

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

The Persian Gulf: a new Vietnam?

The U.S. rapid deployment force was not really an American innovation, but a British foreign policy move.

A preliminary investigation into the controversial U.S. Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) shows that it was not the brainchild of American strategic planners. Nor was it conceived in the last four years of the Carter administration. The RDF was the creation of Britain at least as far back as 1960 when London formulated a new East of Suez policy to accommodate its "pullout" from its colonial holdings in Asia and the Mideast.

A look at the current personnel in charge of the RDF shows not only historic ties to Britain's foreign and military policy establishment, but also reveals that these were the top planners of the Vietnam War debacle. On June 17 the newly named commander of the RDF, Lieutenant General Paul Xavier Kelley, announced that the force would be ready to move into the Persian Gulf in a "preemptive strike" against the Soviets by mid-July. He declared that at that time a test run would be launched whereby 12,000 airlifted troops, with heavy artillery and other logistical supplies would rendezvous with a flotilla near the gulf region.

Military critics of the RDF have stated to this magazine that a U.S. invasion of the gulf is "strategic insanity given the hands-down advantage the U.S.S.R. has, given its proximity to the area." An RDF deployment into the gulf would most likely strike at the oilfields of Iran, a country which shares a 1,500

mile border with the U.S.S.R. These same critics fear that such an adventure into the gulf region would yield the U.S. the worst strategic humiliation since Vietnam. The U.S. military invasion into Iran in April reportedly was hastily aborted following staunch warnings from the U.S.S.R. and an accompanying deployment of Soviet Mig fighters.

Arab sources state that every word out of Kelley's mouth last week came from the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Robert Komer. Komer made his mark in U.S. policymaking circles in the mid-sixties under the Johnson administration when he ran the bloody Operation Phoenix counterinsurgency campaign against the Vietnamese. Following his brief ambassadorship in Ankara which contributed to the destabilization of Turkey in the late sixties, he deployed to the Rand Corporation to write what he claims is the policy which the Carter administration adopted through the 1976 Presidential Memo 10, calling for a U.S. invasion of the gulf.

It is questionable that Komer in fact ever devised an original policy for the U.S. From the beginning of his career in the Kennedy administration, he has been a policy conduit for the British. At that time, he was a "liaison" to London working out the logistics of their withdrawal from the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean region. This was the period

when the Yemenese civil war erupted on the Arabian peninsula, a war which the British had a key hand in fomenting for the purposes of scaring both the Saudis and the Iranians into a military buildup. This was conceived as one element in the strategy of extending NATO and U.S. forces into the region as a surrogate for British forces to work with regional military capabilities. In that same period General Kelley was an exchange officer to the British Royal Marines where he received counterinsurgency training in Aden, Yemen. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, today the most open Arab proponent of extending NATO into the Mideast, was in charge of the Yemenese war for the Egyptian government.

Concomitant with the Yemenese war, Britain's Sir Robert Thompson was personally prodding Kennedy to commit U.S. troops to Vietnam, no doubt with the help of Komer.

During the 1960-61 period, one of the co-authors of Presidential Memo 10, former National Security Council staffer and confidant of NSC chief Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel Huntington, was writing the strategic hamlet doctrine which was later used in Vietnam.

Lt. Col. William R. Corson, a Marine who guarded one of those strategic hamlets during the Vietnamese war, later wrote a book entitled *The Betrayal*, where he says that Komer lied to America about the purpose of the war. He concludes that Komer proved "as Goebbels proved, if one tells lies long enough it is possible to get people to believe them, but when the liars themselves begin to believe their own falsehoods, an organization is in deep trouble."