

1983

The Military as an Instrument of U.S. Policy in Southwest Asia: The Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, 1979-1982

William Hickman

Maxwell Orme Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Hickman, William and Johnson, Maxwell Orme (1983) "The Military as an Instrument of U.S. Policy in Southwest Asia: The Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, 1979-1982," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 36 : No. 6 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol36/iss6/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

tives which drove several nations to develop a nuclear capability, and then raises the fundamental policy problem in a chapter which discusses strategies for control over further nuclear weapons proliferation. He reviews objectively the development of approaches to the nonproliferation problem, and goes to some length to lay out and categorize the various kinds of policy responses that one can take toward dealing with it. But in the end this part of the analysis remains as a catalog of disincentives to proliferation, without specific recommendations for US policy other than the conclusion that in such a complex field there is a "need to tailor nonproliferation measures to specific cases." So the reader who seeks the answer to "What should US nonproliferation policy be?" will not find the answer to his question in this volume.

Nevertheless, this does not distract from the substantial value of the book. While some scoping of possible corrective policy measures, and an assessment of the success of current approaches would add a useful speculative element to an objective work, they are not essential to the non-specialist who is looking for an overview of the field. The failures of certain previous lines of nonproliferation policy seem clear, and the necessity for future international consensus and actions (as opposed to further unilateral US action) should be apparent from this work.

In conclusion, we recommend this work, both for the specialist who will study and evaluate some of the

factors we have outlined above, and for the non-specialist who will find a good discussion of all sides of the problem but not a push in any particular policy direction.

WILLIAM G. DAVEY
ROBERT E. PENDLEY
Los Alamos National Laboratory

Johnson, Maxwell Orme. *The Military as an Instrument of U.S. Policy in Southwest Asia: The Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, 1979-1982*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983. 134pp. \$16

Since its inception, the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) has been a topic of heated public debate. Proponents have pointed to it as a sign of US strength and resolve to maintain peace and stability in the politically volatile but vitally important Persian Gulf region. Opponents have attacked it as a military organization that is not rapid, not deployable, and not much of a force. In this volume Maxwell Orme Johnson attempts to cut through the rhetoric to present an objective view of the RDJTF.

Writing from the perspective of a career Marine officer, Major Johnson has done a credible job of presenting a balanced, objective discussion of a contentious issue. The strength of the book lies in his perceptive analysis of the development of the RDJTF and the Carter doctrine which preceded it. Contrary to a widely held public view, he points out that the RDJTF was not a hastily conceived reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Rather, it was a measured calculation

to the events in the region, a policy that had roots extending back to interagency studies and presidential directives dating from 1977. This, however, made it no less controversial. Owing to the varying perceptions of the threat it was organized to meet and the difficulties encountered in finding a regional home for it, the RDJTF has raised as many questions as it was purported to solve.

Major Johnson's examination of the RDJTF itself attempts to deal with these questions by analyzing its mission, organization, training, logistic-support deficiencies, and tactical doctrine. After recounting a series of significant deficiencies, he reaches an initial judgment that the RDJTF might not be capable of backing up America's commitment in the Persian Gulf. At the end of the book, however, he reaches a bottom-line conclusion that despite its acknowledged problems, "the RDJTF is a valuable instrument of American foreign policy and a capable military force." Unfortunately, the strength of this statement is significantly weakened by his analysis and earlier conflicting assertions which makes it quite possible for opponents of the concept, or more importantly potential adversaries, to disbelieve his base conclusion.

The key to the RDJTF's credibility is its ability to be employed quickly, but as Major Johnson points out, the most critical shortcoming of the unit is strategic mobility. He goes on to say that the only way the full RDJTF could be deployed now is for the president to use the Civil Reserve

Air Fleet. The resulting severe disruption of the civilian airline industry makes this a very difficult step to take. The key issue then becomes whether there would be sufficient domestic political support for such a presidential decision to employ the RDJTF in any contingency less than full confrontation with the Soviets. In addition, significant shortcomings in water, fuel, and the ability to evacuate the sick and wounded tend to support Johnson's initial judgment that "it appears that numerous tactical and logistic-support problems need to be resolved if the RDJTF is to be a capable military force."

One difficulty that readers may have with Major Johnson's book is the problem of unsubstantiated sources. Although for the most part he documents his work carefully, on several points he refers uncharacteristically to vague Pentagon, State, or White House sources. Although it is not widespread, it occurs often enough to be troubling to the scholar.

Overall, Major Johnson has produced a book that is easy to read, well-organized and understandable. Whether one is a casual observer or a serious student of military or foreign affairs, his book will provide an excellent introduction to the complex topic of the RDJTF.

WILLIAM F. HICKMAN
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Flynn, Gregory, et. al. *The Internal Fabric of Western Security*, Totowa, N.J. Allenheld, Osmun, 1981. 250pp. \$32.50

Much has been written about the