

area but that I understood he was faced with implications of a broader nature on the question of the release of the Report.

No. 83

780.5/8-1552

*The Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews) to the Secretary of Defense (Lovett)*¹

TOP SECRET

[WASHINGTON,] August 15, 1952.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: As you know, our military planning has always considered the British responsible for the defense of the Middle East, just as our political thinking has always allotted to the British primary responsibility for maintaining stability in the Near Eastern area.

However, I understand that current British plans envisage the defense only of a portion of Turkey and of the Mediterranean sea-coast from Lebanon south. This of course would permit enemy occupation of the greater part of the Near East and of virtually all of its oil resources.²

The Department of State believes that the time has come when we should reassess this situation to determine whether a forward defense of the Near East, designed to protect at least a portion of the oil and give greater protection to our strategic bases, could not be undertaken. It is fully recognized that neither troops nor equipment are presently available to the Western Powers to make such a defense possible, but we need not assume that this will be the case indefinitely. It is our thought that we should begin now to prepare for the time, which might come in 1956 or 1957, when other commitments may permit the furnishing of equipment in significant quantities to the Near East.

It is at least theoretically feasible to count on raising defense forces within the states of the Near East which, with adequate

¹ This letter was attached to a memorandum, dated Aug. 6, not printed, from Byrnes to Matthews. According to the memorandum, the letter had been discussed in draft by John Ferguson with Rear Admiral H. Page Smith of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, who considered the request desirable and indicated that the letter was appropriate.

The memorandum stated that the study under reference in the letter was essential because "in spite of our long-standing concern with the problem of Middle East defense and the mounting evidence that it is beyond British capabilities to defend any substantial part of the area, there has been no US study of what would be required in terms of force and equipment to effect a forward defense of the Middle East." (780.5/8-1552)

² For documentation, see Documents 242 ff.