanon is the other Eastern Mediterranean state which some U.S. policymakers think should be included in the vital interest category. This multi-religious state was an important U.S. interest in 1958 when President Eisenhower deployed 13,000 Marines there to prevent Egypt, then run by Nasser, and Syria from undermining the political balance in Lebanon and turning it into an anti-Western country. Although the Marines were withdrawn within a few months, Lebanon's political orientation remained an important U.S. interest. In August 1982, after Israel invaded the country in an effort to crush the PLO and establish a friendly Lebanese government, President Reagan sent 1,500 Marines to Beirut to restore peace. He hoped they would enforce a cease-fire among the warring factions and induce Israel and Syria to withdraw troops. However, Israeli and Syrian forces did not withdraw after U.S. and European peacekeeping forces were sent, and peace was not restored in Beirut. After the Marine barracks were bombed in October 1983, President Reagan decided in February 1984 to withdraw the Marines rather than dispatch a much larger force to Beirut and the surrounding area. The Reagan administration thus decided that Lebanon was not a vital U.S. interest and that U.S. troops should not try to impose a settlement. The U.S. decision to depart necessitated a painful Israeli

withdrawal from Lebanon, and since then Syria has exercised the major peacekeeping role.

U.S. national interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1988 may be identified on the interest matrix, shown in table 2. This positioning of six countries in terms of their importance to the United States suggests that none of them is vital to the defense of North America or to the economic well-being of this country. Four countries—Turkey, Greece, Israel and Egypt—are vital U.S. world-order interests because they are crucial to maintaining a balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean, in regard both to the Soviet Union and to three local states (Syria, Libya, Iraq) which oppose U.S. interests and policies with respect to Israel and Egypt.

**U.S. Interests in the Eastern Mediterranean**

Basic National Interests	Intensity of Interests			
	Survival	Vital	Major	Peripheral
Defense of Homeland			Turkey Israel	Greece Egypt Cyprus Lebanon
Economic Well-being				Cyprus Lebanon Egypt Israel Turkey Greece
Favorable World Order		Turkey Greece Israel Egypt	Cyprus Lebanon	
Promotion of Values		Israel Greece	Turkey	Lebanon Cyprus Egypt

**Table 2**

In sum, the United States has had a vital world-order interest in the Eastern Mediterranean area dating from the 1940s. This interest now has been expanded to include Egypt, the largest and most influential Arab state. The important U.S. military bases and facilities located in Greece and Turkey, and the understandings Washington has with Egypt and Israel in the event of a Soviet threat, underline the vital world-order stake the United States has in this region.

**Southwest Asia.** Unlike the Eastern Mediterranean, the area located between India and the Soviet Union, encompassing the states of Afghanistan and Pakistan, has never been a vital interest of the United States, even though Pakistan was a member of both the Southeast Asia Mutual Security Pact and the Central Treaty Organization.<sup>4</sup> This reality became clear to Pakistan's government in 1971 when the United States failed to support it during its brief war with India. This clash resulted in the creation of Bangladesh from the region that had been East Pakistan. Nevertheless, the United States has long had a major world-order stake in Pakistan as part of its containment policy toward the Soviet Union. Consequently, the Islamabad government has been the recipient of large amounts of U.S. military and economic assistance and support for its tough policy on Afghanistan. Although no treaty commitment obliges the United States to defend Pakistan in case of war, there is little doubt that a Soviet attack on that country would be viewed as a serious threat to U.S. world-order interests.

Afghanistan is in a different position. Until the Soviet Union sent its forces into that country in 1979 to install a more compliant Marxist government and establish air bases there, the United States viewed this remote country as a peripheral interest—requiring careful watching but not substantial economic aid and other support. President Carter altered that perception when Moscow demonstrated in December 1979 that it intended to turn Afghanistan into a military base of operations, potentially directed southward toward Pakistan and perhaps westward into Iran, then in the midst of its Islamic revolution. President Carter single-handedly moved Afghanistan from a peripheral to a near-vital U.S. interest and took retaliatory economic measures against the Soviet Union for what he viewed as a serious threat to the balance of power in Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf. A Rapid Deployment Force was soon created by the Department of Defense.

