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**NAVAL
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**DEFENDING U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE
PERSIAN GULF: GOING LIGHT**

by

Michael A. Gretz

March 2008

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Daniel Moran
Maria Rasmussen

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**DEFENDING U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF: GOING
LIGHT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

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I. DEFENDING U.S. INTERESTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF: GOING LIGHT

A. INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to defend U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf through the use of primarily SOF/light forces? How might implementing this type of force structure affect the perception of U.S. involvement in the region and its ability to project power on a scale commensurate with its interests? This question, whether or not the United States would be able to defend its interests in the Persian Gulf with light and Special forces is an attempt to answer the security dilemma: how to assure the safety and security of the state's interests while at the same time minimizing the threat that it poses to other actors so as not to force them to in turn pose a threat to the state's security? If we take a mainly realist approach to foreign policy and see states as essentially power maximizers who will aggressively pursue their interests until they are blocked, costs out weigh benefits, or other powers arise then it is rational to try and minimize the costs associated with pursuing the security of the state's interests. Accordingly, this would suggest that as a way to minimize these costs the state would also attempt to minimize the threat that it poses to other states/actors so as to avoid their feeling threatened.

In the Persian Gulf the U.S. has been trying to do this for years, largely unsuccessfully. This is due in large part to the vast cultural differences that exist between Americans and the Arab/Persian inhabitants of the region. While attempting to maximize its access to resources and promote security the U.S. has in fact created greater instability in the region and greater threats to the security of its interests. Given the current state of affairs in the Persian Gulf and the view that the world has of the United States it is imperative that we find alternative means to pursue our national interests in order to rebuild not only our national image but also our military capabilities. National interests are those things that a given state deems to be essential to the maintenance of its stability or security. The United States has many interests at stake in the Persian Gulf. The three primary ones, based on current policy, are securing unhindered access to energy, deterring the development or acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction by states

whose stability is questionable to the point where non-state actors or groups unfriendly to the U.S. could possibly gain control of these weapons,¹ and the disruption of terrorist threats to the U.S. directly or to its other regional interests.²

It is reasonable to believe that every state will try and act to protect its own interests. However, if the state does so in a manner that is offensive to those who live in the region or its allies it is in the long run counterproductive to the security of those same interests. According to a survey taken between December 2006 and February 2007 in four predominantly Muslim countries, the majority of those polled felt that the purpose of the United States' "Global War on Terror" was to divide the Muslim world and to dominate it militarily.³ Majorities in these same countries also endorsed having the United States leave the Middle East entirely.⁴ The decline in public regard for the United States in Muslim countries does not suggest that the U.S. is winning the war of ideas. While there are myriad causal factors that lead people to join terrorist organizations it would seem logical that an increased number of people with anti-American sentiments would increase the available pool of terrorist recruits available to attack the U.S. and its interests in the region.

Furthermore, positive views of the U.S. have been declining not just in the Persian Gulf but elsewhere as well. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, positive views of the U.S. have declined consistently in Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Russia, Indonesia, Jordan, Turkey, Japan, and India between 1999 and 2006.⁵ This is extremely important because the U.S. presence in the Middle East, in a military capacity

¹ *The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. September 2006. 1
www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/ (Accessed 15 November 2007.)

² Ibid.

³ Stephen Kull et Al. *Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al Qaeda*. The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland: www.worldpublicopinion.org, April 24, 2007, 6. This poll sampled was taken in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia. The margin of error is +/- 3 %.

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Pew Research Center, *Conflicting Views in a Divided World 2006: How Global Publics View: Muslim-Western Relations Global Issues U.S. Role in the World Asian Rivalries*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2006, 3. This survey looked at 15 countries from various regions of the world. The margin of error is +/- 3%.

fighting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, has along with other factors caused public opinion of the U.S. and its ability to use soft power worldwide to decrease. Therefore by fighting these wars and trying to secure national interests with an overt military presence the U.S. is undermining its reputation, and consequently its strategic effectiveness, on the world scene.

I would suggest that this is not necessary. It may be possible for the U.S. to defend its interests using primarily SOF and light forces, the use of which would decrease the overt U.S. footprint in the Persian Gulf and remove a stumbling block to long term security and stability in the region. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are most certainly now causing new hatred of the U.S.. In Egypt for example 91% of those polled approved of the killing of U.S. soldiers in both Iraq and Afghanistan and over 60% of Moroccans felt the same way.⁶ U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has historically been seen in a favorable light by Middle East countries. However, in a 2007 survey of Muslim countries including Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia the majority of people polled believed that the U.S. supported the expansion of Israel's borders within Palestinian territories.⁷

There exists the perception that the U.S. is only really interested in the Gulf and Iraq in particular because of its oil. Given the current trends which show that oil consumption in the United States far out paces supply; the projected, estimated need by 2020 will be to import roughly 7.5 million barrels a day.⁸ A similar disparity between domestic supply and consumption also exists in natural gas. With oil prices currently approaching \$100 a barrel, due in large part to instability in the Persian Gulf, it is imperative now more than ever to find new ways to secure U.S. interests and aid in returning stability to an already troubled region.

The energy markets are largely self-regulating; it is not any one nation's responsibility to regulate the market. However, the markets are not self-defending. This

⁶ Kull et al., 7.

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ National Energy Policy Development Group. May 2001. *National Energy Policy*. X. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/energy/2001/National-Energy-Policy.pdf> (Accessed 13 November 2007.)

means that in the end the United States and other nations will act to protect their own interests within the market, and the overall operation of the market itself. With the growing competition for energy resources especially with the rapidly growing Asian powers like China and the increasing influence of regional powers like Iran it is even more important to plan for the eventuality that we will experience future market crises through the actions of other nations trying to promote their own interests.

All of the above interests including energy, terrorism, and WMDs are directly affected by how the United States is perceived. That is a major reason why it is so important to examine ways to improve the image of the U.S. through force structuring alternatives as one means of ensuring the long term security of U.S. interests.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within this discussion there exists a major source of debate. The interests of the U.S. in the Persian Gulf are widely accepted and the debate revolves around the best means of defending those interests.

The primary debate in this thesis revolves around the best method for maximizing U.S. power in the Persian Gulf. One school of thought espoused by Walt and Mearsheimer suggests that historically, with some exception like Europe following WWII, the U.S. has not had to maintain ground forces in a region to be able to secure its interests. They feel that sea basing, which they refer to as offshore balancing, or using naval forces to project U.S. power into the region would best serve U.S. interests by reducing costs and also by removing American and Allied soldiers from harms way and in the end would remove fuel from the ideological fire of extremists.⁹

Several studies have been conducted on the value of sea basing. A study by the Naval Postgraduate School concluded that naval forward presence tends to have both a stabilizing affect on global markets and on commodities markets as well.¹⁰ Sea basing is

⁹ Mearsheimer, 338-341.

¹⁰ Robert Looney et al. *Economic Impact of Naval Forward Presence: Benefits, Linkage and Future Prospects as Modified by Trends in Globalization*. Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, December 2001, i.

also being heavily examined by the Department of Defense and by Congress. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review suggests with regard to seabasing:

The future joint force will exploit the operational flexibility of seabasing to counter political anti-access and irregular warfare challenges. The Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) family of ships will advance the capability of seabasing to support a wide spectrum of joint force operations. Special Operations Forces will exploit Afloat Forward Staging Bases to provide more flexible and sustainable locations from which to operate globally.¹¹

It is largely this concept in particular that I will try to explore, which particular emphasis on how SOF will be able to use seabasing as a platform to project power.

While there are many potential advantages to seabasing there are also disadvantages. This position of off-shore balancing is completely at odds with current policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, in general, with a policy of “regime change” as a long-term remedy for political instability. FM 3-24, the Army’s manual on counterinsurgency, focuses on the importance of winning the people. In the end whichever side succeeds in convincing the neutral or passive majority of the population will inevitably win the conflict.¹² To win the population David Kilcullen, senior counterinsurgency advisor to General David Petraeus in Iraq, suggests that a counterinsurgent must first persuade the population then protect them.¹³ To accomplish this task of winning the hearts and minds of the population it is essential for soldiers to be present at the local level and to not only have a good understanding of the people and their environment but also to be a visible deterrent to the insurgent forces.

In a study conducted at Naval War College of the Navy’s new Global Fleet Station, which is a proposed form of seabasing that is small enough to be relatively inexpensive and manageable within the joint community, the potential downside of

¹¹ Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 6 February 2006, 47.
<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf> (Accessed 10 October 2007.)

¹² FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency, Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006, 1-19.

¹³ <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/doc/9088781> (accessed 3 December 2007.) “Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice.” By David Kilcullen given 26 September 2007 in Quantico, VA. Slide 54.

seabasing is evaluated. The study suggests much like Kilcullen, that when operating from a sea base, forces on the ground would be more likely to be isolated from the population because their logistics are all managed by the sea base.¹⁴

Another challenge for sea basing is illustrated by a study conducted by the Government Accountability Office. The report concluded that there existed no coherent plan within DOD to coordinate between the services pursuing sea basing and that there was a major lack of clear leadership and management of the project.¹⁵

While the sea basing option provides at face value a greater degree of flexibility and the ability to project power as needed it could potentially increase response time of ground forces in the event that they are needed. Another issue is that sea basing as a concept is currently under development and therefore it is unclear what the final outcome of the project will be. However, it does show great potential to provide policy makers with alternatives to “boots on the ground” for projecting power and protecting interests; although, like other options. It is also subject to the politics of the given situation.

