

41. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Komer) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) and Francis Bator of the National Security Council Staff<sup>1</sup>

Washington, January 26, 1966.

*Komer on  
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in power*

The big remaining issue on the UK defense review seems to be the extent of future British presence in the Suez-Singapore area. I won't argue the minor aspects (e.g. evacuation of Aden, Africa, etc.). But it seems to me that our larger response must be based on the fact that, viewed globally, the new area where the US itself is militarily weakest is the Indian Ocean area. An even greater vacuum here 1968-75, because of gradual drawdown of the modest UK presence, is worrisome.

Despite our natural current focus on Southeast Asia and Indonesia, it's essential to look ahead and anticipate many new problems over the next decade in Burma, South Asia, Iran, Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa. Though we are increasingly able to deploy US forces there quickly, the Indian Ocean is the area farthest from the US. Moreover, we have to worry not only about the actual threats in this vast area but a likely decline of confidence in western support on the part of Indians, Paks, Burmese, Persians, etc., if the UK withdraws further.

So I see real advantage in attempting to keep a mobile UK carrier force in the Indian Ocean, whether based in Singapore or Australia. Even one carrier would have real flexibility to meet situations throughout the area (conventional even more than nuclear). If the UK doesn't maintain at least a carrier on station, I predict that the pressures on us to set up an Indian Ocean squadron will increase. No matter how we slice the pie, it would be far more expensive if we had to fill the power vacuum in the Indian Ocean area than to keep the UK there.

This leads to the question of what we could offer in order to encourage HMG to maintain such a force. For example, need we charge such a high price for selling secondhand carriers? Even giving them to the British under ship loan or some such device would be cheaper than maintaining US carrier task force in the Indian Ocean. A US contribution to Indian Ocean island bases or to the Australia base project might also seem sensible in this connection.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Name File, Komer Memos, Vol. II. Secret.

In sum, my basic point is that looking ahead for the ten years 1966-75 someone (either the US or UK) is likely to have to maintain some flexible sea/air power in the Indian Ocean. It would be far cheaper to subsidize HMG than to wake up a few years from now to find that we must substitute for the power vacuum its drawdown of forces creates.

RWK

#### 42. Position Paper Prepared in the Department of State<sup>1</sup>

UKR/P-3

Washington, January 27, 1966.

##### UK DEFENSE REVIEW

##### Indian Ocean Island Base Plans

##### *Recommended US Position:*

It is in the US interest for the UK to maintain a credible presence "East of Suez" with the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) playing an important role in a support capacity.

Although the US has no immediate construction plans, we should welcome any indications of a British intention to establish such facilities as a fuel depot in Diego Garcia and an air staging base on Aldabra, with priority on the latter.

With regard to the latter, the Defense Department would be willing to contribute to construction costs of an RAF station in return for joint usage rights.

##### *Anticipated UK Position:*

The British are caught between a need to reduce Defense expenditures as well as the atrophy of political acceptancy of so-called foreign bases on the one hand, and the necessity to protect their own interests in the area (as well as those of the West) on the other.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, United Kingdom, UK Defense Review, 1/27/66. Secret. Drafted by Captain Asbury Coward (G/PM) and cleared by AFI Politico-Military Adviser W. Paul O'Neill, Jr., Kitchen, and Assistant Secretary for European Affairs John M. Leddy.

They may be expected, therefore, to seek the general US attitude regarding the development of these islands for defense purposes, and more immediately and precisely, if we are interested in joining them in any projects such as the air staging facility on Aldabra.

##### *Background:*

There are no known immediate firm construction or usage plans on the part of either the US or UK for the BIOT.

At one time the US was considering construction of an austere communications station and supporting facilities on Diego Garcia; however, this is not the case at this time. (HMG has been so notified.)

The UK has recently alluded to an interest in developing a POL depot on Diego Garcia.

Within the respective Defense Establishments of both governments there have been indications of an awareness of the potential value of an air staging facility on Aldabra.

The future utility of the BIOT may well be surfaced in the context of British plans "East of Suez", i.e., withdrawal from Aden, consolidation in the Persian Gulf, reductions in Southeast Africa, and even as a specific alternative to Singapore.

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#### 43. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (McNaughton) to Secretary of Defense McNamara<sup>1</sup>

I-25133/66

Washington, August 2, 1966.

##### SUBJECT

Indian Ocean Islands

##### *Issue:*

The British Embassy informed us officially on 14 July (Tab A)<sup>2</sup> that HMG has decided in principle to build an air staging facility on Aldabra.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, OASD/ISA Files: FRC 70 A 6648, 680.1, Indian Ocean Islands. Secret.

<sup>2</sup> Neither tab is printed.

Island. They estimate the cost at 18 million pounds (\$50 million). They ask:

(a) Whether we wish to send a small group to participate in engineering surveys in September, and

(b) *Whether we are willing to fund one-half of the cost (\$25 million) in return for equal use of the facility.*

*Discussion:*

(a) The British have recently made counter-proposals on our draft agreement concerning future defense use of the "detached" islands, including Aldabra and Diego Garcia, which now constitute the British Indian Ocean Territory. Some differences remain for negotiation, but we do not anticipate that these differences will seriously delay conclusion of the agreement. One theme of the agreement is that the islands are available for defense use over a long period by both Governments and that to assure coordination there should be consultation on plans. The agreement also recognizes the possibility of joint financing for facilities in which both Governments may be interested.

(b) Last year the Air Force proposed a facility on Aldabra similar to that now planned by the British. You did not approve funding for a USAF installation per se, but indicated willingness to help fund a British installation if we had assured use. The Air Force continues to have a strong interest in such a facility (see Tab B), and is supported by the Joint Chiefs. The current Air Force cost estimate for the facility is considerably lower than the British figure.

(c) Last February you authorized Navy to make in-house studies toward development of engineering plans for construction of logistic support facilities on Diego Garcia, preparatory to programming action. A Navy PCP detailing this plan is in the final stages of preparation. The fact of this planning has been closely held.

(d) A British installation on Aldabra would promote their continued military presence in the western Indian Ocean. Further, if we should fail to contribute toward its development, it is doubtful that the British would build it alone. Our contribution would thus advance the case of those within the HMG who have supported a British presence East of Suez. We would also have the physical facilities available for our own use whenever necessary.

(e) A contribution toward the British facility on Aldabra would give us an excellent opportunity to stimulate British interest in participating in the construction and operation of facilities we may decide to build on Diego Garcia. By letting it be known in this context that we are examining the feasibility and utility of naval support facilities on Diego Garcia, we may be able to promote British participation and continued presence in the central Indian Ocean area.

*Recommendations:*<sup>3</sup>

(a) That we accept in principle the British proposal for a jointly financed facility on Aldabra, and authorize the Air Force to participate in detailed planning with the British authorities, join in the September surveys, and include funding of the U.S. share in its FY 68 program.

(b) That we inform the British that we are examining the feasibility and utility of austere naval support facilities including an air strip on Diego Garcia, and seek early arrangements with the British for a joint engineering survey. We would make clear to the British that we have made no final decision to build, and would seek to stimulate some degree of British participation in the project should it materialize.

John T. McNaughton

<sup>3</sup> McNamara approved both recommendations on August 4.