

The (Not So) Rapid Deployment Force: Bureaucratic and Political Barriers to Implementing Strategic Change

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Abstract

Early in his Presidency, President Carter approved PD-18 which foresaw the creation of a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) with the purpose of responding quickly to out-of-area crises and threats, particularly in the Middle East. The directive however was insufficient to catalyze the RDF's implementation. The paper analyzes the main impediments to the implementation of the RDF, highlighting the bureaucratic and political barriers. The existing studies on the development of the RDF have essentially highlighted the bureaucratic resistance to its implementation. While acknowledging these constraints, the value of the current paper is its focus on the political barriers to the RDF, particularly those resulting from the interagency debate regarding the nature of détente. Based on an assortment of primary sources the paper argues that the main barrier to the creation and implementation of the RDF was the political struggle to define United States strategy within the Administration, particularly between the NSC and the State Department.

Resumo

A (Não Tão Rápida) Força de Projeção Rápida: Barreiras Burocráticas e Políticas à Implementação de uma Mudança Estratégica

No início de sua presidência, o Presidente Carter aprovou a Diretiva Presidencial 18 (PD-18), que previa a criação de uma Força de Projeção Rápida (FPR) com o objetivo de responder rapidamente a crises e ameaças fora da área, nomeadamente no Oriente Médio. Porém, a diretiva foi insuficiente para catalisar a implementação da FPR. O artigo analisa os principais entraves à implementação da FPR, destacando as barreiras burocráticas e políticas. Os estudos existentes sobre o desenvolvimento da FPR têm focado essencialmente a resistência da burocracia na implementação da FPR. Apesar de reconhecer estas limitações, o valor do atual ensaio é o seu enfoque nas resistências políticas ao FPR, especialmente as resultantes do debate interinstitucional sobre a natureza da *détente*. Argumenta-se através do recurso a uma variedade de fontes primárias, que a principal barreira à criação e implementação da FPR foi a luta política no seio da Administração Carter, nomeadamente entre o Conselho de Segurança Nacional e o Departamento de Estado, para definir a estratégia global dos Estados Unidos.

Introduction

President Carter came to office with the intent of continuing a policy of détente. In particular he sought to adjust US military commitments to the available resources and downplay US-Soviet antagonisms. In early 1977, President Carter ordered the National Security Council (NSC) to proceed with a major reassessment of US-Soviet competition across the globe. The result of this re-evaluation was Policy Review Memorandum 10 (PRM-10), which analyzed the balance between the US and the USSR in a wide range of functional issues, namely in the military, economic, political, and intelligence fields. The review also identified the major regions subject to US-Soviet competition. The recommendations of this review gave rise to Presidential Directive 18 (PD-18) in August 1977. According to PD-18, the US military should develop the capabilities to rapidly project force in crisis situations, particularly into the Persian Gulf, and specifically by creating a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF).

The response to PD-18 is particularly revealing of the resistance to policy change. Despite some of the Administration's efforts, particularly in the NSC, several barriers contributed to hindering the implementation of the RDF. First of all, additional financial resources were not allocated to this undertaking and existing resources were already committed to other missions and operational requirements. In particular, the continued importance of Europe in American strategic considerations contributed to stalling progress. Turf wars also emerged among the armed services hindering organizational details and preparations. However, political struggles to define US strategy were equally significant in obstructing the prompt implementation of the RDF. While the NSC, led by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (APNSA), actively promoted a more assertive military policy in the Middle East, the State Department believed the creation of the RDF to be counter-productive to improved cooperation with the Soviets and prejudicial to détente.

The following sections use recently unclassified primary documental sources from the Carter Administration to assess the breakdown of the implementation of the RDF. The article begins, however, with a brief conceptualization of the main foreign policy decision-making models. The subsequent section provides an overview of the political discussion which catalyzed PD-18 and the demand for a rapid reaction force. The following two sections assess the main bureaucratic and political barriers to the creation and implementation of the RDF. Particular emphasis is placed on Brzezinski's and the NSC staffs' continuous endeavors to promote the RDF and the political obstacles they encountered within the Administration's upper echelons. Finally, bearing in mind the current Administration's goal of rebalancing US policy toward the Asia-Pacific region, some caveats and recommendations are presented which may be insightful for decision-makers in managing the change process.

Models of Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Before we can proceed in explaining the barriers to the development and the implementation of the RDF, some conceptual issues require clarification. Allison and Zelikow (1999) have provided the seminal text on foreign policy decision-making. As an alternative to the traditional Rational Actor Model (RAM), the authors put forward two additional decision-making models which they argue explain the complex and sometimes irrational behavior of states more cogently – i.e., the organizational behavior model (Model II) and the governmental politics model (Model III). Since its original publication in the 1970s, the models provided in *Essence of Decision* became a standard in foreign policy analysis (Bernstein, 2000).