A secondary option to reduce the U.S. ground footprint in the Middle East would be to shift to bases just outside of the region, potentially under the command of the newly formed AFRICOM. Bases already exist in Africa particularly in Djibouti where JTF Horn of Africa currently maintains a force of 2000 who conduct primarily counter-terrorism, civil affairs operations and command and control. A potential difficulty is that AFRICOM is also in its nascent stage and is without a permanent home for its headquarters (it is temporarily based out of Stuttgart, Germany). Though AFRICOM is not looking to establish major bases in Africa, it is looking to establish 5 regionally-aligned, forward deployed headquarters to work with the governments in those regions and to promote cooperation.

¹⁴ A.D. Danko, *Refining Seabasing to Support Security-Shaping Missions*. Naval War College, 10 May 2007. 7.

¹⁵ Government Accountability Office. *Joint Seabasing Would Benefit from a Comprehensive Management Approach and Rigorous Experimentation before Services Spend Billions on New Capabilities*. Washington, DC, January 2007, GAO-07-211, 3.

An additional concern is that many African countries fear that any large scale military presence in Africa would amount to little more than a new round of colonialism and exploitation of the continent's natural resources.¹⁶ Not all of Africa is opposed to the idea though, and Liberia has offered for AFRICOM to establish its headquarters there. Which of these force postures or some third option is most effective will be highly influenced by (1) the stability of those states that we feel are most important, (2) general public opinion, and (3) our ability to project force in a timely and adequate manner.

C. WHY SOF?

The basic case for SOF is that, given the nature of the threats that the United States is currently facing, i.e., chiefly non-state actors or failed-state regime elements, it is logical to employ those instruments within the arsenal which are best suited to this task. Where the threat is by its nature smaller, more flexible, and where the environment in question poses inherent difficulty for the conduct of operations based on the complexity of the religious and cultural differences involved, Special Operations Forces are ideally suited.

Given the national interest in energy security, countering the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and deterring terrorist threats there is no force better suited to this task than Special Operations Forces. SOF are specially trained and organized to give them the operational flexibility as well as responsiveness necessary to respond to emerging threats. They are geographically aligned and culturally trained to avoid many of the mistakes made by their more mainstream counterparts. Because of their small footprint and specialized capabilities and equipment these forces can more easily be prepositioned, whether at sea or on land, to respond quickly to crises, and if necessary to sustain themselves until more conventional forces arrive.

¹⁶Africom's one-year courtship test. Jane's Foreign Report: Jane's Information Group, October 18, 2007.
http://www8.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/frp/hi story/frp2007/frp70367.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=AFRICOM&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=FREP& (Accessed 30 November 2007.)

SOF have traditionally performed many of these tasks for many years. The Department of Defense doesn't send an armor battalion to liberate an oil rig which is being held by terrorists, they send SOF. This is not to suggest that the need for conventional forces is past, but rather, given a more narrow focus on what U.S. national interests in the Gulf are, that SOF are naturally better prepared to respond to the vast majority of problems that arise there.

Special Operations are defined as

Operations conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, and/or economic objectives employing military capabilities for which there is no broad conventional force requirement. These operations often require covert, clandestine, or low visibility capabilities. Special operations are applicable across the range of military operations. They can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations of conventional forces or other government agencies and may include operations through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces. Special operations differ from conventional operations in degree of physical and political risk, operational techniques, mode of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets.¹⁷

SOF are not meant to be a substitute for conventional military forces. They are rather tasked with conducting nine core missions which differ from their conventional counterparts: direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, psychological operations (PSYOP), civil affairs operations, counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and information operations.¹⁸ Given their training to perform these core tasks it is logical that since these tasks respond directly to the requirements of accepted national interests in the Gulf, that SOF should play the principal role in the region.

The scope of this research focuses on the ability of SOF and light forces from all services to project power and defend U.S. interests in the Gulf. SOF has to this point played a major role, in particular since 9/11, in securing U.S. interests in the Gulf. SOF, by their very nature, are not meant to be used as conventional forces in nonpermissive

¹⁷ Joint Publication 3-05: Doctrine For Joint Special Operations. 17 December 2003, GL-11

¹⁸ Ibid. viii.

environments. It is not entirely reasonable to expect a 12 man Special Forces A-team to self secure in downtown Mosul, Iraq. As a result SOF have had to be paired with conventional forces, which provide them security at their forward operating bases and while they are operating in theatre. This is a waste of resources. Neither, however, is it desirable to see SOF expanded to the degree necessary to be able to self secure, because it would in the end prove a hindrance to the operational flexibility which is characteristic of SOF, and necessarily dilute the exceptional high quality of the personnel of what must remain, in the end, an elite (and hence a small) force.

D. FORCES AVAILABLE

Each branch of service has increasing numbers of special operations forces. The Army has the largest pool of SOF with thousands of Special Forces, Rangers, Aviation, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations personnel as well as special mission units designed to meet specific operational needs. The other branches of service have less overall personnel available but all would be essential to the success of any operations in the Gulf. The Navy's Sea Air and Land (SEAL) and Special Boat teams would be ideally suited to operating in the littorals of the Gulf and in protecting U.S. oil interests especially oil or natural gas while in shipment. The recently formed Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) which consists primarily of Force Reconnaissance and Foreign Military Training Units are already forward assigned to naval deployments and are therefore well prepared for a potentially greater reliance on naval platforms for forward staging. Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is an essential part of the special operations community because of its ability to make something out of nothing. Air Force Special Tactics, Para Rescue, and Combat Controllers provide the ability to the other services to have both air support while forward deployed but also the ability to create forward landing sites for air assets that could provide additional material support or reinforcement of forces should any forward deployment become a more protracted mission.

United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is the supported command in the war on terror. It possesses the habitual relationships with the geographic

combatant commands to allow for the freedom of maneuver necessary for SOF to meet their strategic operational objectives. When considering future operations in the Gulf it is important to recognize that USSOCOM has in the past and is currently working closely with both CENTCOM, EUCOM, and AFRICOM in the pursuit of the objectives of the GWOT and therefore these relationships would not need to be newly created but rather reinforced to accommodate any increase in forces for contingency operations.

Planning at the USSOCOM level is already underway for joint actions across all of the branches of service. In 2006 USSOCOM put forth its Capstone Concept for Special Operations (CCSO). This concept was USSOCOM's response to the directives it was given in the 206 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). The QDR gave USSOCOM this mission:

SOF will increase their capacity to perform more demanding and specialized tasks, especially long-duration, indirect and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas. For direct action, they will possess an expanded organic ability to locate, tag and track dangerous individuals and other high-value targets globally. SOF will also have greater capacity to detect, locate and render safe WMD. For unconventional warfare and training foreign forces, future SOF will have the capacity to operate in dozens of countries simultaneously.¹⁹

The CCSO takes a long duration perspective. While they are focused specifically on the GWOT it is viewed as a long war and one that will be fought and won over years and decades and not days or months. This is in line with the concept of trying to protect, in the long term, U.S. interests in the Gulf. According to the CCSO, USSOCOM will do this because "Appropriately tailoring Joint SOF packages comprised of warriors who possess competent regional language and cultural preparation will prepare SOF to keep fighting the Long War."²⁰

Recognizing the nature of the threats that it is tasked to deal with USSOCOM has laid out how it intends to fight the Long War.

¹⁹ 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, 43.

²⁰ United States Special Operations Command. *Capstone Concept for Special Operations*. 2006, 3.

Small, forward-based Joint SOF teams will support and be supported by larger expeditionary Joint SOF force packages composed of SOF, General Purpose Force, and interagency personnel rotating through land or maritime forward operating bases (FOB). Joint SOF rotational forces will continuously provide an appropriate force level to meet whatever timeline is required. Through this construct, Joint SOF units will continue to foster relationships with theater militaries, governments, non-governmental organizations, and other supporting agencies.²¹

This concept is in line with the scope of this thesis and in this project the focus is to look at two options for these forward bases: bases ashore in Africa versus seabasing in the Gulf.

1. Conventional Support for SOF

SOF is not meant to engage in large scale force-on-force conflicts. In these more protracted conflicts SOF have been paired with more conventional forces. The recent incorporation of Stryker brigades into the U.S. force structure has excellent potential as a supplemental force to augment protracted engagements by SOF. SOF and Stryker brigades have worked together in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The Stryker brings a unique mix of speed, maneuverability, and firepower on the ground with rapid deployability. The Stryker vehicle is a modular platform that is C-130 deployable, and that can be configured with a 105mm cannon, MEDEVAC, C2, 120mm mortars, fire-support, or any number of small arms. Overall the platform is extremely versatile and has served well in deployments with SOF and has potential to provide increased firepower necessary to augment SOF deployments in environments that are more austere and where large scale conventional support is at a greater distance.

The Stryker brigades represent a relatively new option but the deployment of both airborne and marine expeditionary forces has been used for many years to provide rapid massing capability. The XVIII Airborne Corps is the primary command responsible for airborne forces. There are currently airborne forces stationed in Alaska, North Carolina, Germany, and Italy. The advantage to using Marine forces is their habitual relationship with the Navy which would facilitate the transition to seabasing. Traditionally, Marine

²¹ United States Special Operations Command. *Capstone Concept for Special Operations*. 2006, 9.

expeditionary forces have been configured to be self sustaining for 90 days. Another advantage to these light forces is that they are rapidly deployable and represent relatively small footprints which would minimize their impact on the host region.