President Carter warned Moscow in his State of the Union Message in January 1980 that the United States would react militarily if the Soviet Union moved beyond Afghanistan into the Persian Gulf region.<sup>5</sup> He apparently believed that Moscow was positioning itself to occupy northern and eastern Iran if the situation seemed ripe for armed intervention. Mr. Carter did not give Pakistan a similar pledge, but he offered that country a substantial assistance package. It was also suggested that U.S. air bases should be established in Pakistan. Beginning in 1981, the Reagan administration increased aid to Pakistan and also sent military aid through Pakistan to rebel groups fighting in Afghanistan. Provision of Stinger missiles to Afghan Freedom Fighters in 1986-87 reportedly was a major factor in halting an offensive by Soviet forces against the rebels in 1987.

An agreement, concluded in 1988 between the United States, the Soviet Union and Pakistan that arranged for the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Afghanistan in return for a cessation of military aid to the rebels means that Afghanistan remains a peripheral U.S. interest. The United States in that agreement pledged to respect Afghanistan's neutrality after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Although Washington has some interest in the composition of a new Afghan government, the country's peripheral status in U.S. interests means that the United States can probably accept any government there so long as it does not provide the Soviet Union with military bases.

Pakistan's importance to the United States is more ambiguous. One reason is that the former Zia government desired to develop a nuclear weapons capability to match a perceived nuclear threat posed by India, and to counter military intimidation from the Soviet Union. Pakistan's fundamentalist, basically anti-democratic, Islamic system is another source of friction with the United States. Whether Pakistan will turn toward democracy following the recent death of President Zia is not yet clear. Because of its strategic location, however, Pakistan will remain a major U.S. world-order interest. It should not be raised to the vital level unless the Soviet Union launches a large military attack in Southwest Asia.

Pakistan's and Afghanistan's limited importance to the United States in 1988 is summarized in table 3.

**U.S. National Interests in Southwest Asia**

Basic National Interests	Intensity of Interests			
	Survival	Vital	Major	Peripheral
Defense of Homeland				Pakistan Afghanistan
Economic Well-being				Pakistan Afghanistan
Favorable World Order			Pakistan	Afghanistan
Promotion of Values				Pakistan Afghanistan

**Table 3**

**Persian Gulf.** The United States has long had two basic interests in the Persian Gulf: an economic one that is based almost exclusively on the gulf's vast oil reserves, and a world-order interest based on the "containment of communism" policy adopted in the Truman administration and pursued with



great vigor by President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles during the 1950s. Defense of North America and promotion of American values were never serious objectives of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf states, although the Carter administration pressed the Shah to institute democratic reforms in Iran. The issue all U.S. Presidents have wrestled with since 1946, when President Truman confronted Josef Stalin over his failure to withdraw Soviet troops from northern Iran, is this: How intense are U.S. economic and world-order interests in the Persian Gulf region? Are they major interests, requiring diplomacy and economic and military aid; or are they vital, anticipating the use of combat troops if other measures fail to achieve U.S. objectives?

Security in the Persian Gulf was considered to be primarily a British responsibility after World War II. In 1968, however, London announced it would withdraw its forces "East of Suez" in two years, including the Persian Gulf. President Nixon concluded in 1969 that the United States should not try to replace Britain as the guardian of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, and he therefore decided to make an agreement with the Shah to have Iran assume responsibility for keeping peace in the gulf area. The United States did build a communications facility on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia—a British possession which London agreed to lease to the United States. In return, Nixon agreed to sell Iran the latest U.S. military equipment and to give the Shah strong diplomatic support. The Shah also provided important intelligence-gathering bases to the United States. Bahrain offered the United States use of its naval facilities from which the U.S. Navy operated a small Persian Gulf squadron. During the 1970s, therefore, Iran became a highly important world-order interest of the United States, probably vital, because of its key strategic location and its pro-U.S. policies. The Shah made peace with all of Iran's Persian Gulf neighbors and provided security for the region. However, Washington has never concluded a binding defense treaty with Iran, as it did with Turkey and Greece. Although the United States was associated with Iran in the Central Treaty Organization until CENTO's demise in 1979, it was not a signatory of that defense pact.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of its Islamic revolution in 1978-79, Iran reversed policy and turned antagonistic toward the United States. After the Khomeini regime condoned the seizure of 52 U.S. diplomatic personnel, relations with Tehran were ended. When Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, most Americans applauded. And when Iran counterattacked in 1982 and later invaded Iraqi territory, U.S. policy gradually tilted toward Baghdad. U.S. diplomatic ties with Baghdad, which Iraq had severed after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, were reopened in 1984. This signaled that the United States considered Iraq's

