

4 June 1975

To: C P C

From: Steve Bryen

Re: Diego Garcia

I think it useful if you have a preliminary outline of the elements forthcoming in the Diego Garcia debate.

(1) Procedure. Under the rules of the conference report on the Military Construction Act the President was required to certify that any expansion of the facilities on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean to be in the National Interest. Once such certification was filed in the Congress it has to lie before the Congress for sixty days unless either House by a majority vote approves a resolution of disapproval. In such case, the appropriation of approximately \$14 million for the expansion of facilities on the Island will not be approved.

(2) Background. This compromise formula replaces one passed in the Senate by a vote of 85-0 offered by Senator Mansfield that would have required approval by both Houses of Congress of the President's certification.

(3) Senator Mansfield has offered a resolution of disapproval which has gone to the Armed Services Committee. Armed Services is expected to hold hearings beginning on June 10 and likely will report out the resolution of disapproval unfavorably. Comparable hearings are expected in the House but no resolution of disapproval has been filed. It is extremely unlikely the House would approve such a resolution.

(4) An Approval Resolution. There is no law that would prevent the Senate after refusing a disapproval resolution, should it do so, from passing a resolution of approval. I have raised this question with the Administration basically arguing with them that even if they get the \$14 million for the expansion of the base facility, this is only a portion of their request to the Congress. The original request was \$29 million. As the Committee pointed out: "After careful consideration of the many factors involved and thorough debate, the Committee approved \$14, 802, 000 as a first increment of the Navy's requirements, and the \$3.3 million requested by the Air Force."

In short a further request next year could have attached to it the same requirement attached to it this year -- if Symington and Mansfield want to try it that way (or anyone else, e.g., Kennedy).

From the Administration's point of view it may be in their interest to have this specific executive agreement approved. This is a slightly different matter than approving the appropriation for Diego Garcia.

The United States and Great Britain have initialed (but not completed officially) an agreement to permit expansion of the existing facilities on Diego Garcia. Britain owns Diego Garcia. The British Labor Government, however, has been unwilling to complete action on the matter until it is clear that the US Government and by that they mean the Congress has given its approval for the expansion.

Whether approval of a partial appropriation will be satisfactory to the British is open to question. It will probably be adequate, but it would no doubt ease their political burden considerably if the Congress actually approved the agreement as well as the appropriation.

I can't yet say whether the administration will be willing to meet you half-way on this proposal --nor have I said that you are in any way committed to taking this action. But if there is any possibility it might give you an opportunity to lay the foundation for your executive agreements legislation (which you have a draft copy of in hand).

(5) Political Background. Early last year Senator Kennedy introduced a resolution (March 19, 1974, Senate Concurrent Resolution 76) which was referred to Foreign Relations but no further action was taken on the measure. In short it expressed the sentiment of the Congress that efforts should be made by the United States and the Soviet Union to help keep the Indian Ocean free from an arms race between the superpowers. In short, Senator Kennedy and his cosponsors (Senator Pell and six others) were responding to concerns expressed by India and by concerns expressed by some liberal groups that the Indian Ocean could become a zone of confrontation between the superpowers.

While the Kennedy resolution was not directly aimed at Diego Garcia, it had an obvious relationship (even though not all of the Kennedy cosponsors would be opposed to the expansion of the Diego Garcia base). (For example, of the six other cosponsors --Church, Clark, Cranston, Humphrey, McGovern, Stevenson, Tunney-- Humphrey has already indicated that he will support the expansion of the Diego Garcia facility. It is likely that Stevenson will also.)

A second aspect of the background (The Mansfield resolution) has already been described. It has as its root a number of notions about the expansion

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of US involvement in the Indian Ocean where we have not maintained a naval fleet, involvement or potential involvement in conflicts in that region, the cost of such involvement in expansion of naval and air facilities, and the danger that our involvement will lead to a related and similar expansion of the Soviet threat in the region --ultimately to an arms race between the two superpowers in the Indian Ocean.