E. METHODOLOGY

This project will be to perform a cost benefit analysis of two differing policies, sea-basing in the Gulf and land basing outside of the Gulf, in East Africa. Sea-basing as it is currently being proposed represents a new approach to power projection, while the Africa-based policy would represent more of a lateral shift of the current force structure. Organizations like the Pew Research Center and World Public Opinion have conducted extensive polling in both the West and the Arab world, which provide extremely valuable insights into the effect of U.S. foreign policy on the local populations. Such insights are valuable for contextualizing the problem but this research will not focus only on public opinion alone. It will also examine the fiscal costs inherent in these programs and potential ways to minimize those while retaining maximum benefits. Although “political” and “fiscal” costs and benefits cannot be weighed in precisely the same scale, both must be taken into account to obtain a balanced view of the operational choices that are available. After looking at the costs and benefits from both approaches I will compare them both to see if either presents a feasible long term solution for power projection and national interest protection in the Persian Gulf.

The major question that looms over any planning for future operations in the Persian Gulf is the uncertain outcome of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This research nevertheless assumes that there are no realistic outcomes that will not require the continued maintenance of some U.S. military forces in the region. This thesis will examine how those forces might be aligned to maximize their effectiveness and minimize the negative aspects of their presence.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the United States’ national interests in the Persian Gulf. This portion of the paper will examine what the interests of the U.S. are based on policies implemented and strategies outlined by the current administration but which are also likely to carry over into any further administrations. The thesis will

examine public opinion polls from both within and outside of the region to see how the security of these interests has been affected by current policies.

I will then examine sea-basing using government reports as well as independent scholarly perspectives to offer balance. I will look at the costs and benefits of this program from both a budgetary standpoint and a strategic perspective. Next I will look at alternative land basing options for light and Special Operations Forces in Africa and assess possible benefits and drawbacks to such a plan. In both of these cases I will use the information gained from public opinion polls to guide the structuring possibilities in order to minimize new conflict. Both of the force structure options will be evaluated with the emphasis being on the use of SOF and light forces. This is important because light forces are generally more easily deployed and require less forward positioning of supplies thus enabling a minimized posture in the region.

By light forces I am referring specifically to the Special Operations Forces from all of the services as well as light components of both the Army and Marines. I will also include what have been referred to as medium forces, particularly the Army Stryker Brigades because of their rapid deployment capability. The Navy and Air Force would also play a major role in any force structuring, particularly as enablers for forward staging and in the rapid deployment of forces into a given conflict area.

Each of these different scenarios, whether sea basing or using AFRICOM for example, would require a unique force structure to maximize the options of the regional combatant commanders as well as policy makers while minimizing risk for soldiers and civilians alike. Given the tenuous situation in Iraq, escalating tensions with Iran, and the increasing costs of energy in an ever more competitive market, the U.S. needs to find new ways promote its interests. This thesis is an attempt to do exactly that by doing a cost benefit analysis of these force structures with the intent of providing more options to policy makers.

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II. DEFINING U.S. INTERESTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

A. INTRODUCTION

The United States has many interests at stake in the Persian Gulf. These interests are not all agreed upon by the different sectors of the American government or society. For this reason I have chosen to focus on those three interests that appear to be most relevant across the board as well as being those that the U.S. has most greatly emphasized in this particular region. Though these interests are those which have been championed by the Bush administration they are also accepted to a greater and lesser degrees by academics and politicians alike.

This thesis centers on U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf. Geographically this region consists of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and the smaller countries of Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The size and complexity of this region poses several challenges. As the world becomes increasingly more interconnected through globalization, and as the region becomes more important to U.S. interests it is vital to understand these cultures and learn how to operate within or around their cultural and ideological frameworks.

Part of this process is identifying those interests in the Persian Gulf that are most vital to the United States. The Bush administration has laid out what it believes to be its interests in several papers: the National Security Strategy, the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, and the National Energy Policy. From this there would seem to be three interests in particular that the administration has chosen to focus on most heavily: securing unhindered access to energy, deterring the development or acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction by states whose stability is questionable to the point where non-state actors or groups unfriendly to the U.S. could possibly gain control of these weapons,²² and the disruption of terrorist threats to the U.S. directly or to its other regional interests.²³ No explicit account is taken of a fourth issue – the Arab-Israeli

²² *The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. September 2006. 1 www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/ (Accessed 15 November 2007.)

²³ *Ibid.*

conflict –despite the fact that the animosity it has inspired undoubtedly undermines all American and indeed Western efforts to exercise influence in the Gulf. Nevertheless, neither country falls within the geographic boundaries of the Persian Gulf. It is also unlikely that the course of that conflict would be directly impacted by either of the force structuring scenarios considered by this research.

B. ENERGY SECURITY

The U.S. is the world's largest and most diversified economy. No other state benefits more than the U.S. from the stability of world markets. It is most definitely in U.S. interests for the markets to function in an orderly fashion. Among developed states, the United States actually obtains a relatively small share of its energy from the Persian Gulf; yet to the extent that it has an interest in the stability of the system as a whole, it has a strong interest in the stability of the Gulf, at least to the extent required for it to fulfill its market role. The Persian Gulf represents collectively the largest oil and natural gas reserves on the planet. It is a vital crossroads for all developed nations as source of energy. At the center of those crossroads sits Saudi Arabia, a state whose security has been guaranteed by the United States since the end of the Second World War, and currently the supplier of about 25% of America's consumption. According to International Energy Annual, Saudi Arabia was producing around 10.5 million barrels of oil and 2.7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas a day in 2004.²⁴

Instability in the energy markets has dramatic consequences throughout the world. The boycott initiated by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1973 as a response to the Arab-Israeli conflict had a major impact on the U.S. economy. During the embargo, which lasted two years, the price of oil quadrupled.²⁵ This was an historic moment in that it showed just how dependent the U.S. and the West in general was on foreign sources of energy, and that they were in fact quite vulnerable to any attack on this energy exporting system. Any volatility in oil exporting regions can impact the

²⁴Country Energy Balance: Saudi Arabia. U.S. Department of Energy
http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/world/country/cntry_SA.html (Accessed 3 March 2008.)

²⁵ William R. Keylor, *The Twentieth Century World and Beyond: An International History Since 1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 320-321.

price at which oil futures are traded. A threat from Iran or a rebel attack in the Niger delta has the effect, generally, of raising the cost of a barrel of oil due to the fear that supply will be unable to meet the world's demand. The price of oil is currently at a record high at roughly \$100 per barrel. Apart from the obvious ecological disaster that would ensue if attacks should take place in the Gulf on oil facilities or on tankers in transit in the Gulf there would also be major economic and political consequences.

The regimes of the Gulf monarchies enjoy a relative degree of stability due to U.S. guarantees or other external security which allows these countries to focus their military and policing efforts almost entirely on their internal populations. While this has the effect of increased security it is also seen as demoralizing to the citizens of those countries. They know that the corrupt regimes, which are milking their countries dry of resources and pocketing the revenue, are being allowed to continue because of outside interference on the part of the consuming nations. Additionally, there is also relatively little participation allowed to citizens of these regimes more or less leaving them little option but to pursue means other than political for the redress of grievances.

These volatile circumstances directly affect U.S. citizens. Volatility caused by unstable Gulf regimes and threats by the Iranians cause Americans to spend more money on heating oil, gasoline for their cars and gas used to cook their food. They also bare the costs more indirectly. As industry is forced to pay higher prices for these commodities they in turn pass this cost on to the consumers with higher prices on manufactured goods.

1. SOF Missions to Secure Energy Resources

Many examples exist of Special Operations Forces being used to protect energy resources in the Persian Gulf. During the Iraq invasion in 2003 SOF was used to seize oil platforms in the Gulf and protect key oil drilling and production sites. SOF has also been used to secure shipping lanes. When facing the threat of terrorism at sea to disrupt the flow of energy resources or other trade through the Gulf SOF are prepared to board and retake vessels that have been seized by terrorist forces. An example of this would be the hijacking of the passenger ship Achille Lauro. The Achille Lauro was a passenger ship that was cruising the Mediterranean and that was scheduled to make several stops in the

region. The ship was hijacked by four terrorists who killed an American tourist. SOF did not directly retake the ship because a peaceful solution was brokered with Egypt. However, through coordination across the services, a JSOTF consisting primarily of SEALs was prepared to retake the ship and did eventually seize the Egyptian plane which was being used to transport the terrorists to safety.²⁶

In this case the ship in question was a passenger one, however the SEALs who were prepared to assault and retake this ship are equally capable of retaking an oil tanker or a natural gas container ship. Of greatest significance in this case is the high level of coordination that took place between all branches of service, and diplomatic channels, to maintain situational awareness of the Achille Lauro and then to prepare to retake the ship. This level of coordination would likely be required in any future mission destined at reducing threats to the transshipment of energy resources as well.

C. WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) are a major threat to not only the United States but also to the rest of the world. WMDs have been used in the Persian Gulf before. During the Iran Iraq War both sides exchanged barrages of chemical munitions fired from field artillery. They have been seen as a source of power ever since. The greatest concern to the U.S. in the Gulf is that a state that is unfriendly to U.S. interests or who has the potential to try and use WMDs as leverage to enforce its own policies will come to acquire them. The state deemed most likely to try and do this is Iran. The U.S. and Iran have a long history in this domain. During the time of the Shah, in the 1960s and 70s, prior to his being deposed during the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the U.S. had offered to help Iran construct a domestic nuclear power program. Since that time Iran has continued to work towards this end with the help of the Russians who have been working on the nuclear plant at Bushehr.