territorial integrity to be a major world-order interest as the gulf war intensified.

Iraq began to attack Iranian oil terminals and tankers in the mid-1980s in order to reduce Tehran's foreign exchange earnings which were used to buy military equipment employed against Iraq. In 1987 the United States did not protest this oil war because it was not in the U.S. interest to see Iran win the war with Iraq. However, when Iran escalated the tanker war in 1987 by attacking Kuwait's shipping, because it aided Iraq's war effort, the Reagan administration agreed to escort Kuwait's tankers if they were re-registered in the United States. This action showed that Kuwait's security was also a major U.S. interest. Subsequent deployment of over 30 U.S. Navy ships to the gulf suggested that Washington's commitment to Kuwait's and Iraq's defense might border on a vital world-order interest. This assessment depended, however, on how important the Reagan administration believed the entire Persian gulf area to be—whether increased Iranian influence there would be an intolerable situation for American interests and suggest a U.S. combat role. President Reagan stopped short of making that commitment.<sup>7</sup>

The most important Persian gulf state from a U.S. perspective, one which has long influenced U.S. policy, is Saudi Arabia. The relationship dates from World War II when President Roosevelt visited King Ibn Saud on the President's return home from the Yalta Summit in 1945. The United States had a major economic well-being interest in this desert kingdom after World War II because of its huge oil reserves. World-order considerations were a lower priority. However, two major events in the early 1970s propelled Saudi Arabia into a higher category. One was the October War (1973) between Israel and Egypt, during which the Saudi government joined other Arab states in imposing an embargo on oil shipments to the United States and Western Europe in retaliation for their support of Israel's war effort. The second factor was Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf, which was completed in 1971, and the growing importance of Saudi Arabia, as well as Iran, in helping to manage the emerging power vacuum and prevent a growth of Soviet influence. While Saudi Arabia's oil reserves were a vital U.S. economic interest in the 1970s, the U.S. world-order interest there remained at a major level because the Shah of Iran was prepared to provide security in the gulf and act as the main bulwark against anticipated Soviet pressure. When the Shah's regime was overthrown early in 1979 and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December, Saudi Arabia suddenly assumed a far higher world-order priority, close to a vital interest. The defection of Iran and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan made Saudi Arabia the focus of DOD planning for the Rapid Deployment Force; but its government did not agree with Washington's concern about Soviet penetration of the gulf and it refused to grant military bases to the United States. The Riyadh government nevertheless purchased billions of dollars

in U.S. military equipment—including the AWACS surveillance system and F-15 fighter bombers. Saudi policy preferred to keep U.S. forces “over the horizon” so as not to cause antagonism with other gulf states and possible disruptions within its own traditional society. Joint training exercises and stockpiling of U.S. equipment were acceptable, but not the basing of the Rapid Deployment Force.

By 1988, Saudi Arabia was clearly a vital U.S. world-order interest and also a vital economic interest because of its crucial role in setting OPEC oil prices and influencing the policies of other Persian Gulf oil states. However, Saudi Arabia does not have a formal treaty of alliance with the United States and it remains wary of permitting the U.S. military to establish permanent bases or hosting a headquarters for the Central Command, a joint military staff set up by the Defense Department in 1983 and located in Tampa, Florida.