However, despite their analytical value, Allison and Zelikow's models reveal some discrepancies which should be acknowledged. In particular, several researchers have pointed out that it is difficult to separate between the organizational behavior model and the governmental politics model (Bendor and Hammond, 1992; Bernstein, 2000; Krasner, 1972; Wagner, 1974). In fact, different authors have attributed different operational characteristics to Allison and Zelikow's alternative decision-making models. For instance, while evaluating these models, Wagner (1974) associates Model III with bureaucratic politics. While not properly clarifying what he understands by bureaucratic politics, Wagner (1974: 448) does recognize the difficulty in distinguishing between the two models by acknowledging that "it is not entirely clear whether Model III is independent of Model II or an extension of it". In contrast, Steinbruner (2002) associates bureaucratic politics with Model II. Steinbruner parallels Allison's organizational behavior model to the cybernetic decision-making model. The cybernetic paradigm relies significantly on standard operating procedures (SOPs) in the sense that a decision-maker has "a repertory of operations which he performs in sequence while monitoring a few feedback variables" (Steinbruner, 2002: 55).

One of the main reasons for this conceptual confusion is the tendency in political science, particularly in foreign policy analysis, to clump a plethora of concepts such as "cabinet politics", "court politics", "politics of the inner circle", and "bureaucratic politics", all under the umbrella term "governmental politics" (Stern and Verbeek, 1998). This has led to a generalized misunderstanding as to what researchers actually mean when applying these terms. In order to avoid such ambiguity in analyzing the development and implementation of the RDF, the current paper differentiates between bureaucratic politics and governmental politics.

Accordingly, when analyzing the bureaucratic resistance to the RDF, we are referring to the mid- or lower-level bureaucratic organizations within the government apparatus. The key features underlying organizational behavior are SOPs – i.e., established rules and routines which allow each particular organization to perform their mission appropriately (Allison and Zelikow, 1999; Kaufman, 2001). These rou-

tines develop a set of unconscious, self-sustaining, and recurring practices which guide the actions of a particular organization. Thus, habitual routines operate automatically and perpetuate behavior. Moreover, routines allow individuals in an organization to dispense with much of the ado involved in achieving a minimum common definition of the situation, in working out some kind of shared plan to deal with a situation, and in coordinating its execution:

“Because similar stimuli are automatically treated the same way when a habitual routine is in effect, a group can move quickly beyond stimulus coding activities. Because habitual behavior follows automatically from recognition of the invoking stimuli, a group need not spend time creating and choosing the behavioral strategy that will guide the work. And because habitual routines are well practiced, the time and energy needed to coordinate among members in executing behaviors is kept low” (Gersick and Hackman, 1990: 71).

While each individual bureaucratic organization may have its own objectives and goals, the policy options they provide are essentially focused on the most “satisficing” outcome ensuing from the existing response repertoires (Sterinbruner, 2002). From this perspective, bureaucratic organizations are inherently resistant to change. SOPs undermine innovation and change by promoting inertia within the organization. Due to the repetitive nature of the routines, individuals are not stimulated to ponder or pursue alternative courses of action. The low-level of confrontation within the organization tends to guarantee a level of social conformity which is contrary to innovative thinking. Moreover, as time goes by and individuals become comfortable within their social context, the motivation and impulse for change in the organization weakens. In this sense, SOPs function as “stabilizers” which reduce the vulnerability implicit in change (Goldmann, 1983).

The bureaucratic model therefore contrasts significantly with the current paper’s conceptualization of the governmental politics model. Just as in Allison and Zelikow’s (1999) conceptualization, governmental politics emphasizes the interactions between top-level politically appointed officials during the decision-making process. However, the governmental politics model employed in the current paper differs from Allison and Zelikow’s Model III in several aspects. To begin with, this perspective is distinct since it acknowledges George’s (1980: 115) claim that bureaucratic politics is essentially a phenomenon associated with the “middle echelons” of power, whereas “cabinet politics at the highest level may take place relatively independently of bureaucratic politics”. In this sense, the dynamics of governmental politics resembles much more those generally associated with small group politics – i.e., group interaction, group problem-solving, and social sharing (Echterhoff *et al.*, 2009; Holsti, 2006; Stern and Sundelius, 2011).