The Iranians claim, and this is supported by the current National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, that their nuclear program is strictly peaceful and is intended to help

²⁶ Clancy, Tom and Carl Stiner, *Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces*. New York: G.P. Putnam 's Sons, 2002, 265-296.

Iran avoid total reliance on its stores of natural gas and oil for energy.²⁷ The Bush administration insists though that Iran maintains more sinister intentions. As long as Saddam Hussein was in power it would have been a reasonable strategic calculation on the part of Iran to produce WMDs as a means of deterring further aggression on the part of Iraq or even Israel. Now that Saddam is gone it is possible that Iran is either using this rhetoric to bolster its credibility in the region or to try and cause instability that could in turn raise oil prices thus providing the Iranian government with much needed funding.

Perhaps the greater threat in the region is that posed by the AQ Kahn network which has sold WMD technology to Iran, Lybia and North Korea. This network is more of a threat because it operates underground. States can be dealt with more or less as rational actors, however non-state actors play by somewhat different rules and possess an amount of tactical flexibility that states do not. A great fear of the U.S. is that this AQ Kahn network or another like it will sell this technology to a group like Al Qaeda who would in turn use it against the U.S. or one of its allies.

1. SOF Role in Counterproliferation of WMDs

The counterproliferation of WMDs is a core mission which SOF are tasked to perform. They undertake this mission through a variety of avenues ranging from PSYOPS to direct action aimed at removing key personnel who would either develop or traffic in these dangerous materials. The majority of information regarding these missions is classified though several key examples are publicly known which show the extent to which SOF, in conjunction with the interagency, has been able to perform their counterproliferation duties.

In the conflict in Iraq, SOF played a major role in the search for WMDs. This mission began before the invasion and has continued throughout. SOF also played a major role in the search for SCUD missiles that the U.S. feared would be launched at Israel and other key allies in the region as retaliation during both the first and second Gulf wars. During the first Gulf war this task of finding and destroying mobile launch sites for

²⁷ National Intelligence Estimate, November 2007. *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*. http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf (Accessed 10 January 2008.)

SCUD missiles fell to SOF forces from both the U.S. and the UK who infiltrated southern Iraq from Saudi Arabia. Similar missions were performed in the days leading up to the current conflict in Iraq with great success.

D. COUNTERING THE TERRORIST THREAT

In the years following 9/11 the terrorist threat to the United States has taken on an entirely new level of significance. This is not to suggest that there was less of a threat prior to 2001 but rather that terrorism is now something that the American public in general has experienced if not personally than at least vicariously through television or the experience of a friend or loved one. Prior to 2001 the image of terrorism was one of the masked gunman hijacking a plane or of an AK-47-wielding guerilla. Today terrorism is more complex with terrorist organizations and groups pursuing both nationalistic and ideological goals.²⁸ Where in the past the goals of nationalist terrorist groups were relatively easily definable, today the ideological terrorist's goals are less so. Out of ignorance we assume that organizations like Al Qaeda are a homogenous mixture where all of the terrorists are cut outs of Osama Bin Laden.

Organizations like Al Qaeda have goals that are openly professed, supported by organizational dynamics and values that are harder to define. These goals include removal of the United States and other western nations from the Dar el Islam (Muslim lands to include Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar etc.) but perhaps more importantly to them in the long run is their goal to remove the current authoritarian regimes which are, as they believe, being held in place because of the backing of the United States. This perception is easily confirmed by anyone in the Persian Gulf who is willing to either walk out their door or at the very least turn on their television and see American troops in action.

These American soldiers, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, regardless of how well intentioned they may be are not experts in the cultures and customs of the peoples of the Gulf. For the most part they do not understand the language, they do not understand the implications of what the actions may have based on how they are perceived. The military

²⁸ Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer. *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*. 2d ed. Dubuque: McGraw Hill, 2006, 89.

has taken greater efforts to train and improve upon these skills but unfortunately it takes only one mistake to erase the positive memories and replace them with disappointment and sorrow. This phenomenon is often referred to as the strategic private.²⁹ Examples of this include the incidents at Abu Ghraib, rapes of Iraqi women, U.S. troops entering mosques, defiling the bodies of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, or even unfortunate vehicle accidents where innocents are killed. Of course these incidents are the exception to the norm but that is not how they are perceived.

There is no question that how people perceive not only their own life situation but also that of the United States will have an affect on the ability of extremist groups to propagate their messages as well as recruit new membership. There is a war being fought in the Persian Gulf over ideology but it is not just in Iraq. This war is being fought on the Arab or Persian street. The battle is over which ideology is best, that of the present totalitarian regime, a regime patterned more along the lines of Islam, or a western democratic model. We know from research and opinion polls that the western democratic model being imposed on Iraq is not viewed favorably in the Gulf. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, more than 60% of respondents in Spain, Turkey, Germany, Jordan, and Egypt believed that the Efforts of the U.S. to establish a democracy in Iraq would fail and that the war has made the world and the region in particular less stable.³⁰

This does not suggest though that Muslim countries do not want democracy. According to the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland over 60% of those surveyed in Morocco, Pakistan, and Indonesia had positive views of democracy and 82% of Egyptians surveyed held a favorable view of democracy.³¹ So if democracy, as seen in Iraq, is not viewed favorably then what is? Unfortunately, it is

²⁹ While serving in Tal A'far Iraq between 2004 and 2005 with the 25th Infantry Division myself and other officers frequently referred to this phenomenon as members of our brigade inadvertently caused us difficulties through their cultural misunderstandings.

³⁰ Pew Research Center, *Conflicting Views in a Divided World 2006: How Global Publics View: Muslim-Western Relations Global Issues U.S. Role in the World Asian Rivalries*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2006, 14-15.

³¹ Stephen Kull et Al. *Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al Qaeda*. The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland: www.worldpublicopinion.org, April 24, 2007, 23.

difficult to assess the level of approval of more authoritarian regimes in the Gulf because the regimes in question are not particularly open to dissent. It is easier on the other hand to measure the views of Muslims of an Islamized form of government. People in these same countries were also asked if they felt that all predominantly Muslim countries should be required to apply Sharia law as the main basis of government. Respondents in Indonesia were the least inclined to feel that Sharia law should be the basis of government with 53% at least partially in agreement and 17% of which strongly agreed.³² In Egypt, Morocco, and Pakistan, however, the numbers were much higher with roughly 75% of respondents being at least partially in favor of the strict application of Sharia law in all Muslim countries.³³

This is important because it suggests that the current plan doesn't work. It suggests that there is a great deal of unrest in the region in part at least because there is, if not a clash of civilizations as Huntington suggests, a clash of seemingly conflicting ideologies. When this is combined with rampant unemployment and large populations of young people we see two of the major factors that are suggested contributing to individuals choosing to use terrorism as a tactic or at a minimum be sympathetic to those who do. Gilles Kepel in his book *Jihad* suggests that Islamic fundamentalist movements over the last century from Egypt to Iran to Sudan have several themes in common. These were large populations of unemployed urban poor and the inability of governments to address their population's social needs under authoritarian regimes.³⁴

It is important to make the distinction between the people who chose to join these radical groups and those who lead them. Marc Sageman has performed an important work in this area by examining the structure of Al Qaeda and its leadership. His study included 134 people and found that 101 of them were performing at least semiskilled or professional work prior to joining the organization.³⁵ These people were doctors,

³² Stephen Kull et Al., 21.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002, 362-363.

³⁵ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2004, 78.

lawyers, policemen and students, they represent, however, those leaders who then mobilize the urban underprivileged and guide them on their journey of radicalization. It is not the leadership that turns themselves into suicide bombers.

1. SOF and Counterterrorism

Special Operations Forces are considered to be the tip of the spear in the fight against terrorism. They have been involved recently in missions directed at high value targets (HVTs) like searching in Afghanistan for Osama Bin Laden or the successful hunt for Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq. These types of missions are not solely kinetic in nature. They incorporate a direct action phase which comes into play once sufficient intelligence has been gathered and analyzed. Additionally, they incorporate all of the facets of special operations using civil affairs missions to gain the trust of local populations so they will be more likely to provide the required information or at least deny sanctuary to the HVT in question. PSYOPS are used to push forward the messages that the taskforce and the U.S. government want to promote with the intention of convincing the local population that it is in their interest to cooperate. Special Forces work in conjunction with local security forces as force multipliers to both develop capacity and to engage in more kinetic operations. All of this was used in the hunt for abu Musab al Zarqawi and ultimately culminated in his death.

Involved in his process was the “interagency,” a word which has come to refer collectively to all of the major law enforcement and intelligence as well as diplomacy based organizations within the U.S. government. This level of integration and cooperation is further developed in the command structure that AFRICOM has developed. Instead of following the traditional J structure of the geographic combatant commands, AFRICOM pairs the interagency directly with their military counterparts in an attempt to increase cooperation and efficiency. This would seem to be a model that would be extremely conducive to these types of complex operations.