U.S. national interests in four major Persian Gulf states in 1988 may be seen in table 4. It is clear that only one of them—Saudi Arabia—is a vital U.S. interest, for both economic and world-order reasons. The other countries are at the major interest level in terms of world-order. Kuwait and Iran remain major economic interests because of oil and U.S. investments.<sup>8</sup> The promotion of American values in the Gulf States is, and should remain, a peripheral national interest.

**U.S. National Interests in Persian Gulf States**

Basic National Interests	Intensity of Interests			
	Survival	Vital	Major	Peripheral
Defense of Homeland				Iran Iraq S. Arabia Kuwait
Economic Well-being		S. Arabia	Kuwait Iran	Iraq
Favorable World Order		S. Arabia	Iran Iraq Kuwait	
Promotion of Values				Iran Iraq Kuwait S. Arabia

**Table 4**

## Appraisal of U.S. Interests in the Middle East.

The history of American commitments in the Middle East and this analysis of current U.S. interests there lead to several general conclusions:

First, the Eastern Mediterranean is of greater importance to the United States for world-order and promotion-of-values reasons than it was ten or twenty years ago. Furthermore, this arc of countries on the fringes of Asia and North Africa is of higher value to the United States, for similar reasons, than either the Persian Gulf area or Southwest Asia. In the past decade U.S. security relationships with Israel and Egypt have deepened, the strategic importance of Turkey grew as Iran ceased to be an ally, and Greece—despite a good deal of anti-American rhetoric—has retained its defense relationship with the United States and NATO. The U.S. world-order interest in this area is clearly vital, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future because of its strategic location and political importance to other parts of the Middle East. The promotion of democratic values in this region constitutes a major U.S. interest: Greece and Turkey are members of the NATO alliance which exemplifies Western democratic government, and Israel's democratic value system is based on a Western model. Although Egypt is not a democracy today, it intends to move in that direction as its economy and social system modernize.

In Southwest Asia, Pakistan has been viewed as a major world-order interest of the United States since the 1950s when "containment" was extended to the southern periphery of the Soviet Union. Afghanistan was never more than a peripheral U.S. interest until the mid-1970s. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979, however, caused an upward revision of U.S. interests in Southwest Asia—just as North Korea's invasion of South Korea in June 1950 precipitated a reassessment of U.S. interests in East Asia. By 1988, what had been viewed as a near-vital U.S. world-order interest in Afghanistan had moved back to a near-peripheral one as Soviet forces were gradually withdrawn and the United States agreed to reduce its support for the guerrilla forces. The U.S. interest in Pakistan continues to be a major one and will remain so unless Moscow again uses force to extend its control in the region. In effect, Soviet military action outside its own borders is a key factor in determining the level of U.S. interest in Southwest Asia.

The third and most controversial region is the Persian Gulf. Has this area increased in importance for the United States since the demise of the Shah's regime ten years ago? Or, is it now a major, rather than vital, world-order and economic interest? Without doubt, the gulf area would be a vital U.S. interest if Moscow tried to extend its influence over the region by military force. That would be a dangerous threat to the balance of power (world order), as well as a serious threat to the world's largest reserves of oil

(economic well-being). Even though the United States obtains only about five percent of its oil from the Persian Gulf, the world price would be heavily affected by a serious reduction in supplies from the area. In addition, the United States has a major interest in ensuring safe passage of the world's shipping in the gulf. The threat of Soviet intervention, which persuaded President Carter to declare that the gulf area was a vital interest, is clearly receding in 1988. Although the creation of a Rapid Deployment Force and the establishment of the Central Command may have been prudent policy in the early 1980s, it is doubtful whether a full-fledged U.S. military command for the gulf area makes sense in the 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

The political and military threat posed by revolutionary Iran to the gulf region is a serious issue for U.S. foreign policy, but this should not be construed as constituting a vital national interest. Some officials, notably former Secretary of the Navy James Webb, apparently thought that the Navy should have launched heavy bombing raids on Iranian territory in retaliation for Tehran's attacks on U.S.-flagged ships and naval vessels.<sup>10</sup> However, that would be "a bridge too far" in terms of U.S. strategic interests and political objectives. The U.S. long-term interest in the gulf region—exclusive of Saudi Arabia—is one of world-order and is at the major, *not* vital, level. This means working cooperatively with all the Gulf States and our European allies to maintain a balance of power in the gulf and prevent it from coming under the hegemony of one country—Iran, Iraq or the U.S.S.R. This is not a task for U.S. combat troops. Nevertheless, a major world-order interest can include a limited deployment of the Navy to protect ships of friendly gulf nations during times of stress and even to retaliate with measured armed force to attacks by hostile ships and planes. However, once hostilities end, as they did in August 1988, there is little need for a U.S. naval task force or ground forces in the gulf area.