At the heart of the Manfield-Symington-Pell-Kennedy argument is testimony given by CIA Director Colby last year. Colby fueled the fires of the "arms race" argument with the following statement:

"I think that our assessment is that you will see a gradual increase in Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean area, that if there is some particular American increase, that the Soviets will increase that gradually to match any substantial additional American involvement. "

While Colby's statement was billed by the opponents as meaning that expansion on Diego Garcia would stimulate the Soviets to similarly expand and that this would lead to an arms race in the Indian Ocean, Colby really did not intend that this was so. Furthermore, developments since September, 1974 (when the Colby testimony in purged form was made available) suggests that even without the US expansion on Diego Garcia the Soviets have been moving forward, albeit on a slow but apparently determined pattern. Other strategic conditions have changed in the area as well: from outside the Indian Ocean the American use of Udaipau in Thailand will likely be reduced soon and the reliability of the Phillipine bases are in question; from within the area the opening of the Suez Canal

permitting the transit to the Indian Ocean of Soviet warship and the small Soviet aircraft and helicopter carriers (Kiev class) and as well the continued development of Soviet base facilities in the Indian Ocean suggest that a pattern has been established even without Diego Garcia. It can be argued, as leading strategist Mordechai Abir argues that:

Even if we overlook the impact of 'showing the flag' on local politics, several factors make the Indian Ocean extremely attractive to Soviet strategic planning. Obviously, the first is the Persian Gulf, which contains about half of the world's proven oil reserves and which is the West's most important source of fuel. When the Soviets began to establish their influence and presence in the Red Sea and the northwestern part of the Indian Ocean, many experts tended to believe that this fact had no relation to the Gulf Oil. Some still believe this assumption claiming that it is unacceptable that the Russians would interfere with western oil supply, an act which could easily provoke a disastrous power confrontation. It is of course only logical to assume that the Soviets would not commit such a folly and would not try to directly interfere with the flow of oil to the West. Such an act would be completely incompatible with the detente which at present the Soviet Union supports, for its own reasons at least as much as the West, and would go even beyond the brinkmanship policy, occasionally practised by Russia. However, it is still within the limits of the permissible to do as much as possible to erode the position of Western oil companies and western interests in the Gulf.

The October war and its aftermath clearly demonstrated that it is possible to undermine important Western interests and even to stop the flow of oil to the US by the use of a proxy. The Soviet Union has vociferously encouraged the Arab oil producing countries to use the 'oil weapon' and maintain their boycott against the United States and other NATO countries. . . .

It is only logical to assume that the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean had a not inconsiderable influence on OPEC's aggressive policy since 1970 and what happened in the October 1973 in relation to oil prices and the use of the oil weapon by the Arab oil producers. It is inconceivable that oil producing countries would have taken such extreme steps without more consideration to a possible Western reaction, had they not known that such a reaction would be mitigated by the presence of a Soviet navy not far from the Persian Gulf. A show of power by the West was, therefore, no longer sufficient to coerce the producers. Although it is unlikely that the Soviet Union would have interfered against a 'Western action' in the Gulf in the case of a real threat to Western energy supply and economy, Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean forced the West to carefully consider the steps it

was ready to take.

(From a paper by Mordechai Abir, "Power Rivalry in the Indian Ocean," translated for me from the Hebrew. The paper was delivered at the Israel Strategic Institute at Hebrew University in August 1974.)

From the US point of view, it can be established there are strategic interests for a communications and fueling station (with air support potential) in the Indian Ocean.

The US Indian Ocean base would be crudely comparable to the Soviet base at Berbera in Somalia on the northern horn of Africa, which is better situated. At Berbera the Soviets maintain docks, repair facilities, supply depots and a communications facility. (The communications facility is secure.) Presently they stock approximately 205,000 barrels of naval fuel at Berbera. The Soviets are building an airstrip at Berbera. They also fly from Somalia Bear-D Reconnaissance Aircraft and IL-38M (Ilyushin) Reconnaissance Aircraft. The only two other Soviet secure communications-base facilities are at Hayana, Cuba, and Conakry in Guinea on the West coast of Africa.