In reality there is from a philosophical perspective the little difference between counterterrorism and counterproliferation. Tactically both missions are directed at groups or individuals who are unfriendly to the U.S.. In the case of counterproliferation

the stakes are much greater. For counterproliferation SOF must rely much more heavily on support and intelligence from the interagency for the conduct of their operations. In the case of the Persian Gulf counterterrorism missions are as much kinetic as they are civil affairs driven. General Bryan D. Brown the commander of USSOCOM through 2007, suggested that the key to success in the long term war against terror was a two pronged approach which focused efforts on both nation and capacity building in states where the potential for terrorism was highest and then when necessary using force to combat terrorist organizations that arose in spite of these efforts.³⁶

E. CONCLUSION

Of the many interests of the United States in the Persian Gulf the three of the most vital are securing unhindered access to energy supply, countering the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and deterring terrorist threats. Energy drives the global economy. If the supply of energy is interrupted for any reason the world will feel the effects. While the U.S. cannot control God it can take measures to minimize the likelihood that terrorists will succeed in disrupting this vital commodity. WMDs are the deadliest and most feared weapons in existence. The U.S. will not stand by and allow them to fall into the hands of those who would use them to do harm to America or its allies. SOF are well suited to perform this key mission that they are tasked with. Countering terrorism is the bread and butter of SOF. They have been performing this role admirably for many years. As time has progressed and the conflicts in the Gulf and Afghanistan have become more evolved SOF has also adapted with greater flexibility and skill to meet this emerging threat and they will continue to do so.

This chapter has examined ways that SOF has historically and doctrinally acted to secure these interests. The focus now shifts to determine whether or not it is feasible for the U.S. secure these interests using a minimalist force structure comprised mainly of special operations forces in conjunction with light forces. The first option to be examined will be the use of sea bases as forward staging points for SOF operations.

³⁶ This is based on General Brown's command vision. Which I received when he came to visit the Naval Postgraduate School during the summer of 2007. In his vision he speaks to using both the direct and indirect approaches to defeat terrorism. The indirect approach includes UW, FID, CMO, and other actions contributing to the social and economic welfare of the target audience.

In the case of this project the goal is to examine ways of reducing the force necessary to maintain these interests while at the same time attempting to alleviate some of the causes of instability that would prompt the use of force to begin with. Current wisdom on fighting counterinsurgency suggests the need of the counterinsurgent to be amongst the people and to gain their trust through continued interaction. The problem is that by being on the ground the soldier is also promoting the formation of the insurgency. There are many other reasons behind the formation of insurgencies or the decision of people to choose terrorism as a means to some end but it is certain that the way that the United States is perceived in the region is a major causal factor behind this choice.

If it is in the interests of the U.S. to deter terrorist attacks both against itself and its interests then it is logical to try and not only kill or capture current members of terrorist organizations but also to try and prevent these young urban poor from joining these organizations in the first place. It doesn't matter if the U.S. is really the root of all that is evil if it is perceived that way. One way that the U.S. can remove fuel from the extremist fire is in the long run to reduce its force posture in the Gulf. By pursuing alternatives like those discussed in the following chapters it is possible to retain the tactical capabilities necessary to act on intelligence and counter terrorism while at the same time reducing the likelihood that the strategic private will lose us the war of ideas.

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III. OFFSHORE BALANCING

A. WHY SEABASING?

This chapter will examine the feasibility both physically and fiscally of using naval platforms as staging points or as basing options for SOF in the Persian Gulf as a way to reduce the U.S. footprint on the ground. The theory behind seabasing is that by moving offshore U.S. troops will have greatly reduced risk for long term operations, particularly Stability and Support Operations (SASO), as well as greater operational flexibility because the sea base could shift geographically to project power as necessary. The Department of Defense has recognized the important role that naval forces can play in the future of combat and also in more permissive Stability and Support Operations (SASO)

This strategy reaffirms the use of seapower to influence actions and activities at sea and ashore. The expeditionary character and versatility of maritime forces provide the U.S. the asymmetric advantage of enlarging or contracting its military footprint in areas where access is denied or limited. Permanent or prolonged basing of our military forces overseas often has unintended economic, social or political repercussions. The sea is a vast maneuver space, where the presence of maritime forces can be adjusted as conditions dictate to enable flexible approaches to escalation, de-escalation and deterrence of conflicts.³⁷

This is the case because when they are finished with a given operation, instead of moving several kilometers down the road they are moving to a place where the insurgents or terrorists are much less capable of reaching them. Given the advanced nature of U.S. aviation and naval assets, response time of any ground forces that would need to be committed to an operation would still remain relatively low. What is unique about this concept is that it removes the people from the equation. There is no local populace to offend with U.S. or non-Muslim presence, there is a lessened feeling among the populace that they are at the whim of a foreign invader. This approach is not without drawbacks and these will be discussed later.

³⁷ *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*. October 2007, 8.
<http://www.navy.mil/maritime/> (Accessed 10 March 2008.)

The government has conducted several studies aimed at designing and or recommending alternative force structures to the present naval force.³⁸ These studies were conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), the Office of Force Transformation (OFT), and the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA). The first two of these studies were directed by the Department of Defense while the third study by CBSA was conducted independently. Further studies were conducted by the Government Accountability Office which looked at the feasibility of joint seabasing and the Congressional Budget Office which examines the Maritime Prepositioning Force. These studies all focus on what seabasing would look like in practice and what the inherent costs would be to using this approach of “offshore balancing.” In any case where the employment of naval forces is examined it is necessary to remember that no matter what scenario is employed, there will be, in some form or another, a U.S. presence on the ground. This may take the form of anything from refueling and refitting to actual SOF missions but in the end the objective is to minimize both the number of boots on the ground and the social (as distinct from military) impact of that temporary presence.

B. THE JOINT INTEGRATING CONCEPT

If there can be said to be a foundational document for the seabasing program it is the Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept (JIC).³⁹ The JIC was developed in 2004 in response to Joint Requirements Oversight Council which directed a review of seabasing along with four other concepts.⁴⁰ The JIC is a focused scenario-based study with the objective of providing a Joint Forces Commander of the future an idea of how to integrate a range of capabilities to achieve his objectives.⁴¹ The JIC was not the first

³⁸ Congressional Budget Office. *Sea Basing and Alternatives for Deploying and Sustaining Ground Combat Forces*. Congress of the United States, July 2007. Thomas Hone. *Seabasing: Poised for Takeoff*. Office of Force Transformation, Department of Defense. 15 February 2005. http://www.oft.osd.mil/library/library_files/trends_372_Transformation_Trends_15_February_2005%20Issue.pdf (Accessed 10 March 2008.)

³⁹ *Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept: Version .25*. Department of Defense, www.dtic.mil/jointvision/ideas_concepts/jic_seabasing_290804.doc (Accessed 10 March 2008.)

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

study of seabasing but rather was intended to take all of the otherwise independently directed studies and focus them more narrowly around a specific definition of what seabasing is

Seabasing is the ability to rapidly deploy, assemble, equip, command, project, retrograde, and re-employ joint combat power from the sea, while providing continuous support, sustainment, and force protection to expeditionary joint forces without initial reliance on land bases within the JOA. These capabilities will enable operational maneuver and facilitate assured access and entry from the sea.⁴²

The JIC based its assessment on the requirements laid out in the 2001 QDR, the National Security Strategy, the 2004 National Defense Strategy, and the National Military Strategy which all hit on the importance of access to otherwise denied areas.⁴³ The following table illustrates the problem that the JIC was trying to overcome.

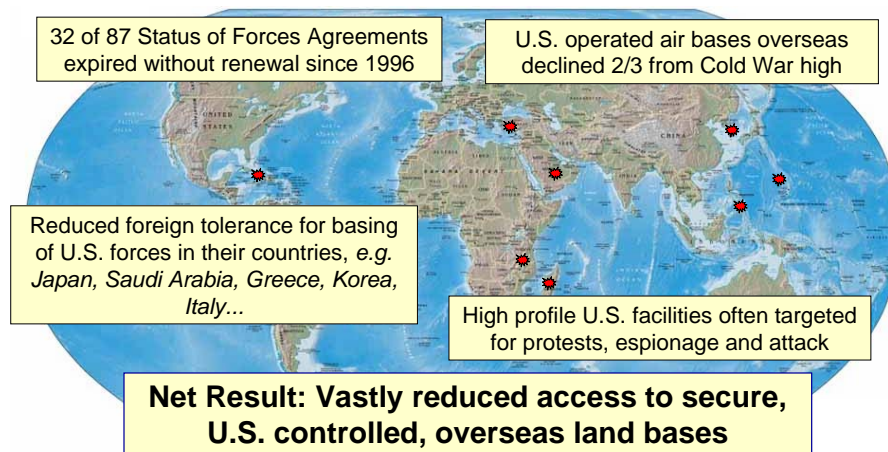


Table 1. This figure from the JIC illustrates the increasing problem of denied access and the need for greater operational flexibility.⁴⁴

The potential value of seabasing has been highlighted in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases the U.S. was limited in its options for planning and staging because of either lack of infrastructure in the regions or another nation's unwillingness, for political

⁴² *Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept: Version .25*. Department of Defense, 4. www.dtic.mil/jointvision/ideas_concepts/jic_seabasing_290804.doc (Accessed 10 March 2008.)

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

reasons, to allow U.S. forces access.⁴⁵ In the case of Iraq, Turkey refused to allow U.S. troops from the 4th infantry Division to enter Iraq through its southern border forcing a delay of operations and putting deployments of other units on hold. In Afghanistan there were willing partners among neighboring states, but they lacked the infrastructure to support a large U.S. force. It is in large part because of these difficulties that there has been a greater emphasis placed on options that would provide operational flexibility to commanders and planners in the event of future conflicts.

C. SEABASING OPTIONS

The congressional Budget Office conducted a study in July 2007 that looked at how seabasing could be used to deploy and sustain ground forces. As part of this study they looked at all of the existing options for deploying forces into areas that would otherwise be denied because of either political or infrastructure related issues like those faced in the 2001 and 2003 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Table 2 shows the costs associated with using sea bases as well as the costs associated with both deploying troops and sustaining them. The study focuses more on larger scale units as opposed to SOF in particular but the basic trends in terms of expenditures would remain roughly the same though proportionately smaller as the size of the force decreased.