As the Iran-Iraq war recedes and Iran adopts a conciliatory stance toward its neighbors and toward the United States, there is a limited military mission for the United States to perform in the gulf. A peacekeeping function needs to be filled, and this should be undertaken by the Gulf States in cooperation with United Nations forces supplemented by a modest presence by the United States, Britain, France, Italy, West Germany and Japan. These states have at least as large a stake as the United States has in maintaining a peaceful Persian Gulf area and should bear a major share of the costs in doing so. A collective effort at maintaining peace in the Persian Gulf is fully consistent with a "major" U.S. world-order interest. It is also a policy which gives the Gulf States the primary responsibility for negotiating a peaceful solution to their many differences.

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### Notes

1. The conceptual framework summarized here for determining the intensities of U.S. national interests is described in detail in Nuechterlein, *America Overcommitted: United States National Interests in* <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol42/iss1/9>

*the 1980s* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1985), chap. 1: "National Interest as a Basis of Foreign Policy Formulation."

2. *Ibid.* Chap. 2: "Instruments of Foreign and National Security Policy."

3. The United States protested Turkey's use of force to protect its interests in Cyprus, and Congress cut off military assistance to Ankara. However, Turkey's key strategic importance eventually caused Washington to renew aid and accept the *de facto* partition of Cyprus.

4. SEATO was a casualty of the Vietnam war and no longer exists. The United States did not join CENTO or its predecessor, the Baghdad Pact, because the State Department determined that it could not get either treaty approved by the Senate. However, it did become an associate member.

5. President Carter said in his State of the Union Message on 23 January 1980: "Let our position be absolutely clear: 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." Mr. Carter recalled in his memoirs, *Keeping Faith* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pp. 471-472, how he reached his decision to make this sweeping declaration of U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf.

6. CENTO's membership was Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Great Britain. The United States played a major role, however, as an associate member of the pact.

7. During 1988 the media carried a number of stories reporting on disagreement within the Reagan administration on how strongly the United States should punish Iran and whether it should openly defend Iraq. Administration policymakers, however, clearly did not want to risk pushing Iran into the arms of Moscow by threatening Iranian territory.

8. Other Persian Gulf States not discussed here are Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Oman. Bahrain is important because it permits the U.S. Navy to use its excellent port facilities. Oman is important because part of its territory extends into the strategic Strait of Hormuz and is used for surveillance operations by the United States and Britain.

9. In 1983 the Congressional Budget Office issued a report saying that the Defense Department had plans to deploy 440,000 combat forces to the Persian Gulf. See *The Rapid Deployment Force and Budgetary Implications* (Washington: Congressional Budget Office, 1983), pp. 11-12.

10. See *Washington Post* op. ed. article, 20 April 1988, by James H. Webb, entitled: "At Least The Navy Knows What It Is Doing in The Gulf." He observed: "If retaliatory force is necessary, it must be properly directed, but it must also be ruthless and overpowering. It must anticipate an adversary's next move, and preempt it. After the mine-laying incident of last October, appropriate use of force would have called for the elimination of much of Iran's navy."



## NAVAL ACADEMY HISTORY SYMPOSIUM

The History Department of the United States Naval Academy will sponsor its ninth Naval History Symposium. Tentative dates for the symposium are 18-20 October 1989. The symposium welcomes papers on all topics relating to naval and maritime history. Proposals should be sent to Associate Professor William R. Roberts, History Department, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland 21402-5044. The deadline for proposals is 1 February 1989.