Moreover, policy outcomes do not inevitably result from the negotiation of competing preferences as Allison and Zelikow (1999) propose. Several authors have

attested that an Administrations' highest officials do not necessarily have to have conflicting objectives (Bendor and Hammond, 1992; Krasner, 1972). In fact, Krasner (1972: 166; see also Bernstein, 2000) has highlighted an elementary fact regarding the nature of the Presidential advisory group: "The President chooses most of the important players and sets the rules". Accordingly, presidential advisors, even the heads of the large bureaucratic organizations, share a set of core beliefs and values, as well as a sense of personal loyalty to the President. This observation does not deny conflicting views within a decision-making body. Rather, as George suggests, it emphasizes other dynamics involved in catalyzing policy change:

"...in constituting small decision making groups executives often prefer individuals who operate with a broader, less parochial view of the values at stake. The advantage of forming the group in this way is that such advisors are less likely to engage in bargaining in order to protect the narrow bureaucratic interests of subunits of the organization. When decision-making is in the hands of a small group, it is probably easier for individual members to convince each other or to change their own minds than it is in larger, more formal groups in which each high official is identified as representing his own department or agency." (George, 1980: 86)

Above all, the governmental politics model is focused on the political contest within the upper echelons of the foreign policy decision-making body to frame and define what is important in each different political context (Garrison, 2001). As 't Hart (2011: 317) has made patently clear, the "crucial task for policymakers is to arrive at sound and workable definitions of what the problems are, what can realistically be expected of government to diminish or perhaps completely solve them, what specific options (actions, measures, programs) are available, and which (combinations of) options stand the best chance of achieving the desired ends". From this perspective, the intense political debate to frame the issues and define the policies surrounding PD-18 and the overall US-Soviet relationship was the main barrier to the effective implementation of the RDF.

Carter and the Reassessment of US Strategy

Acknowledging the relative decline of US power, Jimmy Carter came to the White House seeking to maintain a policy of détente whilst devaluing the traditional East-West focus on international relations. According to Skidmore (1996: 31), the Carter Administration sought to implement a strategy of adjustment in which the US could rebalance its foreign policy objectives and commitments, namely by "reducing US commitments in peripheral areas, sharing burdens more evenly with friends and allies and seeking accommodation with adversaries or rivals where this proved consistent with US interests". In order for this strategy to succeed, the Administra-

tion would have to introduce selective cutbacks in US overseas commitments, while simultaneously enhancing its diplomatic activities.

On 18 February 1977, Carter signed PRM-10 with the purpose of initiating a comprehensive assessment of the overall American national strategy and US capabilities. The review was to consist of two distinct studies. The first was a Military Force Posture Review that would delineate a broad assortment of alternative military strategies and develop the alternative military force postures and programs that best sustained each of the military strategies. The second study was a Comprehensive Net Assessment (CNA) that would consist of a review and comparison of the overarching developments in capabilities – *i.e.*, political, diplomatic, economic, technological, and military – between the US, its allies, and its adversaries, particularly the USSR.

In June 1977 the Secretary of Defense submitted the final report of the Military Force Posture Review (PRM-10 Annex). The review was designed to solicit Presidential policy guidance on issues dealing with US military strategy. The study was founded on an assortment of deep-seated assumptions. To begin with, it was believed that the Soviets would continue to pose the main threat to US interests and American security at home and abroad. The second major postulate was that European security would continue to be vital to the US and America would maintain its commitment to actively defend NATO against aggression by the Warsaw Pact. Equally, aggression against Japan was also deemed a threat to US vital interests. A further assumption was that any conciliation between the Soviets and Chinese would not be sufficient to warrant a significant decline in the military forces facing each other. Therefore, continued Sino-Soviet hostility implied that the US would not need to secure specific conventional forces in order to counter a potential Chinese military threat. Finally, the study assumed that, due to the interdependent international environment, the US would continue to have major interests worldwide.

The Military Force Posture Review also assessed the capabilities of the American force structure (PRM-10, Annex). Consequently, it concluded that if war with the Soviets erupted at that time there was only a remote chance that NATO could stop a Warsaw Pact attack to Central Europe. While defeat of NATO forces in Central Europe and penetration towards the French border and North Sea Coast was deemed unlikely, the study considered it implausible that NATO forces could quickly recover the lost territory. It was also assumed that an Allied victory in a US-Soviet confrontation outside Europe was uncertain. Moreover, a nuclear confrontation between the US and the Soviets would result in a high degree of devastation to both parties and would not bring victory to either.