⁴⁵ Congressional Budget Office. Sea Basing and Alternatives for Deploying and Sustaining Ground Combat Forces. Congress of the United States, July 2007, vii.

Capabilities and Costs of Alternative Systems Examined by CBO

Alternative	Access-Insensitive Capabilities			Approximate Tactical Reach (Percentage of World's Land Area)	Cost (Billions of Fiscal Year 2008 Dollars)	
	Employ One Brigade	Sustain Two Brigades	Reconstitute One Brigade		Low	High
Employment and Sustainment						
E1: Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future)	11 to 17 Days	S, M, E, H, C	Yes	20	15	22
E2: Sea Base with New Rotorcraft	11 to 17 Days	S, M, E, H, C	Yes	30	31	39
E3: Amphibious Task Force with Sea-Based Sustainment	25 Days	S, M, E, H, C	No	20	1.8	2.0
E4: Airships	7 Days	S, E	No	90	12	18
Sustainment Only						
S1: Sea Base with Planned Rotorcraft	n.a.	S, M, E, H, C	n.a.	20	10	14
S2: Sea Base with New Rotorcraft	n.a.	S, M, E, H, C	n.a.	30	13	20
S3: Airdrop	n.a.	S	n.a.	Nearly Unlimited	3.8	4.8
S4: Airships	n.a.	S, E	n.a.	90	5	7

Source: Congressional Budget Office.

Notes: n.a. = not applicable; S = deliver daily supplies (about 1,000 tons/day); M = maintain/repair ground vehicles; E = evacuate wounded/injured personnel; H = provide hospital care; C = provide command and control.

Table 2. Congressional Budget Office cost benefit analysis of force projection options.⁴⁶

Based on the information contained in the Congressional Budget office study outlined in Table 2 it would seem evident that the best course of action, the one that would provide the greatest benefits with the least cost, is the Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future).

1. Maritime Prepositioning Force

The Maritime Prepositioning Force has been in operation for decades and is essentially the grandfather of the seabasing concept as it exists today. It began in the 1970s as part of a Department of Defense program aimed at reducing response times to

⁴⁶ Congressional Budget Office. Sea Basing and Alternatives for Deploying and Sustaining Ground Combat Forces. Congress of the United States, July 2007, viii.

international crises.⁴⁷ This force was successfully used during the first Gulf War when it was employed to equip the 7th Marine Expeditionary Brigade after it moved to Al Jubayl from Diego Garcia.⁴⁸

The MPF is made up of 3 squadrons. Squadron one is based in the Mediterranean, Squadron two is based in Diego Garcia, and Squadron Three is based in Guam. The squadrons are geographically oriented to specific regions to allow for greater mission flexibility for Marine units and in particular rapid reaction to world events like the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Each of the Squadrons is designed to be able to support a Marine Corps Air Ground Task Force which consists of roughly 17,000 personnel and their equipment for 30 days.⁴⁹ Since the 1970s there have been improvements to the MPF concept. The first of these improvements is called MPF(Enhanced). The MPF(E) is a major change in the system because not only does it add one additional ship to each squadron but the ships are crewed by contractors instead of sailors.⁵⁰ This MPF(E) ship increases the capacity of the MPF to carry fleet hospital, Seabee, and airfield equipment.⁵¹ In addition to these MPF squadrons maintained by the Navy, the Army also has pre-positioning ships. The Army's Army Prepositioned Stocks-3 (APS-3) is made up of 10 ships that are available to rapidly deliver Army supplies throughout the world on short notice. Eight of these APS-3 ships contain Army combat equipment while two others are loaded with ammunition.⁵²

The next development in the MPF is called MPF(Future). The MPF(F) is specifically intended to integrate the MPF with seabasing. It is different from the existing MPF in four ways: "(1) at-sea arrival and assembly of units, (2) direct support of the assault echelon of the ATF, (3) indefinite sea based sustainment of the landing force,

⁴⁷ Maritime Prepositioning Ships. Global Security.ORG
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/sealift-mps.htm> (Accessed 7 March 2008.)

⁴⁸ Maritime Prepositioning Ships. Global Security.ORG
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/sealift-mps.htm> (Accessed 7 March 2008.)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Army Prepositioned Stocks-3 Ships (APS-3). Military Sealift Command
<http://www.msc.navy.mil/PM3/aps3.asp> (Accessed 7 March 2008.)

and (4) at-sea reconstitution and redeployment of the force.”⁵³ The MPF(F) is bridging the gap between current Naval capabilities and the more expeditionary-minded Navy of the future. The concept is not without fault but it is well under way and could prove a valuable test platform for the seabasing of SOF in the very near term.

In the near term the MPF(F) addresses the operational requirements to “assemble, equip, project and sustain”⁵⁴ forces in the absence of suitable land bases as laid out in the JIC. More important it does this within the general timeframe desired which is within the next few years. Additionally, though there have been some issues regarding contracting and shipbuilding, the majority of the ships are already proven and in use.

D. ADVANTAGES

Based on the CSBA and OFT reports seabasing in some form seems to be a cost effective way of projecting power into otherwise denied regions. The CSBA report shows that while conventional means including airborne and air assault options are significantly cheaper and have almost unlimited range they lack sustainability. The Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) procurement and development is already underway. The difference between the current MPF and MPF (Future) is that MPF(F) incorporates all of the advantages of prepositioned stocks for Marine Expeditionary Forces with the MPF, while allowing them to be sustained indefinitely from afloat instead of at port. It also allows Marines to both deploy and redeploy at sea. The MPF(F) is already partially employed and can be tested while many of the more exotic concepts that have been proposed for development are still in the development phase.

From a broader perspective the use of sea bases to forward stage SOF is a step in the right direction to fulfilling USSOCOM’s missions, as set down in the 2006 QDR, of being more jointly oriented and more expeditionary. Sea bases, like forward land bases would provide SOF greater access to potential adversaries while offering greater safety and flexibility, because the base can move and project power into another area when

⁵³ Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) MPF(F). Global Security.ORG
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/mpf-f.htm> (Accessed 7 March 2008.)

⁵⁴ *Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept: Version .25*. Department of Defense, 18.
www.dtic.mil/jointvision/ideas_concepts/jic_seabasing_290804.doc (Accessed 10 March 2008.)

necessary. Sea bases are removed from the indigenous population, reducing the possibility that the conspicuous, persistent presence of American soldiers may undermine U.S. foreign policy objectives by delegitimizing the host nation government, inadvertently engaging or otherwise harming non-combatants, or in some other way.

E. DRAWBACKS

Seabasing has received a significant amount of attention for almost 10 years. However, given all of the conceptual development and theoretical analysis it remains largely an abstraction. Seabasing is a great idea in theory. The reports attest to its potential effectiveness but in the end they can only hypothesize that it will actually work on a large and sustained scale in practice. The most persuasive proof of concept up to present is probably the proven effectiveness of the MPF in the Gulf War which has in turn inspired the thinking behind the MPF(F). In the end seabasing is an emerging set of technologies and organizational practices that is as yet unproven in practice on the scale at which it is expected to operate. Despite the JIC, there is not even complete consensus on what the definition of seabasing is. OFT recommends that the concept should be explored and developed but that a true distinction between seabasing capabilities and amphibious assault capabilities needs to be made.⁵⁵

Development of seabasing platforms and technologies is not cheap. Several issues have arisen regarding the contracting process for building and designing these ships and that there must be a greater degree not only of transparency but of distribution of contracts so that the process does not solely favor one company. This becomes more important in light of the fact that the Navy's ship building programs have been having difficulties remaining within budget and on time.

As a concept seabasing flies in the face of prevailing counterinsurgency doctrine which suggests that the counterinsurgent needs to operate amongst the host population. By being isolated from the people SOF could potentially have greater difficulty gaining

⁵⁵ Thomas Hone. Seabasing: Poised for Takeoff. Office of Force Transformation, Department of Defense. 15 February 2005. http://www.of.t.osd.mil/library/library_files/trends_372_Transformation_Trends_15_February_2005%20Issue.pdf (Accessed 10 March 2008.)

the trust of the local populations which would, at a minimum, make human intelligence collection more difficult. This shift away from the population could be seen as negating one of the major assets that SOF bring to the table which is their cultural and language expertise. Whether this is a valid concern or not is uncertain and will probably resist any general answer. Like all forms of military action, there will be circumstances in which seabasing will be the wrong choice, whether for political or military reasons. Civil Affairs and PSYOPS missions may potentially be more difficult because, being removed from the population, it would be nearly impossible to gauge public opinion and general perceptions without an actual presence on the ground. There are cases in which the actual presence of American soldiers in a community may be reassuring to the community, others in which it may be a source of anxiety. These are matters that must be made on a case by case basis, based upon the best available knowledge of local conditions.

The Government Accountability Office report expresses concern about the interoperability of the services, and suggests that forward operating bases like the sea base could benefit from a more joint development process. Their critique is that all of the services are essentially pursuing and developing seabasing technology and concepts independently. Given the level of importance assigned to the development of seabasing capabilities not only by the Navy but also the Marines, the Army, and in particular USSOCOM, it is not surprising that there is so much independent planning and development underway but in the end this essentially redundant, if not competitive, process may only serve to discredit the seabasing concept as a whole.

