

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Haig bullies Europe on RDF

Haig and Weinberger are trying to carry out Carter's policy, but Bonn, among others, is resisting.

A major foreign-policy objective of Secretary of State Alexander Haig will be to complete the job begun by the Carter government and break European resistance to participating in the controversial Rapid Deployment Force to the Middle East.

In his confirmation hearings Haig declared that he would pursue the Carter policy. Shortly thereafter Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger told the press that he envisioned U.S. troop presence in Israel and the creation of a crack U.S. antiterrorist unit modeled on the British SAS forces. In total, these statements reflect a policy which was created by the British government, whose aim is the extension of NATO forces into the Persian Gulf as the first step of militarizing the developing sector.

But the major obstacle which Haig and his British cohorts face is breaking West Germany of its resistance to extending its military arm south of the Equator.

According to a highly-placed Washington source, "Haig is now considering how and when to begin to put pressure on Bonn." Bonn has resisted such a ploy, both because it is unconstitutional for Germany to become involved in any foreign conflict and because Chancellor Schmidt perceives such a military buildup as contrary to his détente policy with Moscow.

Nonetheless, both London and its allies in Washington began a

full-scale propaganda campaign this week to create the climate for extending NATO to the Middle East. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff leaked a report proposing that command over the RDF should be placed under the European Command of American troops under Gen. Bernard Rogers. The next day *Financial Times* Washington reporter David Buchan reported that "switching the command of the RDF to Europe would underscore the U.S. contention that defense of the Gulf . . . is as much, if not more, in the NATO allies' interests as in those of the U.S. and Britain apart; Western Europe depends more heavily on oil from the Gulf."

To overcome European resistance, report military insiders, Haig wants to redeploy American forces from Europe to the Mideast and, in turn, force Germany, in particular, to both build up its conventional troop forces and to build its forward defense systems, based on the Pershing and the Cruise missiles, and on the controversial neutron bomb, as a front-line defense of Europe. This would be a first step in getting NATO forces beyond their legal boundaries.

But Harvard Europe-watcher Stanley Hoffman says that Germany sees such a policy as "shooting itself in the foot" since it would jeopardize Germany's relations with the East bloc. Hoffman and other American strategic planners agree that the most potent blud-

geon to break German resistance would be a Soviet invasion of Poland.

Arab sources report that the governments of the Mideast are no less anxious about NATO than Bonn. A Jordanian source commented, "This is an invitation to confrontation between the big powers."

Last week, the Carter administration's budget for the RDF was submitted to Congress for approval. Included is an allocation of nearly \$140 million for the construction of a base for the force at the Ras Banas base in the Egyptian Sinai.

Washington sources say that this base, along with whatever facilities will be given to the U.S. by Israel, will serve as the backbone of the infrastructure within the Mideast from which the force will deploy. But Egyptian President Anwar Sadat has been footdragging on giving official approval to the U.S. to go ahead with the construction, reportedly because he fears a backlash both from within Egypt and from anti-American groupings within the Arab world.

Somalia is slated to receive millions of dollars worth of sophisticated radar and communications equipment, far too advanced for the Somali military to operate, but as yet there is no agreement over U.S. military presence in Somalia. Similarly, the strategic Gulf state of Oman has granted facility rights to the U.S. on the island of Masirah at the mouth of the Gulf, but there is no agreement as to what constitutes an emergency which would prompt an American military deployment to Oman. Next week, the U.S. begins its first joint exercises with Oman, which, the Defense Department has not ruled out, may include RDF troops.