Nevertheless, the PRM-10 study did divulge several interesting assumptions about US-Soviet competition and US military capabilities, particularly regarding

the Middle East. To begin with, it emphasized the strategic importance of the region for the US and its Allies. The need to safeguard access to the regions' natural resources created the potential need for American intervention. Moreover, while competition with the Soviets was considered the highest threat and priority for developing US strategy, the study foresaw the importance of local conflicts, namely in the Third World. Continued international crises and local wars warranting US involvement were judged very likely over the coming decade. US action could vary from crisis management or peacekeeping activities to direct military intervention. The response varied according to each particular circumstance, allowing for a large measure of flexibility in choosing the appropriate course of action. Nevertheless, the study upheld that the "significance of interests in some regions, such as the Middle East, may justify a degree of military involvement under any circumstances" (PRM-10, Annex: 24).

The main problem with this contingency was US force projection into the region. To meet operational demands, the study indicated that decision-makers could choose between two main options: procure additional resources or draw down from existing capabilities. In the case the US did not want to draw down on existing forces, the study recommended securing additional land combat forces and tactical air forces. Supplementary naval forces and strategic mobility forces, along with airborne and amphibious forces, depended on the level of intervention selected in each particular moment. If, however, the option was to draw down, a certain number of caveats were presented, namely concerning the mix of forces, deployments, and operational requirements. In particular, PRM-10 argued that the chronological relationship between local and global conflicts would highly influence the operational availability and effectiveness of the forces.

Consequently, PRM-10 reflected the general belief, principally within the Administration, that the US lacked the military capability necessary to deal with the multiple potential security threats in the Third World, particularly in the Middle East. However, the interagency debate over PRM-10 revealed different perspectives within the Administration on how to deal with the multiple challenges presented to American security. The Policy Review Committee (PRC) discussed PRM-10 in early July 1977. At the 08 July PRC meeting a broad agreement emerged that "forces procured for this purpose should be added to those required for a NATO/Warsaw Pact war" (PRC, 08/07/1977: 2). The group considered the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Korea to be the most critical areas. Moreover, forces procured for these theaters could be used elsewhere if necessary. The top foreign policy decision-makers all shared the conviction that it was necessary for the US to be able to secure its national interests in these regions. In order to achieve this objective, the APNSA proposed the creation of a highly responsive global strike force.

As a result of this interagency debate, President Carter signed PD-18 on 24 August,

1977. PD-18 codified the Carter Administration's US National Strategy. The directive focused essentially on the US-USSR relationship and acknowledged that the US continued to have several critical advantages over the Soviets. As a result, it called for the US to harness its economic, technological, and political assets in order to counterbalance Soviet military power and influence in key regions, particularly Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.

As Njølstad (2004) has accurately recognized, PD-18 stressed two major and demanding priorities for US global strategy. The first was the reassertion of the US commitment to a forward defense strategy for NATO, emphasizing the continued priority of European defense and security. The second was the need to create the necessary conditions for the US to be able to act in urgent situations outside Europe, particularly in the Middle East. For that reason, PD-18 called for the creation of the RDF with the purpose of responding quickly to out-of-area crises and threats:

“...the United States will maintain a deployment force of light divisions with strategic mobility independent of overseas bases and logistical support, which includes moderate naval and tactical air forces, and limited land combat forces. These forces will be designed for use against both local forces and forces projected by the USSR based on analyses of requirements in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, or Korea, taking into account the contribution of our friends and allies in these regions.” (PD-18: 4)

However, the creation and implementation of the RDF promptly became mired within the bureaucratic apparatus and the political struggle to define the US-Soviet relationship. Since the different actors and agencies were still very much focused on other issues and regions, they were reluctant to press on with the RDF's implementation.

Bureaucratic Resistance to the Implementation of the RDF

Initially, the provisions of PD-18 were largely ignored by the multiple governmental bureaucracies. The different agencies in the State Department and the Department of Defense, as well as the intelligence community resisted the idea of augmenting the force projection capabilities foreseen in the directive. According to former NSC staffer William Odom (2006), each agency had its particular reasons for resisting the stipulations of PD-18. For the State Department, an increased US military presence was considered counterproductive since it might provoke a reaction from radical Arab groups. In addition, a more assertive military posture might also impair relations with the Soviets, particularly in the area of arms control agreements. For the Defense Department, budget restrictions hindered any additional consideration of reallocating available resources. With a budgetary reduction of 38% since 1968 (Odom, 2006), the Department of Defense was unwilling to divert resources from what it considered its top priority – *i.e.*, Europe. Moreover, the Pen-

tagon was not particularly inclined to take on missions involving unconventional warfare as would be the case in the Middle East (Kupchan, 1987). The intelligence community, for its part, was more concerned with other issues, such as preserving strategic facilities in Iran, and paid little attention to the Administration's new strategy. On the whole, the different agencies were immersed in their routines and "once PD-18 was signed, the Pentagon essentially ignored the directive to set up an RDF, and the State Department showed no interest in making it acceptable to US friends in the region" (Odom, 2006: 59).