F. CONCLUSION

Seabasing is a complex and politically charged issue. It is a developing operational approach, based upon emerging technologies, whose final outcome is uncertain. Its effectiveness has been demonstrated on a limited scale, but its subsequent development has been relatively slow, and it does not play a large role in current operations. Though conceptually there exist many different varieties of the “Sea Base” the MPF(F) seems at present to bring the greatest added value to systems already in

place. MPF(F) represents the integration of both new and existing technology and will be fully operational within the next few years. Though there have been set-backs in terms of cost overruns and construction times it is a worthwhile concept that is being and should continue to be pushed forward.

There are good arguments that suggest that seabasing would be counterproductive to the current U.S. way of war-fighting. This is likely true, but given the criticism that has arisen around recent operations in Iraq especially, exploring a new range of options is not necessarily a bad idea. By staging forces at sea rather than on land you lose the connection with the people that is widely deemed to be important in fighting an insurgency. However, by moving out of the towns and villages you may also remove much of the impetus that inspired the insurgency in the first place. This is not a simple issue and it deserves further investigation. In any event, U.S. interests in the Gulf are not likely to be confined indefinitely to the conduct of counterinsurgency. The United States has a wide range of interests in the region that will require a long-term military presence, irrespective of the outcome in Iraq. It is only in this sort of long-range context that the merits of seabasing can be properly assessed.

IV. FORWARD STAGING IN AFRICA

A. THE CASE FOR AFRICA

Given the turbulent situation in the Middle East it is essential now more than ever to be able to project power into the region; however, because of this turbulence it is also important to do this without throwing further fuel on an already burning fire. The recent standing up of Africa Command (AFRICOM) in the neighboring region presents an important opportunity to both maintain a U.S. presence within striking distance while at the same time minimize the negative impact that such a force would have in the Gulf. At the present time AFRICOM does not intend to place masses of troops on the continent but will instead focus on continuing the missions that it has inherited from EUCOM and CENTCOM while doing no harm.⁵⁶ Africa is a vast continent but the horn of Africa and Djibouti in particular stand out as an ideal staging point for future U.S. operations. The U.S. has had military presence in the Horn of Africa in the past. These operations consisted of radio intercept and relay stations as well as humanitarian relief, during the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia, as well as operations in Somalia. At present the U.S. has two primary organizations operating in the Horn; Operation Enduring Freedom- Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) and Combined Joint Taskforce-Horn of Africa (CTF-HOA).

CJTF-HOA is based at camp Lemonier in Djibouti. The base is associated with the French Foreign Legion which has had a presence in Djibouti since the time of French colonialism which officially ended in 1977. Currently, between 1800 and 2000 U.S. troops from all services fall under the umbrella of the taskforce, though this number fluctuates and not all are at camp Lemonier at any given time. The mission of CJTF-HOA is to “prevent conflict, promote regional stability, and protect Coalition interests in

⁵⁶ This comes from the AFRICOM command brief created 16 November 2007 and lays out the commander’s intent and command philosophy.

order to prevail against extremism.”⁵⁷ The concept behind this operation is to preempt the instability and radicalism that has already taken hold in other regions from doing the same in the Horn.

CJTF-HOA is responsible for operations in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Yemen with additional responsibilities in Comoros, Mauritius, and Madagascar.⁵⁸ The taskforce focuses more on the application of soft power to change the environment in the region by focusing on cooperation with regional militaries and by establishing civil affairs projects like wells, schools, and healthcare related projects than it does on more traditional kinetic anti-terrorism tactics. The idea with this policy being to provide an environment that is less accepting of radical ideologies and is not looking at the U.S. military as a threat or a neocolonial invader. To this end CJTF-HOA, as of November 2007, has built over 50 schools, dug dozens of wells, built around 30 clinics, and inoculated thousands of livestock against disease.⁵⁹

The mission of OEF-TS falls more in line with the tradition more kinetically focused counter-terror approach. Where CJTF-HOA is more focused on winning the proverbial hearts and minds OEF-TS is more focused on capacity building of regional armed forces to combat terrorist groups and secured the vast under-governed spaces in the hinterlands of their respective border regions.⁶⁰ Traditional antiterrorism efforts are easily seen in the U.S. cooperation with the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in an attempt to remove the Islamic Courts Union from power and kill or capture high value targets that were responsible for the embassy bombings in Africa during the Clinton administration.

Little information exists on the public opinion of Djiboutians regarding the U.S. presence though anecdotal evidence suggests that in so far as the U.S. is focused on the

⁵⁷ Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, U.S. Central Command <http://www.hoa.centcom.mil/factsheet.asp> (Accessed 20 January 2008.)

⁵⁸ Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, U.S. Central Command <http://www.hoa.centcom.mil/factsheet.asp> (Accessed 20 January 2008.)

⁵⁹ Berchinski, Robert G., *AFRICOM's Dilemma: The "Global War on Terrorism," "Capacity Building," Humanitarianism, and the Future of U.S. Security Policy in Africa*. Strategic Studies Institute: U.S. Army War College, November 2007, 44.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

more civil affairs related missions the taskforce is well received.⁶¹ However, as the taskforce focuses more on the kinetic approach to antiterrorism, as seen in Somalia, their approval declines. While at face value this would present a similar challenge to the one faced in the Gulf to U.S. presence on the ground it is really a false comparison. It would seem that Djiboutians in particular but Africans in general are opposed to the idea of an outside power acting independently on the continent but this does not suggest that they would be against or even aware of U.S. actions abroad while based in the Horn. Whether or not this truly is the case and Djiboutians would tolerate greater U.S. presence warrants greater research.

B. WHY DJIBOUTI?

Formerly known as the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas, and French Somaliland, Djibouti became an internationally recognized state in 1977 with the end of the French colonial occupation.⁶² Though officially the French ended their colonial rule, Djibouti is still very closely linked to France and the French maintain a small military presence in the form of a Foreign Legion base which is located in conjunction with the U.S. base at camp Lemonier. The political birth of Djibouti was not all together different from that of other African states and saw the emergence of a dictator in the form of Hassan Gouled who ruled until 1999 when Djibouti held its first democratic presidential election.⁶³ The elections in 1999 brought Ismail Omar Guelleh to power and he has remained in office until the present after he was also reelected in the 2005 presidential elections.⁶⁴

Djibouti is located strategically in the Horn of Africa along the Gulf of Aden and the mouth of the Red Sea. Djibouti is one of the largest ports in East Africa and serves as a major commercial hub for the importation of goods destined for the continent. Djibouti

⁶¹ This assertion is based on discussions with Africa experts Dr Jessica Piombo and Dr Laetitia Lawson from the Naval Postgraduate School. Both have spent extensive time on the continent and Dr Piombo has recently spent time with CJTF-HOA.

⁶²The World Factbook: Djibouti. Central Intelligence Agency <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dj.html> (Accessed 26 February 2008.)

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

is strategically important with respect to its port facilities but also given its close proximity to the Arabian Peninsula and therefore to the Persian Gulf. A forward base in Djibouti would provide quicker access to the gulf than current bases in Europe or the Pacific. Given the extremely high level of piracy off the Somali coast as well as the global need to maintain the flow of trade through the Red Sea and through the Suez canal, an increased U.S. presence would provide increased security guarantees for uninterrupted flow of trade through the region.

Djibouti is an ethnically divided country. 60% of Djiboutians are of Somali descent and 35% are Afar.⁶⁵ Djiboutians are much less divided in terms of religion with 94% Muslim and 6% Christian.⁶⁶ Given the difficulties that the U.S. has been having winning over the Muslim world this might seem like a bridge too far except that U.S. efforts in Djibouti have been largely very positive.

CJTF-HOA was initially organized under the auspices of fighting terrorism in Africa with the ultimate aim of capturing jihadists who were fleeing from Iraq and Afghanistan. When this flight never materialized the taskforce transformed its mission into what is considered phase zero operations. Phase zero refers to the pre-conflict phase of war, and in this case a war that the taskforce would hope to prevent entirely. With the aim of preventing conflict and on winning the proverbial hearts and minds CJTF-HOA has primarily focused its efforts on civil affairs related missions. They have built schools, clinics, dug wells and worked to help build up the terribly impoverished nation of Djibouti. Additionally, the taskforce does not limit itself to activities within Djibouti but has also worked with neighboring countries to develop partnerships aimed at strengthening African military capacity to combat terrorism so that the U.S. does not have to do it for them.

The fact that the U.S. has been, at least officially, so well received in Djibouti can be seen as a rare win in the battle for the Muslim mind. Where the U.S. is seen in the Middle East as a malevolent and crusading regime bent on the destruction of Islam and

⁶⁵ The World Factbook: Djibouti. Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dj.html> (Accessed 26 February 2008.)

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the subjugation of Muslim people, in Djibouti that is not the case. To be certain the balance is delicate and can shift easily given a major missed step but even given Djiboutian discontent with the U.S. aid of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, given the large Somali population, tensions seem to have eased and returned to normal.

C. ADVANTAGES

There are many reasons why Djibouti would be an excellent choice for a forward operating base for SOF with missions oriented toward the Persian Gulf. Unlike the nearby Middle Eastern countries Djibouti had far less of a negative colonial experience, and retains good relations with its former colonial master, France, as well as with the United States. Djibouti is relatively stable. Following the civil war that lasted through the 1990s until 2001 Djibouti has been able to enjoy relative peace and stability despite being one of the least developed countries in the world. In part it would seem that an important contributing factor towards stability has been a consistent source of income through its port at the capital city of Djibouti. Another factor would appear to be a continuous stream of rent pouring in from the French for the maintenance of their base and since CJTF-HOA the U.S. rent as well.

