

SECRETARY OF STATE

Defence Interests in the Indian Ocean

We understand that the U.S. authorities are likely to raise with the Foreign Secretary, when he visits Washington, certain questions about UK/US defence collaboration in the Indian Ocean. Officials are meeting tomorrow (Wednesday) afternoon to prepare the Foreign Secretary's brief. The Colonial Office is concerned because certain facilities may be desired in Mauritius and Seychelles.

2. I attach a note on this subject and would invite your particular attention to paragraph 6(a) which sets out the Colonial Office view on the political implications for Mauritius and Seychelles. It would be helpful to the C.O. officials who will be going to the meeting if they could know whether the line taken in the attached note would have your concurrence.

AD
20th October 1964

Sir H. Poynton

S/S agrees x

I have informed

In Trafford Smith's office

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Defence interests in the Indian Ocean

In February 1964 official discussions took place between representatives of the U.K. and U.S. Governments in London. The Americans stated that their Government was considering a greater defence presence in the Indian Ocean area to complement (but not in any way to replace) the existing British effort there. U.S. participation was likely to mean, over a period of time:-

- (a) periodic visits by a U.S. task force into the Indian Ocean area;
- (b) the installation of military communications and technical facilities on islands under British sovereignty;
- (c) the development of auxiliary base facilities to support U.S. forces which might be deployed in the area.

The British Government welcomed this American initiative and agreed that their joint basic objectives in the Indian Ocean area were first, to deter Communist encroachment of countries bordering the Indian Ocean, and second, to have the capacity to deal firmly and rapidly with any situation that may arise in the countries bordering the Indian Ocean. Both delegations accepted that the U.S. interest would provide a valuable joint insurance in case of any loss or limitation of the use of existing facilities in the area.

2. The Americans expressed interest in setting up communications and support facilities in Diego Garcia, the main island of the Chagos archipelago which despite the 1200 miles between them forms part of Mauritius. Diego Garcia is a compact island whose present population of under 500 is largely contract labour from Seychelles. Such facilities might include in the long term (a) a stockpile for the army, (b) an air base, (c) a naval anchorage and base area to support a task force, (d) communications facilities.

3. The U.S. delegation also expressed a possible interest in the eventual development of an air staging post in the Western Indian Ocean.

4. The U.K. delegation agreed to recommend to the U.K. Government that they should consider favourably the developments indicated above on the following basis:-

- (i) U.K. should be responsible for acquiring land, resettlement of population and compensation etc. of Mauritius interest.
- (ii) U.S. Government should be responsible for all construction and maintenance costs.
- (iii) U.S. Government would share these facilities, during development and thereafter, with the U.K.
- (iv) The two Governments would consult as necessary about establishing any possible U.K. military facilities that might be required.

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5. Subsequently by agreement between the two Governments a joint U.K./U.S. survey team visited the Indian Ocean calling at Diego Garcia and other islands in the Western Indian Ocean under consideration for the western air staging post. The Colonial Office representative in the survey team examined the civil repercussions of possible military plans in the various islands in question. We now await the outcome of the American survey in order that it may be co-ordinated with the British military surveys and a study carried out of the political and administrative implications.

6. On the assumption (a) that the Americans will confirm their interest in developing the facilities proposed for Diego Garcia; (b) that the Americans will identify Ile Desroches (150 miles south-west of Mahé in Seychelles) as the suitable site for the western staging post, and (c) that the R.A.F. are interested in the possibility of eventually having facilities on Farquhar Island in Seychelles, the main problems for the Colonial Office would appear to be as follows:-

- (a) Political. It would be unacceptable to both the British and the American defence authorities if facilities of the kind proposed were in any way to be subject to the political control of Ministers of a newly emergent independent state (Mauritius is expected to become independent some time after 1966). As the islands in question are remote from Mauritius itself, and are to all intents and purposes not administered by Mauritius, it is hoped that the Mauritius Government may agree to the islands being detached and directly administered by Britain. The same considerations would apply as regards Ile Desroches, which forms part of Seychelles, except that the establishment of British/American service facilities there would most probably be welcomed in Seychelles as bringing economic benefit. The Mauritius Prime Minister has been provisionally sounded about the whole proposition and has reacted not unfavourably. Other Mauritius Ministers and the Seychelles Executive Council have been informed of the survey and its broad purpose. There has been a certain amount of comment and discussion in both territories, and articles in the Mauritius press. The Colonial Office view is that detachment of Diego Garcia from Mauritius could only be achieved if Mauritius Ministers were prepared to give their consent. Otherwise the difficulties of justifying our action internationally and especially in the United Nations would be insuperable. Mauritius Ministers will undoubtedly require some form of compensation. If we can so work out arrangements with the Americans that an airfield is constructed on Ile Desroches, with some form of civil joint user,

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the advantages to Seychelles (which at present has no airfield) will be so great as to make it relatively easy to secure Seychelles co-operation.

(b) Administrative.

(i) Excision of the two islands from their present parent territories will involve the establishment of a new administration, perhaps under a High Commissioner (who would probably be identical with the Governor of Seychelles).

(ii) There will be resettlement and development problems arising from the military requirements.] *

7. Notes on the Indian Ocean Islands concerned with a map and diagram of the area are attached.

Colonial Office,
20th October, 1964.

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