

CONCLUSION

President Carter pledged the United States to defend the Gulf as a response to a perceived threat to Western security, should free access to the oil supplies of the region be denied by a hostile power. The Carter Doctrine was, therefore, a formal reconfirmation of the historical US policy objective in the Indian Ocean, which is both to secure access to the oil supplies of the Gulf, and to ensure the safety of the sea lanes by which they are transported. The United States viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a direct challenge to its fundamental security interests and responded with a military build-up of its naval forces in the Indian Ocean. The burgeoning war between Iran and Iraq reinforced Washington's justification for pursuing the military option and subsequently replaced the Soviet threat from Afghanistan as the leading strategic concern in the region.

When the United States deployed carriers in response to the crises in Southwest Asia, it had no military alternative. Since then, the United States has developed the capacity to offer a credible land deterrent to any Soviet move on the Gulf. New regional access arrangements, the upgrading of facilities at the US base on Diego Garcia, and the prepositioning of heavy equipment in the region, ensure a rapid and sustainable reaction by the unified units of Central Command. Moreover, the industrialized world has not been idle since the oil crises of the 1970s. Measures taken to diversify supply and to develop alternative sources of energy, together with conservation efforts and emergency stockpiling, have reduced the risk factor of any sudden cut-off of oil supplies. The world oil glut, depressed prices, and the current disorder in OPEC, all attest to the success of these initiatives in reducing dependence on Middle East oil. The security of