Djibouti is a Muslim country. It is possible that U.S. actions that are perceived positively in Djibouti would have the effect of ameliorating U.S. perceptions in surrounding countries and among Muslim populations at large. This outcome is uncertain though and could easily be overshadowed by any misstep on the part of U.S. forces in Djibouti. With the focus of a new CJSOTF being outside of Africa there is little reason to suspect that the indigenous population would react negatively to operations carried out in the Gulf. However, a potentially dangerous exception to this would be on operations that are perceived to be conducted against Islam or Muslims as opposed to against a non-state actor or a rogue state. This could be mitigated by more vigorous public affairs and psychological operations directed at better explaining U.S. motivations and justifications for operations in the event that they should become public. Some of this blowback has been seen on a small scale in U.S. involvement in the Ethiopian

invasion of Somalia in 2006 though this was against a neighbor so it remains unclear to what extent Djiboutians would react to operations outside of the Horn.

D. DRAWBACKS

1. Capacity

Djibouti is a small country with a small population of only around 500,000. Djibouti does not have the infrastructure to support a major troop presence, certainly not one that is of a more permanent nature and included dependents. It is also not in the interest of the U.S. to drastically increase a troop presence on the African continent. An increased presence would inevitably be viewed as a further affront by the West and perhaps even a new round of colonialism. Even if the Djiboutians did not feel this way it is important to avoid this perception amongst neighboring states especially those who have been so helpful thus far in the U.S. GWOT through participation in OEF-TS and CJTF-HOA. This being the case, Djibouti has been quite able to support the current U.S. and French mission and could likely support an increased presence if it remained within the historic scale of SOF deployments. Because, the overall presence in Djibouti would need to remain relatively small and would not be able to increase by more than perhaps a battalion strength of roughly 500 personnel, it would be necessary to augment any forces in Djibouti with forces either prepositioned elsewhere in the Persian Gulf or from other allied countries in the event of a large scale crisis in the Gulf as opposed to the type of operations that this thesis is focused on.

2. Blackhawk Down

There seems to exist in the American public and within the military, the idea that any increase in force presence in Africa, and particularly in the Horn, would be akin to the now infamous mission sent to Somalia to aid UNISOM in delivering food aid and which morphed into a direct action mission focused at the removal of clan leaders. This incursion into Somalia ultimately cost the lives of 18 SOF personnel. The way that the brief U.S. involvement in Somalia degenerated into all out combat has greatly influenced U.S. policy and tactical doctrine, not to mention individual perceptions, until the present.

This fear of being dragged into a protracted conflict in the Horn whether reasonable or not does weigh on policy makers and could be seen as an obstacle to expanded U.S. presence in the region. However, given the nature of what this expansion would entail and the external focus of its mission this perception is not insurmountable. With regards to capacity the nature of a future deployment would depend a great deal on the perceived requirements of the Combined Joint Special Operations Taskforce (CJSOTF) commander. It is reasonable to assume that as a stepping off point that the size of the current CJSOTF in Djibouti could be used for planning purposes.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the information currently available with regard to how the U.S. forces from CJTF-HOA and OEF-TS have been received it would seem that increasing the force posture to accommodate another CJSOTF with missions directed toward the Persian Gulf is completely feasible. The main counter-narrative in this is the negative reaction of Djiboutians to U.S. support for the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia. It would be important to do further study to determine the reaction of Djiboutians to both an enlarged U.S. footprint as well as those forces conducting operations off of the continent. Given that the initial reason for the U.S. presence was to interdict fleeing jihadists/terrorists from Afghanistan and Iraq it is reasonable to believe that as a whole there would be little negative reaction. It would also be possible to mitigate any potential negative response by increased humanitarian and development projects as well as aggressive PSYOPS and public affairs operations to project the messages and themes that the U.S. feels important to helping the Djiboutians understand the reasons behind any operations that are discovered. The economic value of American presence to the local economy would also be considerable, and presumably welcomed by the inhabitants.

The only other major drawback to using Djibouti as a forward staging base is that capacity is already somewhat limited. There is an international airport and a major port but aside from that there is little indigenous infrastructure and services which could be used to support these new forces. Additionally given the small size of the current U.S. footprint it would be rather difficult to mask the troop increase thus posing an OPSEC

threat which given the Muslim majority in Djibouti might be exploited by the one or two bad apples that might be under the employ of U.S. forces at camp Lemonier to provide intelligence to anti U.S. elements in the Horn or abroad.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSION

The United States has three primary interests in the Persian Gulf: assuring unhindered access to energy resources, counterproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and counterterrorism. As the U.S. has worked to secure these interests with major troop deployments and large support footprints on the ground in Muslim countries they have unwittingly stimulated a variety of military and social reactions that have put these interests at increased risk. The Muslim world is in turmoil. There is rampant unemployment, a sense of abandonment by the growing young population, a feeling that their leaders are only puppets of the West and that these rulers are allowed to perpetuate the misery and inequality because it suits Western interests. The presence of U.S. boots on the ground in Iraq and throughout the Gulf is being used by extremists to justify the very terrorist acts that the soldiers are there to prevent.

This situation is not tenable in the long run and is ultimately counterproductive to U.S. interests. To attempt to address this issue, at least in part, this thesis has examined the feasibility of trying to secure U.S. interests in the Gulf with a reduced footprint. The forces considered for this project are primarily SOF, with necessary support from light forces from both the Army and the Marines. The two options that were evaluated were the forward staging of SOF in the Horn of Africa, specifically in Djibouti, and the use of seabasing as means to project SOF power while minimizing any sustained troop presence in the Gulf itself.

1. Djibouti

The first option for forward staging of SOF is to use Djibouti, under the current auspices of CJTF-HOA and OEF-TS, as point of departure for SOF who would be focused solely on operations in the Gulf. The analysis of this option presented above is largely favorable and would appear to suggest that this could be undertaken immediately as a test before larger scale deployments would be necessary following any major withdrawal from Iraq. The minimum infrastructure necessary to support small scale SOF

deployments are already in place. There is both a major sea port and an airport which can be used as means to transport SOF to their target destinations. Djibouti is a friendly country and relatively stable compared to its neighbors in the Horn of Africa. Thus far there has been little measurable opposition to the U.S. presence in Djibouti with the exception of local opposition to U.S. support for operations against suspected Al Qaeda terrorists who may have ingratiated themselves with the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia.

Djibouti is not perfect. It is a small and poor country. However, by increasing U.S. SOF presence in Djibouti to support U.S. operations in the Gulf, there should be little negative fallout for the U.S.. The increased presence and increased revenue for the Djiboutian government could also be seen in a favorable light as aiding in the current CJTF-HOA mission of trying to build capacity in the Horn of Africa.

2. Seabasing

Seabasing, even more than the idea of deploying significant forces permanently in Africa, represents a major shift in how the U.S. acts to secure its interests. Seabasing is seen as a way to increase safety, flexibility, and reduce the U.S. footprint in order to reduce terrorism and instability in the region; it accepts, in other words, that the presence of American forces is part of the problem in the region, and not merely part of the solution. Seabasing is also expensive. It requires the building of new ships and new frameworks for command and control, to allow SOF and other U.S. forces to work more jointly without being hindered by complex lines of accountability.

Deficiencies in inter-service cooperation are already apparent in the design process. The services like the idea of seabasing and are pursuing different concepts but they are doing it largely independently. This will only lead to greater headaches in the future. It is important for the services to work on this project together if it is to be viable in the long term. It is also important to recognize that SOF is not the same as an MEB. They look different in terms of manpower and equipment and therefore all of the work that is going towards the development of the MPF(F) and other sea basing concepts may not be addressing directly the needs of the real customer. The MPF(F) is partially

operational. It can support SOF or more conventional forces but it may be worthwhile for designers to identify the differences in requirements from the operational standpoint for what it takes to support SOF as opposed to what it takes to support more conventional Marine Forces.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This research leads to two principal recommendations. The first is, that given the low cost and relatively low risk of expanding the current U.S. presence in Djibouti to accommodate another CJSOTF, it makes sense to begin immediately to preposition forces in Djibouti with a Persian Gulf specific focus. This initial deployment while the war in Iraq is still ongoing could be extremely useful in evaluating whether this type of approach to forward staging is advantageous in practice without jeopardizing ongoing missions. This test period would also be an ideal time to conduct the necessary research on the effect that increased troop presence would have on Djiboutian public opinion while still providing the flexibility to withdraw or downsize and pursue other options if the results are unfavorable. It would also provide USSOCOM a low cost short term solution to fulfill its QDR requirements while new technologies are being developed and evaluated that would produce a viable seabasing option.

The second recommendation is for USSOCOM to continue working with the services to develop seabasing technology. Seabasing represents a major shift in U.S. naval doctrine and will certainly take some time to become fully operational. During this phase of development and procurement USSOCOM should, given its flexibility in developing and fielding new equipment and technologies developed commercially, seek out commercially available technologies to begin limited testing of the concept with actual SOF as opposed to computer simulated war games. Perhaps the easiest and most cost effective way to do this is using the MARSOC and SEAL teams that are already assigned to the geographic combatant commands who have habitual relationships with those commands and for whom the current naval platforms might be sufficient to test the concept. Additionally, as the MPF(F) becomes fully operational, we should begin immediate testing to see if both long-term usage and staging afloat is feasible. In theory

seabasing of SOF makes sense but until larger-scale development and testing has taken place it will be very difficult to implement an adequate seabasing solution.

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