

NHC, 00, 1970, BX-115, 1100

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Op-51/cfc
Ser 601121201

1 DEC 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

Subj: Copra Workers on Diego Garcia (U)

Ref: (a) STATE CA-6087 of 7 December 1970
(b) Embassy London 10242 DTG 112046Z December 1970

1. (C) At your meeting with the Deputies on 10 December, you stated your desire to push the British to get the copra workers off Diego Garcia prior to the commencement of construction. This is the first situation report on this effort. *

2. (C) The background on the workers is as follows: The most recent census on 15 March 1969 indicated that the total number of persons on Diego Garcia was 350. Of this total, 22 were Mauritian, 230 Seychellois, and 125 were Ilois. The latter can be considered to be citizens of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). They are mostly infants born on Diego Garcia. It has been clearly understood by both the U.K. and the U.S. that the British have the responsibility to remove the workers since the signing of the agreement on the use of the BIOT on 23 December 1966. U.K. responsibility includes bearing the costs of relocation. Since all but the Mauritian nationals are British subjects, the U.K. had an additional moral responsibility in the matter. 1768

3. (C) The United States first indicated in mid-1968 that we wished all the workers to be removed from the island before the commencement of construction. On this basis the British began to plan for the relocation based on utilization of the workers on other copra plantations in the area. This proceeded to a point in early 1970 when the British informed the U.S. that relocation would be accomplished in 1970 even though the United States might not want to utilize the island at an early date. This fell through in August 1970 when it was learned that a typhoon had hit Igoolo Island, the desired relocation area, causing damage to the copra plantations there. This effectively stopped the British efforts for 1970. In view of the uncertainty about Congressional consideration of the funding for the project the U.S. did not push for more action at that time. **

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4. (C) After Congressional approval was granted, an airmen was sent to Embassy London (reference (a)) indicating that we desired the relocation completed as soon as possible. As a minimum, we asked that the western half of the island be cleared by the time that construction starts in mid-March 1971 with full relocation by the time that the initial airfield capability is accomplished at the end of July 1971. In response, the British Foreign Office on 11 December (reference (b)) "stressed that there may be difficulties in meeting March date for relocation of islanders. The dimension of the difficulties cannot be known until after consultation with the BIOT Administrator in the Seychelles."

5. (C) As a result of maximum effort in State, OSD and OPMV, a joint US/UK press release about Diego Garcia was achieved on 15 December. Efforts are now being made on an urgent basis to arrange a meeting between Navy representatives, the BIOT Administrator and interested USG representatives. The meeting could take place as early as 22 December. The question of relocation will be raised again at that time, and the urgency stressed. In light of past history it appears that the U.K. will have a great deal of difficulty in meeting a mid-March 1971 deadline for complete evacuation of the workers from Diego Garcia. It is recommended that this not be established as a firm prerequisite to the commencement of construction.

6. (U) I will continue to keep you informed as events occur.

J. H. DICK
Asst. Director, Politico-Military Policy Division

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TYPE: WEN A. P. CHRISTENSEN, 16 DEC 1970

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