The military bureaucracy also created roadblocks to the operationalization of the RDF's Gulf contingency planning. Turf wars between the military services hindered the planning process (Bliddal, 2011). The Navy and the Marine Corps supported a strategy based on US naval superiority. Wary of the need to assume mere sealift services for ground forces, the Navy proposed the introduction of several carrier task forces in the Gulf region or the implementation of a strategy of horizontal escalation in which the US Navy would engage the Soviet navy in peripheral areas. The Marines also deemphasized the need for large-scale ground forces. Being a force dedicated to amphibious assault, the Marines sided with the Navy by recommending a limited ground strategy in the littoral areas of the Gulf. The Army, for its part, favored a strategy that relied on heavily armored combat units placed deep within the region. In addition, the Army also stressed the need to employ light airborne units. Consequently, the Air Force sided with the Army since it would be responsible for transporting the forces into the region. However, the Air Force also proposed a strategy that would make use of deep air strikes and air support of ground forces, reinforcing a strategy focused on the region's interior.

In addition, the bureaucratic discussion over the military command structure responsible for the RDF also hampered its prompt and efficient operationalization. The existing regional command structures – *i.e.*, European Command (EUCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM) – divided the map of the Middle East. While EUCOM was responsible for military operations in the Eastern Mediterranean states, including Iran and the Persian Gulf, PACOM was in charge of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the coordination of overseas deployment in areas outside the existing commands was assigned to Readiness Command (REDCOM). Since each command's principal interests were in regions other than the Middle East, command of the RDF was complicated. The individual commands competed for control over the force. More precisely, PACOM sought to expand its territorial responsibility westward to include the Persian Gulf region, while EUCOM wanted its area of responsibility to be expanded eastward to include Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the access routes to the Persian Gulf in the Indian Ocean. REDCOM, for its part, claimed that since it was designed to manage rapid deployment operations, the mission in the Gulf should be its responsibility. The

competition for control over the RDF hindered progress in its implementation and subsequent policy decisions towards the Middle East. As Kupchan (1987: 90) has observed, assigning control to “an existing command would not have created sufficient bureaucratic momentum to implement the administration’s new policy”. However, while bureaucratic dynamics may help elucidate some of the slippage between the Executive’s decision and the effective implementation of the RDF, they do not provide a satisfactory explanation for the long delay in its materialization and operationalization. Rather, the different strategic outlooks among the President’s closest advisers were the most serious impediments to the swift implementation of the RDF. While the Middle East was acknowledged by the principals as a vital strategic region there was considerable dispute within the Administration regarding overall policy orientation. According to Brzezinski (1983), two main groups with divergent perspectives emerged during the discussions. One group, composed of Secretary of State Vance and Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency Paul Warnke, favored a policy that limited US strategic forces to an assured destruction capability, while concurrently reducing American forces in Europe and Korea. This group sought to address the challenges pertaining to the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf region through arms control initiatives negotiated with the Soviets – e.g., upcoming Indian Ocean demilitarization talks. The other group, which included Brzezinski and eventually Secretary of Defense Brown, emphasized the growing momentum of the Soviet military and the vulnerability of the Persian Gulf region. They argued that the increased capability of the Soviets to project power into the Third World threatened US interests in these regions and required a more robust response. As a result, as the following section illustrates, the political contest to define policy in the upper echelons of the Administration ultimately hindered the quick and efficient implementation of the RDF.

Political Barriers to the Implementation of the RDF

The APNSA was particularly active in promoting the implementation of the RDF amongst the President and the Administration. Above all, the capacity to project American power abroad was perfectly adjusted to Brzezinski’s view of *détente*. While adhering to a cooperative stance vis-à-vis the Soviets, Brzezinski (1983) continually emphasized the need for greater reciprocity from the USSR. More precisely, he continuously underlined the need for the US to make it “unmistakably clear to the Soviet Union that *détente* requires responsible behavior from them on fundamental issues of global order”, particularly in the Third World (reproduced in Brzezinski, 1983: 150).

