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MEMORANDUM FOR DEPUTY CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS, (PLANS & POLICY)

Subj: Naval Base Facility in the Indian Ocean, Proposal for

study of

1. From both short-range and long-range viewpoints, we believe it may be desirable to study the establishment of a naval facility in the Indian Ocean.

2. Most immediately, there is the possible requirement for naval operations at the "back door" of the Middle East, under circumstances where Suez may not be available.

3. The Indian Ocean also opens up the "soft underbelly" of the USSR and China to attack, making possible a new front in the battle of deterrence, with important diversionary, psychological and strategic effects. From the Arabian Sea or the Bay of Bengal, 2000 miles of missile range will cover much of south-central USSR; this range is attainable in REGULUS II in 2 years, in POLARIS a few years later. From the Bay of Bengal this range will cover most of China.

4. As in every other area where the cold war is fought, continuing concrete evidence of U. S. ability and intent to aid threatened regimes is essential. With all due respect to the problem of over-committal, this cannot be accomplished by transient visits through waterways which everyone knows can be blocked, or by occasional round-the-world cruises. Maintenance of even a small continuing force in the area, and particularly of a permanent base facility, will speak much more plainly.

5. In the broad, long-term view, the Indian Ocean is a vast maritime vacuum. We can be sure that in time the Soviet bloc's expanding maritime strength will move to fill and exploit it. (Their survey ships already use it; could they also plan to use it for undetected weapons tests?) We have an opportunity to gain the initiative. The free world has a considerable stake in holding its periphery. We must not underestimate its long-term value, as missile ranges grow, as a fourth front opposing Russia and China. As a related matter, it may offer immediate values as a locus for communications intelligence, satellite tracking, and weapons test monitoring.

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operations. Certainly we should begin to gain knowledge and experience in the area, through meteorologic and oceanographic surveys as a minimum. All these would be facilitated by a base.

6. Realistic contemplation of naval operations in the Indian Ocean must assume that access via Suez, and undisputed access via Singapore or through the Indies may be denied, as may air communications other than via Australia or Central Africa. Access to anchorages and air-fields may be denied or limited north of the equator, as the product of anti-colonialist feelings or Soviet pressures. Serious logistic problems are thereby introduced, which call for the availability of a base. Even if only as insurance against the unfavorable trends which are highly likely, we should have ready on short notice, and freely useable, at least:

a. A protected anchorage where replenishment, maintenance and fleet recreation can be assured.

b. A communication center.

c. A terminus for logistic aircraft.

7. To be of optimum value, such a base should be located:

a. Centrally with respect to the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, and with respect to sea access to either area via Cape or Australian waters.

b. Centrally with respect to air communication with Australia or Africa.

8. With respect to its usage free of political complications, such a base should ideally:

a. Be free of close association with or dependence on a colonial power.

b. Be sufficiently distant to excite minimum alarm or suspicion on the part of any ex-colonial nation.

c. Be free of (any significant indigenous population) & economic interest.

9. Casual survey indicates that a potential base site meeting these idealistic criteria may in fact exist. The Chagos Islands, south of the Maldives, have an excellent central location, and are a good

*They hold the
area in both
aspects.*

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300 miles from the nearest sensitive nationalism, Ceylon. They are British-owned, have no economic significance, and their population is measured only in hundreds. Brief reference to Sailing Directions suggests that one of the group, Diego Garcia, has a considerable land area and may have an anchorage potential for all but the largest ships.

10. We accordingly propose that a study be initiated of:

a. The physical potentials of Diego Garcia, and perhaps of other islands in this area, as the site of an advanced naval facility.

b. The strategic value, short-term and long-term, and from both the current operations and the insurance standpoints, of at least a minimal base development in this area (e.g., clearance of entrance passages, anchorages, shore access, air strip).

11. We make this proposal in full awareness of current fiscal and personnel stringencies. We are not dreaming of anything on the order of a major fleet base. We do suggest that the Navy should not be caught short in its thinking with regard to this major maritime area, and that [an austere entering wedge] may turn out to have a major long-term pay-off, if not an immediate utility.

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*(long term
planning)*

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DISTANCES FROM DIEGO GARCIA, CHAGOS ISLANDS
(Nautical Miles)

SEA, IN THEATER

	SEA, U. S. PORTS
Aden	2,116
Djakarta	2,150
Karachi	2,000
Rangoon	2,000
Singapore	2,224
Colombo	974
Mahe, Seychelles	1,032
Cape Town	3,450
Darwin	3,483
Fremantle	2,850

AIR, IN THEATER

	AIR, IN THEATER
Cocos Islands	1,550
Mauritius	1,150
Mombasa	2,000
Singapore via Cocos	2,700 (around Sumatra)
Singapore via Colombo	2,550 (around Sumatra)

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