Other Soviet base facilities of a lesser nature include:

(1) Umm Qasr in Iraq; (2) Aden; at the entrance of the Red Sea; (3) Socotra, an island off the Yemen Coast where the Soviets are said to have a marine amphibious base; (4) Mauritius, 600 miles east of Madagascar and 1,000 miles southwest of Diego Garcia where the Soviet fleet has fueling and anchorage rights; (5) Mogadiscio; capital and port of Somalia where there are Soviet military and naval facilities.

(6) Diego Garcia and the Israel Question. Diego Garcia is of importance to Israel, but probably not so much from the point of view of an island to be used for aerial resupply of Israel in the case of another Mid-East war. In fact, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency, Diego Garcia would be a "last resort" base for Israel resupply. In fact, for air resupply all US C-5A transports are now equipped for in-air refueling and could be so refueled over the Atlantic. While this is an extremely expensive procedure, in an emergency circumstance it is perhaps the best one to follow if other base facilities such as the Azores are unavailable and fly-over rights (such as from Germany across Europe to Israel) are shut off.

The real importance of Diego Garcia as far as Israel is concerned is almost the same (but not the same as) US strategic concern: it appears to be in the interest of Israel for the US to be strategically significant in both the Middle East and Persian Gulf. This seems only more so today --and especially in light of developments along the Red Sea and Persian Gulf perimeters. For example Israel foresees potential strategic problems at the Straits of Bab al-Mandeb where Perim Island has been fortified by the Arab Republic of Yemen. Furthermore, the apparent shift in the Shah of Iran's position toward Israel, his "detente" with Iraq and the "settlement" of the Kurdish insurgency, and his interest in being the essential guardian of the Persian Gulf and potentially the exits in the Strait of Hormuz at the Gulf of Oman all raise strategic questions in the future. In a changed world, the US has probably to assume the responsibilities for the West in the area that were previously managed by the British, but not in real terms since 1968.

In the present time US interest in the Indian Ocean has not much to do with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. Its relationship is mainly, as described, to the Middle East and Persian Gulf. It may some day, surely, involve more permanent facilities in the area if there is triggered further Soviet expansion in the area, but this may be inevitable anyway without US involvement possibly because of the relationship of the Soviet land-mass to the area and possible tensions with the Chinese (who see Soviet development in the Indian Ocean as a threat to them and, in fact, privately welcome US involvement because of their own/fear of encirclement by the USSR.)
not always rational

A final point of interest is whether it is still possible to distinguish where it makes sense to be involved and where it does not make sense to be involved. To translate the Pacific involvement of the US in SE Asia to the Indian Ocean and the Middle East is an apples and oranges proposition. There was always an inability of the US Government to adequately justify the depth of commitment it undertook in the Far East, especially after it was clear that there was no "conspiracy" between China and the USSR. While it is true that our involvement in that region escalated --most of the escalation was already well in place before the Sino-Soviet split. After wards it can be generally argued that our involvement in Vietnam had already gone so far as to be a thing in itself unrelated to grand strategy but more closely connected with matters of prestige and commitment.

Involvement in the Middle East and Persian Gulf seems more compelling in the near-term from the point of view of US and NATO security. Our presence does not make us, inter alia, committed to any state in the area, including

Israel. But our presence does make any commitment we might want to make, for example in connection with any mid-east settlement, much more creditable. Furthermore, it can be argued that real US presence in the Gulf could cause a Soviet reassessment in terms of the level of challenge they think they will have in the area. It could be a likely prospect that quite apart from Colby's reasoning, it may be determined that it is in the Soviet interest not to expand its base facilities further but, instead, to focus on using client states to carry out its purposes in the Middle East.

The only caveat to this latter possibility is the circumstance in which the US might want to introduce nuclear submarines into the Indian Ocean with a regular repair station for these specialized craft at Diego Garcia. This the USSR might see as a shift in US strategic intentions. There is no reason to anticipate this as a result of US expansion on Diego Garcia and there are good reasons (as the above and others in the arms control field) to resist such a development --essentially through the appropriations process. I don't think a serious case can be made that Diego Garcia is a foot in the door on this matter.

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