Accordingly, Brzezinski used his cabinet status and his influence to push the implementation of the RDF since the beginning of the Presidency. For instance, in January 1978, when discussing US policy regarding the Ogaden War, Brzezinski was

adamant in promoting a more assertive US posture in order to dissuade the Soviets and its proxies from intervening in the conflict. As a result, in the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) meeting chaired by him on 26 January 1978, the principals decided, in a clear reference to the provisions of PD-18, to “accelerate study of our own capabilities and those of other governments to intervene in the situation in ways that could complicate or make more costly the Soviet/Cuba intervention” (SCC, 27/01/1978: 2). However, Brzezinski was countered by the other foreign policy decision-makers. In particular, Vance (1983) rejected any idea that their actions in Africa were part of any Soviet grand design. On the contrary, Vance viewed Soviet behavior simply as the exploitation of emerging opportunities.

The Iranian Revolution offered Brzezinski a new opportunity to press the need for the RDF. In a late December Weekly Report, Brzezinski warned Carter of the dire situation in the region: “The disintegration of Iran, with Iran repeating the experience of Afghanistan, would be the most massive American defeat since the beginning of the Cold War, overshadowing in its real consequences the setback in Vietnam” (Brzezinski to Carter, 28/12/1978: 4). Among other initiatives, the APNSA recommended that US should implement a military posture which could adequately balance the Soviets, namely by carrying out the provisions foreseen in PD-18.

After the fall of the Shah, Brzezinski submitted a memo to the President titled “Consultative Security Framework for the Middle East” assessing the situation in the region and recommending policy options that might compensate for recent setbacks. Brzezinski proposed the development of a broad consultative security framework for the Middle East (Brzezinski to Carter, 03/03/1979: 2). The demands of such an undertaking would require US leadership and a significant increase in American economic and military assistance to the region, as well as an increase in the US military presence in the Middle East.

Brzezinski reinforced his position by subsequently submitting the Comprehensive Net Assessment-1978 (CNA-78). The study concluded that in the previous two years the Soviets had gained a foothold in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and South Yemen, while losing Somalia. However, the loss of US influence in Iran was considered to have “major implications for the regional balance of power, domestic stability in neighboring states, the world oil supply, and US intelligence and security interests” (CNA-78, 30/03/1979: 7). In the view of the NSC, the strategy set out in PD-18 was substantially validated. However, current developments required some changes in the framework of the directive. The study presented several proposals for enhancing America’s position in the arena of global competition. In particular, rapid and coordinated action was necessary to develop the strategic mobility and quick reaction forces envisioned in PD-18.

Secretary Vance was particularly critical of the content of CNA-78 arguing that the US did not require a standing military force projection capability for the Middle

East (Odom, 2006). In fact, in early-May, 1979, the State Department denounced CNA-78 for its pessimistic outlook and raised methodological issues concerning the studies central assumptions (Tarnoff to Brzezinski, 01/05/1979). In contrast, Secretary Brown and the Department of Defense responded positively to the study since it was attuned to the mounting security concerns within the Pentagon (Brzezinski to Brown, 01/05/1979).

As the situation in Iran began displaying some tenuous forms of normality, the discussions within the Administration as to how to secure and improve the overall US position in the Middle East moved on to other areas. More precisely, in a Vance-Brown-Brzezinski luncheon on 03 August 1979, it was decided that the Department of Defense would develop a new report on the RDF (Brzezinski to Carter, 03/08/1979). The study presented by the Pentagon highlighted the need for the US to increase its power projection in the Gulf region (Bliddal, 2011). As a result, Secretary Brown ordered the reluctant Joint Chiefs of Staff to initiate a joint-service level planning of the RDF (Odom, 2006). However, as the bureaucratic turf wars continued among the armed services, in the summer of 1979, Brown acknowledged in a memo assessing the progress made on the RDF, “most of our work is before us” (quoted in Bliddal, 2011: 31).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan renewed the discussion on the need for implementing the RDF. The day following the invasion, in a memo submitted to the President, Brzezinski restated his thesis that Soviet success in Afghanistan would fulfill the traditional Russian aspiration of gaining direct access to the Indian Ocean. The subject was now particularly pertinent since the “Iranian crisis has led to the collapse of the balance of power in Southwest Asia, and it could produce Soviet presence right down on the edge of the Arabian and Oman Gulfs” (Brzezinski to Carter, 26/12/1979: 1).

The Afghan crisis emphasized the effective limitation still affecting the implementation of the RDF. The discussion of the available policy options was seriously constrained since the US had very little effective capability to make any compelling demonstration of force in the region. This was evident in the 27 December memo from the NSC staff which emphasized the serious deployment problems still facing the RDF (Aaron to Brzezinski, 27/12/1979). Actually, the Administration had been seeking to secure basing, over flight, and transit access rights in Djibouti, Kenya, Oman, and Somalia for some time (Ermarth and Welch to Brzezinski, 16/01/1980). However, formal access was not yet guaranteed at this time, hindering American power projection in the region.

Nevertheless, the ensuing interagency debate highlighted the continued divergence among the principals on Soviet objectives. Two main theories existed to explain Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The first, argued by Vance, was that Soviet intervention was essentially local and limited and directly associated to per-

ceived threats to its national security. The second theory, championed by Brzezinski, had a more global perspective and claimed that the Soviets had calculated that, due to the quickly deteriorating US-USSR relations, they had nothing to lose by decisively eliminating the Afghan threat and improving their strategic position in the region. In accordance with this view, the consolidation of the Soviet position in Afghanistan would allow them to better exploit the situation in Iran and pressure Pakistan and India as a response to increased US involvement in the Indian Ocean and Middle East (Vance, 1983).

Despite the disagreements on Soviet intentions, the majority of the principals agreed to the overall strategy of assuming a more assertive role towards the Soviets, particularly in challenging its expansion into the Middle East. This shared outlook was evident in the 14 January SCC meeting on the US Strategy for South West Asia and Persian Gulf (SCC, 14/01/1980). All of the members accepted that the US must bolster Pakistan's capacity to resist further Soviet encroachment in the region. Brzezinski argued that if a Moscow/Kabul/New Delhi Axis threatened Pakistan, the US would respond by developing "a US/PRC/Pakistan/ and eventually Iran axis as a counter" (SCC, 14/01/1980: 2). This analysis did not raise any dissenting views since there was an interagency consensus that a new regional security framework was essential. Some differences did exist regarding the need to safeguard US access to bases in Pakistan. Therefore, it was determined that the US would not currently press this issue as a way of not overloading relations with India. Nevertheless, basing access in other countries, such as Oman and Somalia, was agreed to. In regards to US military capacities in the region, General Jones highlighted that the Soviet military deployment in Afghanistan would change the regional military balance by facilitating penetration into the Persian Gulf region. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the short-term measures for the meeting the Soviet challenges were to project tactical air power into Egypt and Jordan, request that Saudi Arabia assist in supporting US fighter formations, and preposition heavy equipment and supplies in the region (SCC, 14/01/1980). By adopting these proposals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued that the US could significantly reduce the time for deployment of heavy ground forces and for the first time provide sealift supply capabilities. These considerations were consistent with the report Odom had submitted to Brzezinski the previous week and which emphasized the problems of securing the necessary funding and enthusiasm for effectively implementing the RDF and the need for the White House to enforce the complete implementation of PD-18 (Odom to Brzezinski, 07/01/1980: 1).

The announcement of the Carter Doctrine on 23 January 1980 attributed a renewed urgency to effectively implementing the RDF. The new commitment to defend the Persian Gulf from potential Soviet aggression led the Department of Defense to develop a compromise solution that consisted in establishing as of May 1980 a

Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) under the command of REDCOM (Odom, 2006). The RDJTF was instructed to plan, train, and be ready to deploy and employ RDF forces in case of international contingencies (Bliddal, 2011).

Despite the Pentagon's best intentions, the effective establishment of the RDF continued marred by interagency squabbling. In fact, in mid-May 1980, Brzezinski relayed his exasperation in his NSC Weekly Report by claiming that "Getting results is like pulling teeth" (Brzezinski to Carter, 16/05/1980).

Some progress was made nonetheless. By mid-1980, several concrete initiatives had been carried out, namely (Brzezinski, 1983): US force capabilities were improved due to the acquisition of access to regional facilities; increased Navy and Marine presence in the Middle East region; joint contingency planning had begun with some key regional allies and joint exercises were scheduled; regional allies were supported in improving their defense capabilities and procedures for the sale of military equipment were streamlined; European NATO allies were encouraged to share greater responsibility for their security; and the development of a very small and rapid intervention force for aiding friendly regimes under subversive attack was approved.

Nevertheless, while the regional security framework and the development of the RDF were progressing due to the NSC's, particularly Brzezinski's, initiative, the final months of the Carter Presidency once again gave way to a heated interagency debate on US strategy for the Middle East. The 24 November SCC meeting is illustrative of the divergent views still persisting within the Administration (SCC, 24/11/1980). At the heart of the discussion was the Department of Defense's paper on "Basic Strategy Issues". According to Brown, in the upcoming years, the strategic challenges facing the US implied the need to acquire capability for America to fight one full-scale war or two "half wars" (Brzezinski, 1983: 469). These scenarios would require the US, among other measures, to increase its military capabilities in the Middle East. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Jones, also commented on the need for the US to be able to secure its vital interests without being dependent on its regional allies. Brzezinski and Brown countered that in Europe and Japan the US would require the ally's help to defend them. However, both principals agreed that in the Persian Gulf region only the US could defend it and it should be prepared to do so. The recently appointed Secretary of State Edmund Muskie was particularly critical of the Department of Defense assessment and demanded a revision of the underlying strategic issues (SCC, 24/11/1980).

However, even more revealing of the barriers ensuing from the internal political dispute was the failure to create a unified command for the RDF. The creation of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) would only be achieved during the Reagan Presidency (Odom, 2006). Since then, CENTCOM has become one of the pillars of US global security. It has been responsible for planning and carrying out many of

America's recent large-scale military operations in the Greater Middle East region, namely in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Conclusion

President Carter arrived in Washington intent on reviewing and changing many of the existing policies. In the early months of the Presidency, the Administration discussed the American national strategy and US capabilities. During this debate the strategic importance of the Middle East was highlighted, as were the limitations that the US faced in securing its interests in the region. Accordingly, President Carter approved PD-18 which foresaw the creation of the RDF with the purpose of responding quickly to out-of-area crises and threats.

The directive however was insufficient to catalyze the RDF's implementation. Besides bureaucratic resistance in the armed services, the heads of the Departments of Defense and State were generally unresponsive. In particular, Secretary Vance viewed the RDF as detrimental to détente. The APNSA and his NSC staff tried arduously to convince the Administrations' key decision-makers to implement the RDF. Brzezinski took advantage of his central role in the decision-making process to push the issue every chance he could. Nevertheless, despite the NSC's initiative, implementation of the RDF eluded the Carter Administration. The effective operationalization of the RDF would only be realized with the Reagan Administration. Bureaucratic inertia has long been identified as a barrier to change. It has conventionally been identified as the main barrier to the implementation of the RDF (Bliddal, 2011; Kupchan, 1987). However, using a governmental politics model is particularly useful in understanding the record of the RDF. As Allison and Zelikow (1999: 255) argue, policy "outcomes are formed, and deformed, by the interaction of competing preferences". It was the struggle within the upper echelons of the Carter Administration, predominantly between the main political actors in the State Department and the NSC, to define the policy of détente that ultimately hindered the effective implementation of the RDF. Secretary of State Vance was particularly effective in thwarting the implementation of the RDF by arguing that it would damage continued US-Soviet cooperation. It was the APNSA's continuous initiatives and his capacity to exploit international crises that ultimately provided the impetus for unblocking the political logjam. As crises mounted in the Third World, particularly the Middle East, Brzezinski was increasingly capable of interpreting the situation and framing the adequate policy recommendations in the interagency debate.

Like Carter, many newly elected political officials seek to implement an agenda of reform and change. In particular, different regions can attract policy-makers' attention and recolor their mental maps. For instance, the Obama Administration announced a strategic turn towards the Asia-Pacific region (Ross, 2012). In resemblance to the Carter Administration in the Middle East, the Obama Administration

has sought to strengthen US military presence and power projection in the Pacific region. In particular, the Administration has augmented its naval capabilities by increasing deployments to Australia and Singapore and reinforcing military cooperation with other regional actors such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, and New Zealand (Manyin, 2012; Ross, 2012). This policy reflects a clear commitment to a maritime strategy for facing the growing challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance signaled the intention to shift the Department of Defense's priorities toward the Pacific region (Dale, 2014). However, as the current study attests, there are discrepancies between policy decision-making and policy implementation. While officials may decide on a particular policy, its development and implementation may encounter several barriers. Just as the RDF encountered bureaucratic and political obstacles, the American strategic shift toward the Pacific region may also come across many similar barriers. Bureaucratic organizations will certainly struggle to secure scarce resources and assume greater influence in determining military strategy. What is more, governmental political battles will continue to frame the strategic international context and define the most appropriate policies. While some officials will view China as the greatest peril in the near future, others will champion other threats such as international terrorism or the rise of illiberal democracies such as Russia. These political challenges undoubtedly contributed to the lack of any clear reference to the new Pacific strategy in President Obama's recent major foreign policy speech at West Point (Landler, 2014). An understanding of the bureaucratic and political dynamics involved in the policy-making process will help decision-makers manage change and overcome some of the existing barriers. Specifically, by understanding the dynamics in governmental organizations and decision-making groups, particularly those involved in framing and defining the political context, decision-makers can also try to steer the decision-making process to avoid undesirable outcomes.

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